

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS: A STUDY IN LAMARCKIAN SELFDr. Amjad Ali¹, Dr. Kifayatullah², Imran Ali Khan³**Original Article**

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Abstract

Gulliver's Travels has been interpreted from diverse perspectives. Critical assumptions dominantly concentrate upon the nature of the book and the protagonist. Richard Quintana, for instance, sees it a satiric comedy cast in the form of the imaginary voyage. Patrick Reilly considers it an attack on the party of humanity_ deists, rationalists, free thinkers, benevolists and sentimentalists_ who denied the doctrine of original sin and attempted to absolve human nature of corruption. There are critics like Arthur E. Case who is more interested in the allegorical aspect of the book. Our study deviates from the aforementioned views and focuses on the evolutionary angle of the book. We see Gulliver as a Lamarckian character who adjusts himself according to situations. Gulliver's self is quite malleable; it is never rigid. It changes with every new culture. Adaptability and acculturation are the characteristics that Gulliver embodies, and these are the qualities which lead to his enlightenment at the end of the book. The study, however, does not attempt to discuss the scientific principles of Lamarck's theory of evolution. It discusses the literary implications of the theory with reference to the major character of the book.

Keywords: Self, Lamarckism, Experientialism, Gulliver

Introduction

Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels* in 1720 and published it in 1726. From literary historical perspective, it was the age of enlightenment. The age assigned supreme role to the faculty of reason and abhorred sentiments. The age also witnessed great influx of philosophical theories foremost among which was British Empiricism. Three main British Empiricists John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume proposed that knowledge comes entirely from experience. This philosophical school strongly opposed the notion of innate ideas and maintained that knowledge is derived from sensory input as well as emotional responses and self-generated thought. Of the three, Locke maintains that human mind is a *tabularasa* at birth, and the received input is imprinted on the blank slate as the child is exposed to all

manner of sensory experiences. He dismissed the notion of preloaded software and contended that knowledge is installed over time through sensory experiences and observations of the physical world.

Hume rejected the existence of the individual self. According to him, man is nothing more than a collection of different perceptions. Like Hegel, he takes human self as the composite whole of different selves. These ephemeral personas are the product of human interaction in the society. Hence, along with societal and environmental forces, the role of "others" assumes a transcendental importance in the formation of the self.

For empiricists, otherization or the master/slave dichotomy in Hegelian dialecticsⁱ is an umbilical cord-like component in the coloration of self. This reliance upon others may serve a concrete starting point. In this

interaction with other people spring up diverse feeling which contain reference to one self and others. Self is always sufficient whatever the challenge. Swift, being a prose writer of the age of Enlightenment, also displays peculiar interest in the role of reason in the formation of human self. For him, self is the root of all values. He advocates an experiential philosophy of life. Nothing that enlarges one's capacity for life is to be regretted. Openness is all. A balanced and a meaningful existence is a corollary to open expression of the impulses and curbing the cult of self-suppression.

This paper looks at *Gulliver's travels* within 18th century context and attempts to relate the character of the protagonist to the contemporary philosophical debates. It also premises that empiricism and Lamarckism are two sides of the same coin. A thorough comprehension of concept of Lamarckian self is incomplete without understanding experiential philosophy of life. My study takes Gulliver as 18th century experientialist who believes in sapping life to its last drop and which eventually results in the formation of his Lamarckian self. The study concludes with a discussion of Gulliver not as a misanthrope as traditionally he is taken but an enlightened Lamarckian who avoids taking tragic choices.

Literature Review

The critical analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*, by and large, centers on the nature of the book. Richard Quintana, for instance, views it a satiric comedy cast in the form of the imaginary voyage. For him, it is a satirical work targeting man's decline as a spiritual being who has given in to the absurdities of different professions and have unscrupulously got involved in greed, pride and the infinite perversion of reason (157). According to Richard Quintana, *Gulliver's Travels* tries to answer one question, and that's human society lies in perpetual danger of corruption. Man, by forfeiting his reason forfeits humanity and becomes bestial. The corruptible

influences can be averted if morally man asserts reason over brute instinct, and politically and socially he learns from history the means of prolonging the life of the civilized state.

Karpman accuses Swift of his obsession with dirt and considers such excremental references a weakening factor that contributes less to his satiric purpose. Ferenczi takes Gulliver's stay among the pigmies and giants as reflective of "genital inadequacy of a person whose sexual activities have been inhibited by intimidation and fixations in early childhood" (59). Furthermore, his act of urinating on the Queen's palace is symbolic of his childhood libido. Rawson characterizes Gulliver and Swift as neither exactly the same nor utterly different from each other. Both of them, contends Rawson, speak either directly or indirectly through one another. Hence, the view that Gulliver is the mouthpiece of Swift does not hold much water in his opinion. Tilton describes Gulliver as part and parcel of *Gulliver's Travels*. For him, Gulliver is a psychological reality who finds ample actualization during the course of four voyages.

Patrick Reilly in *The Literature of Guilt* considers it as an attack on the party of humanity_ deists, rationalists, freethinkers, benevolists and sentimentalists_ who repudiated the Christian concept of original sin and attempted to cleanse human nature of any sort of evil. Gulliver himself belongs to this party before his defection to the rational horses. Man is still the carrier of original sin and his innocence is mere a myth. It is not the luminous intellect, according to Swift, that governs humans, but the dark brooding instinct that determines his fate. Man can find a viable solution to it provided that he honestly and quickly acknowledges its existence.

M.H. Abrams, on the other hand, interprets the book as a satirical expose which exposes the corrupt moral nature as well the flawed institutions of human society. And to achieve his objective, Swift capitalizes

on the prototypical device of imaginary voyages. Furthermore, the book makes implicit references to contemporary actions, yet the book claims perfect validity today as it had in 1726 for the same vices and follies rein everywhere.

Lamarckian Self

The empiricist view of human self synchronizes with Lamarckian perspective which also sees the self as manifestation of geographical factors. What we call self is in fact a surrogate geographical conscience. Unlike Darwinian self, the Lamarckian self is never autonomous and inviolable. The self gets painted according to the color of the culture. Mobility to a new cultural parameter may mould it anew to the fresh set of cultural assumptions. The purport of his theory is that human is programmed by his environment. This is an inescapable mechanism which if he tries to avoid will lead him to another – a process of ever changing captivities. Self is analogous to a computer which needs programming. The change of data received in the form of cultural impressions will automatically change the self. A self does not exist in separation to society and nature is nothing but a camouflaged culture. Nicholas Grene contends that the formation of the man's self is hinges upon the arbitrary contingencies of the society. Societal environment maps the man and any variation in the social and cultural set up may lead to a different skin on the human body. With ostracism, we risk creating aliens and with love we ensure friends.

Lamarckism assigns great role to environment as contended by Percy Smith in his explanatory footnotes to *Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells*: "Lamarckism was the pre-Darwinian theory of evolution propounded by the French naturalist Jean Baptiste Pierre Lamarck, who held that the evolution of species was a continuous and gradual process, occurring through the inheritance of characteristics acquired in response to *environmental demands*" (9) [italics mine]. So society occupies central place in Lamarckian evolution.

K M Newton contends that in Lamarckism, the self and the world are engaged in a dynamic relationship, never a static one. A Lamarckian subject employs its archetypical wisdomⁱⁱ or psychic energy to change the world so that it may be in fine-tune with the human ideals. It is an active agent in the rhymes and rhythms of life always striving to cut the world to its size and never allowing the world to dwarf it there by making it a passive sufferer.

Self is the medium through which existence is filtered. Gulliver's self is infinitely malleable. It is quite easily transformable through environmental influences and enjoys chameleon-like receptivity. His self can easily be re-programmed to disregard the much-sought and to take something into account what was previously considered bizarre. His beliefs are altered with the altered environment. His self is behavioral in the sense that it follows stimulus-response mechanismⁱⁱⁱ. The social and environmental forces condition the fragile matrix of his self. Hence, he acquires different identities and names in every island or kingdom that he visits. In "Lilliput", for instance, Gulliver becomes a man mountain. He, like a true Lilluptian, even fights against Blefuscu for which he is awarded the highest title of Nardac. In Brobdingnag, he is given the name Grildrig. His association with the little nurse Glumdalclitch and his defensive strategies against the dwarf can safely be described as his acculturation and adjustment to the surroundings. Gulliver's brief stay in Laputa and his quick departure from the island is due to the fact that Laputans are all the time lost in their thinking and ignore Gulliver. They simply don't have time for him (III, 131). Consequently, he does not stand a chance for generating a new self to experience the accretions and drappings of the Laputan culture. It is the last voyage that provides a suitable breeding ground for producing a Lamarckian self. He, for the first time, comes across creatures who personify pure reason. Houyhnhnms' way of life makes immeasurable appeal to his mind, and he

decides to internalize it. Yahoos, on the other hand, disgust him for they are thorough strangers to the use of reason. His presumption about yahoos that they “appear to be the most unteachable of all animals” (IV, 200) seems quite justified. His adaptation of Houyhnhnms’ values and his misanthropic attitude towards human beings at the end of the book is a type of metaphor for the internalization of new set of values based on reason.

Discussion

Gulliver as an Experientialist/Lamarckian

Gulliver is 18th century experientialist-cum-empiricist. His travelling encompasses a total of sixteen years and seven months which is quite reasonable time for observing and experiencing the world. Moreover, he is a man with discretionary power. He tells us in the first voyage that he would spend the remittance he would receive from his father in learning navigation and mathematics as he always considered navigation as his destiny. Gulliver is never passive in picking those objects that have direct bearing on his life. He is even considerate in choosing his wife, and selects a widow Mrs. Mary Burton who brings handsome dowry with herself. The frequent use of sensory organs as mentioned in the first and last voyages validate his empiricist nature. To be an experientialist, one needs to be an empiricist. His extraverted personality also authenticates his experiential nature. He is interested more in seeing the outside world than staying inert at home. Gulliver spends two months with his family at the end of first voyage; ten days at the end of second voyage and five months after coming back from his third voyage. And he writes the book after five years on his return from the land of Houyhnhnms. So a total of five years, seven months and ten days he spends with his family. And the book records sixteen years and seven months of his traveling as he tells us in the last part of the book: “Thus, gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years and above seven months...” (220). He like Tennysonian Ulysses cannot sit around the hearth killing his time in

unprofitable discussion with his wife. Hence, his assertion “the thirst I had of seeing the world” (III, 115) accurately verifies his experientialism. He is the one who would like to be damned rather than to accept the dull and boring life of sitting passively at home.

Gulliver’s Travels addresses the ethical dilemma: how can one respond to crises in life? Different competing strategies offer themselves for addressing the crises and the selection of the strategy will define the person. There are people like Oedipus, Antigone or Hamlet who simply cannot live in amnesic insouciance. They may opt for tragic choice for they see life drained of all values and virtues and survival in such cases would be suffering an unbearable antinomy. But Lamarckism is table-turning. It teaches that in moments of crisis one fights with mind, never with sentiments. Gulliver faces a number of chaotic situations and in their handlings, we see him a true Lamarckian. His enslavement in the first voyage does not provoke him to any volatile initiatives. Although a man mountain, he accepts the situation and starts serving Lilliputians as a slave for any drastic step in the existing situation might lead to discharging of poisonous arrows from well-equipped Lilliputians. His humane treatment of six culprits guilty of shooting the arrows is also on the same ground for the act wins him great appreciation as he explains: “both the soldiers and people were highly obliged at this mark of my clemency, which was represented very much to my advantage at court” (II, 21). Gulliver is conscious of the fact that all real happenings should be the result of mind and what truly matters is the supremacy of the indomitable mind. His credentials as a pragmatist are impeccable. In voyage to Brobdingnag, his real testing time comes when he encounters a rival in the form of dwarf. He declares the dwarf as “the other” as both are competing for the queen’s favor. Gulliver responds with great rationality to his mischiefs like putting him in the bowl of cream and marrow bone and the like incidents. Mind, not heart, should be the master of experience and with sensible use of mind, any calamity can be turned to your own advantage. Such a triumph over circumstance inspires a true sense of human nobility and a belief in the transcendental nature of his intellect.

Whether Gulliver becomes a misanthrope or gets enlightened at the end of the book? Quintana takes it enlightenment. Swift is writing the book in the age of Enlightenment in which literary arts were written with a definite purpose to instruct and to afford both moral and intellectual commentary (153). His overwhelming hatred for humanity at the end of the book does not testify his misguided misanthropy and his illogical worship of Houyhnhnms' values. Rather it is his disgust at the loss of innocence and the decline of moral values in European civilization. It becomes in this sense the voyage of discovery. The journey is the objective correlative of an internal dislocation which might be described as salvation. It is at once both education and disillusion. His interaction with the Houyhnhnms makes him realized his meanness as a human. Consequently, he loses his self-esteem and is brainwashed into accepting their ascendancy. The travels transform and mould him. He simply lacks vital antibodies to resist the shaping influences of the travels. Gulliver, after having seen himself in relation to six inches tall pigmies and sixty feet tall giants, is finally compelled into comparison not with humans at all but animals which are reason epitomized. His eyes for the first time see reality which shatters the hubristic hauteur of the anthropocentric delusion. Consequently, his self undergoes a sea-change. His English self wears away giving place to a fresh self deeply rooted in reason. Self for him is not a hard diamond to cut, but rather a soft wax which can be moulded according to the gravity of the situation. Life for him is not a mathematical formula where two and two always makes four. His malleable self can turn it into five when urgency demands. And it is these qualities which make Gulliver a universal character with an intense degree of empathy as Abrams says: "He [Gulliver] is, in short, a reasonably decent example of humanity, with whom we identify ourselves readily enough." (1506)

Conclusion

Gulliver's Travels records the conflict between being and consciousness. It reorients the much-debated query of being and becoming. Whether Gulliver possesses a self which is in

stasis or a self which continuously evolves? How should a critical mind respond to the challenges and harsh realities of the world? Is man the agent or recipient with respect to the forces of the world? Does there exist any reciprocal formulation between the man and the forces of the world depending on who fights harder and endures longer? Swift clearly rejects the passivity of human self. Acculturation and assimilation are the supreme virtues of human self. Environment might be the greatest determinant for mapping the self, but it is never outlined as a mechanical product. Nothing is more mistaken than the belief that human self is a constant datum, unchanging from age to age, and irresponsive to environmental happenings. Self in a Lamarckian world conforms to a conditioned reflex which changes with the changing matrix. The sufficiency and malleability of self is not a myth. However coercive and threatening the external environment may be, people like Gulliver carries within him the guts to tame experience, to overcome the external threats and to bring the internal disturbance and anxiety under control. Gulliver's boasts in the second voyage when he accomplishes his undertaking by killing one of the flies that "my dexterity was much admired" (81) mirrors his genuine virtuosity. Mental discipline and the circumstantial use of mind is his dexterity. One can pit the unconquerable self against the overwhelming tyranny of external circumstances. Human is the captain of his life and his supreme intellect is his infallible guard against the menacing environment. A man must neither become a passive sufferer nor its accomplice in the tragic drama of life. The world might assume a very vicious configuration, yet man should fight it sensibly for in resistance lies his ascendancy. Otherwise, how else can one justify Gulliver's survival among the people who are sixty feet tall or who are excellent mathematicians ever ready to pierce his body with arrows. Even in the most unpropitious circumstances, a Lamarckian believes in the invincibility of man's nobility. Man is the master and lord of the society, not its helot. The right to survival is the root premise of Swiftian work. Self-

preservation isn't selfish. Helping others is all well and good, but when it comes at the expense of one's own priorities, well, it might be time to scale back. Nothing, at the end of the day, is more striking than one's own skin.

ⁱFor more discussion on Hegelian Dialects, see *Hegel* by Frederick Beiser (New York: Routledge, 2005) pp-155-157.

The term is used by C G Jung to refer to "symbols, imagery, and memories that he called archetypes" and which dates back to the dawn of human consciousness.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more discussion on stimulus-response theory, see *A First Look at Communication Theory* by Em Griffin pp 13-22.

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