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Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift

LAURA BROWN

To say the truth, I had conceived a few scruples with relation to the distributive justice of princes upon those occasions. For instance, a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither, at length a boy discovers land from the topmast, they go on shore to rob and plunder, they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for the king . . . they murder two or three dozen of the natives . . . return home, and get their pardon . . . Ships are sent with the first opportunity, the natives driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold . . . and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people.

But this description, I confess, doth by no means affect the British nation.
(Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*)¹

THE WORKS OF JONATHAN SWIFT provide a test case for political criticism and a proving ground for the nature of the "politics" of such a criticism. An explicit misogynist and also an explicit anti-colonialist, Swift poses a distinct political

¹ *Gulliver's Travels*, in *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 237.

problem: a critique from the perspective of gender would seem to point toward a political assessment diametrically opposed to that suggested by a critique from the perspective of race or colonialism. In other words, Swift's texts lend themselves equally well to a negative and a positive hermeneutic, and a critic concerned with the political aim of her readings of literary culture might well pause between the exposure of misogyny in the canon and the discovery of an early ally in the struggle against colonialism. Which to choose? What is a marxist/feminist to do? By arguing for the mutual interaction of gender and race in Swift's works, I want to provide a working example of a critical position that distinguishes itself from that of most American Foucauldians, whose historical analyses emphasize the coercive strategies of structures of power to the exclusion of effective opposition. The paradigm provided by Swift's problematic texts suggests the political utility of bringing positive and negative hermeneutics together, and defines what I see to be the necessary intimacy of structures of oppression and liberation in eighteenth-century culture and thus the relevance of a method that seeks to link the categories of the oppressed under the rubric of a radical political critique of ideology.

I

From a feminist point of view, the oppression is not hard to find, and recent feminist critics have found much of interest in Swift's writing.² Aside from topical political subjects, the single most significant theme in Swift's poetry is the attack on women. These misogynist poems—"The Progress of Beauty," the dressing room poems, "Strephon and Chloe," "Cassinus and Peter," and others—were written between 1719 and 1731, the decade of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *A Modest Proposal* (1729), *The Drapier's Letters* (1724–25), and Swift's most energetic defense of Ireland against British colonialist policies. These poems belong to that venerable tradition of misogynist verse, long associated with Juvenal, whose most recent exemplars included Rochester, Mandeville, and Pope. They focus on the corruption and decay of the female body, on painting and dressing, on excrement and disease.

"The Lady's Dressing Room" provides a good example of their typical structure. It begins with a description of the artifice by which the true, corrupt nature of the female body is concealed:

² See Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660–1750* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1984); Ellen Pollak, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985); Penelope Wilson, "Feminism and the Augustans: Some Readings and Problems," *Critical Quarterly* 28 (1986), 80–92, and Katherine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1966), and *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982). The difficulty Swift presents for a feminist reading is suggested by the fact that Rogers' first book sees Swift as a misogynist and her second as a feminist, on the identical evidence (pp. 174 and 61, respectively).

Five Hours, (and who can do it less in?)
By haughty *Celia* spent in Dressing;
The Goddess from her chamber issues,
Array'd in Lace, Brocades and Tissues.³ (1–4)

When *Celia* leaves the scene, the poem proceeds to undress her in her absence through an account of the contents of her dressing room, which climaxes in the most memorable passage in eighteenth-century misogyny:

Thus finishing his grand Survey,
Disgusted *Strephon* stole away
Repeating in his amorous Fits,
Oh! *Celia*, *Celia*, *Celia* shifts! (125–28)

The degeneration of the absent *Celia* ends with the mock-advice to *Strephon*:

I pity wretched *Strephon* blind
To all the Charms of Female Kind;
Should I the Queen of Love refuse,
Because she rose from stinking Ooze?
.
.
.
When *Celia* in her Glory shows,
If *Strephon* would but stop his Nose;
.
.
.
He soon would learn to think like me,
And bless his ravisht Sight to see
Such Order from Confusion sprung,
Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Dung. (115–44)

When Gulliver stops his nose with rue to avoid the nauseous scent of his wife at the end of Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, he is taking the advice the poet gives to *Strephon* in this poem, and aspiring—though with a pointed lack of success—to the ironically liberated position of the speaker here, enacting the very extent of his disgust by claiming to accept the inevitability and essentiality of a gendered corruption.

Celia and the much-neglected Mrs. Gulliver are the absent objects of an attack that clearly exceeds their own poor power to offend. Though the female body is the purported locus of corruption in the misogynist poetry, it seems often to be slipping from sight, like the *Celia* of “The Progress of Beauty,” who melts away piece by piece, a hideous victim of syphilis, so that by the end of the poem,

When Mercury her Tresses mows
To think of Oyl and Soot, is vain,
No Painting can restore a Nose,
Nor will her Teeth return again.

³ *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). References by line to Swift's poems will be included parenthetically in the text.

Two Balls of Glass may serve for Eyes,
 White Lead can plaister up a Cleft,
 But these alas, are poor Supplyes
 If neither Cheeks, nor Lips be left. (109–16)

In fact there is no woman left at all in these attacks on women. The place of the female body is occupied by the materials with which it is adorned, or ultimately shored up: from dress to paint to plaster, "Crystal Eyes," and "artificial Hair" ("A Beautiful Young Nymph," 10–11). What is the status of a misogyny that, while claiming to condemn an essential corruption, so quickly substitutes the accoutrements or adornments of the female body for the woman herself? Or rather, what is the ideological status of this purported essentiality?

The attack on female painting is a trope of misogynist literature, as we all know, but in eighteenth-century England the representation of female adornment and dress has a very specific and consistent social referent: it evokes the products of mercantile capitalism. Joseph Addison, for example, in a passage in the *Spectator* papers typical of his description of women, turns the same topic to celebratory ends:

I consider woman as a beautiful, romantic animal, that may be adorned with furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds, ores and silks. The lynx shall cast its skin at her feet to make her a tippet; the peacock, parrot, and swan shall *pay contribution* to her muff; the sea shall be searched for shells, and the rocks for gems; and every part of nature furnish out its share towards the embellishment of a creature that is the most consummate work of it.⁴

Addison's female figure, though undeniably more attractive than Swift's Celia, is like Celia in being defined by and subsumed in the materials with which she is adorned. But unlike Swift's misogynist poetry, Addison's image of female beauty gives us a hint of the source of that adornment. For Addison, all of nature cooperates in dressing womankind; in the discourse of eighteenth-century mercantile expansion, this is the most common trope of all, by which the agency of the acquisitive subject and the urgency of accumulation are concealed and deflected through the fantasy of a universal collaboration in the adornment of the female figure.

The Rape of the Lock (1712, 1714, 1717) supplies the locus classicus of this theme. In particular, Belinda's dressing room scene makes the economic context of Swift's misogynist dressing rooms explicit: the artifice through which Belinda's beauty is either created or awakened is attributed to the products of trade and defined through a catalogue of commodities for female consumption: "glitt'ring Spoil," "India's glowing Gems," Arabian scents, tortoise shell, and

⁴ Joseph Addison, *Tatler*, No. 116, 5 January 1709–10. Also quoted in Louis A. Landa, "Of Silkworms and Farthingales and the Will of God," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century II: Essays presented at the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 267–68.

ivory (I, 129–36).⁵ Elsewhere in the literary culture of this period, too, tortoise shell and ivory, the spices of Arabia, gems, gold, and silk are made to represent the primary objectives of mercantile capitalism, and these commodities in turn appear exclusively as the materials of the female toilet and wardrobe.⁶ Thus, in the literature of mercantile capitalist apologia and even more broadly in the representation of women in general in the early eighteenth century, the richly adorned female figure is identified first of all with the products of trade and prosperity, and then with the whole male enterprise of commerce that generates those commodities. Indeed, a kind of reversal of object and agent becomes naturalized in the literary culture of this period, such that navigation, trade, and expansion all seem to be arranged solely for the delectation and profit of womankind. The activities and motives of the male adventurers and profiteers, and the systematic dimensions of imperialist expansion disappear behind the figure of the woman; in effect, because women wear the products of accumulation, they are by metonymy made to bear responsibility for the system by which they are adorned.

In short, the association of women with the process and products of mercantile capitalism is a strong cultural motif in this period of England's first major imperial expansion, and the obsession with female adornment and dress is a prominent expression of that association. In fact, a recent study of "the commercialization of English culture" designates female fashion and dress as the century's prototype for commodification. As Neil McKendrick says, "Clothes were the first mass consumer products to be noticed by contemporary observers." "Fashion and dress are often used almost interchangeably. From Mandeville onwards special attention was given to the role of clothes in this process of social and economic change."⁷ The implicit cultural designation of dress as a synecdoche for mercantile capitalism is not surprising, since one of the earliest economic sources of the expansion and capitalization of the English economy was the textile industry, specifically the wool trade. So central was this notion, that Defoe used dress quite literally as the condition of English imperialism:

⁵ For Pope and many other writers of this period, the connection between women and trade is direct and explicit, such that commerce itself and the process of production seem organized for female adornment and consumption. See my *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), chapter 1.

⁶ See James Ralph, *Clarinda, or the Fair Libertine* (London, 1729), pp. 37–38; Soame Jenyns, *The Art of Dancing* (1730), in *Poems* (London, 1752), p. 7; John Durant Breval, *The Art of Dress* (London, 1717), p. 17; and Nicholas Rowe, *Jane Shore*, in *British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan*, ed. George H. Nettleton and Arthur E. Case, rev. ed. George Winchester Stone (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1959), V.i.111–16. Ralph, Jenyns, and Breval are discussed at greater length in Louis A. Landa, "Pope's Belinda, the General Emporie of the World and the Wondrous Worm," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 70 (1971): 223.

⁷ Neil McKendrick, "The Commercialization of Fashion," in McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 53 and 51.

for him English prosperity began with the textile industry, and would be sustained by the spread of English dress around the world. He even fantasized that the civilizing powers of English culture would bring clothing to the naked Africans, thereby promoting civilization, dress, and the English economy all at once.⁸

It is only one quick step from the equation of women and commodities to an attack on the hypocritical female as the embodiment of cultural corruption, the visceral epitome of the alienating effects of commodification and the disorienting social consequences of capitalist accumulation. This ideological fixation on female dress and adornment is expressed with the most direct vehemence by Bernard Mandeville when he describes "the silly and capricious Invention of Hoop'd and Quilted Petticoats" as one of the most important changes in English history, barely surpassed in significance by the Reformation.⁹ He argues at length "that a considerable Portion of what the Prosperity of *London* and Trade in general, and consequently the Honour, Strength, Safety, and all the worldly Interest of the Nation consist in, depends entirely on the Deceit and vile Stratagems of Women" in their consumption of a "vast quantity" of trinkets and apparel which they "come at by . . . pinching their Families . . . and other ways of cheating and pilfering from their Husbands," and by "ever teasing their Spouses, tire them into Compliance," or "by downright Noise and Scolding bully their tame Fools out of any thing they have a mind to." For Mandeville "Humility, Content, Meekness, Obedience to reasonable Husbands, Frugality, and all the Virtues together, if they were possess'd of them in the most eminent Degree, could not possibly be a thousandth Part so serviceable, to make an opulent, powerful, and what we call a flourishing Kingdom, than their most hateful Qualities," that is, the taste for luxury, "the Consumption of Superfluities" (pp. 225–28).

Mandeville associates female luxury quite directly with the stimulation of a capitalist economy. Though his comments on women are partly satirical, that satire, like the poet's ironic acceptance of female corruption in "The Lady's Dressing Room," indicates the extent and inevitability of the problem. It is not surprising, in this context, to find in Swift's Irish tracts "A Proposal to the Ladies of Ireland" (1729), which suggests that the distresses of the Irish economy, caused by the colonialist trade restrictions imposed by England, can only be remedied by a restriction in turn upon "the importation of all unnecessary commodities," namely and specifically those for female consumption. Here Swift too takes for granted an intimate connection between female luxury and

⁸ Peter Earle, "The Economics of Stability: The Views of Daniel Defoe," in *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. D. C. Coleman and A. H. John (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp. 274–92, esp. p. 280. Earle's is a broadly synthetic article; as particularly relevant to this point, however, he cites Defoe's *General History of Discoveries and Improvements in Useful Arts* (1726–27), pp. 79–152, and *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), pp. 312–30 and 337–43.

⁹ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), I, 356. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

capitalism. But in this case the benefits of the accumulation of manufactured goods accrue to the English economy, not the Irish, and thus Swift draws the opposite conclusions from Mandeville:

It is to gratify the vanity and pride, and luxury of the women . . . that we owe this unsupportable grievance of bringing in the instruments of our ruin. There is annually brought over to this kingdom near ninety thousand pounds worth of silk, whereof the greater part is manufactured: Thirty thousand pounds more is expended in muslin, holland, cambric, and callico . . . If the ladies, till better times, will not be content to go in their own country shifts, I wish they may go in rags. Let them vie with each other in the fineness of their native linen: Their beauty and gentleness will as well appear, as if they were covered over with diamonds and brocade.¹⁰

Elsewhere in the Irish tracts, economic and misogynist sentiments come even more directly into synchrony:

Is it not the highest Indignity to human nature, that men should be such poltroons as to suffer the Kingdom and themselves to be undone, by the Vanity, the Folly, the Pride, and Wontonness of their Wives, who under their present Corruptions seem to be a kind of animal suffered for our sins to be sent into the world for the Destruction of Families, Societies, and Kingdoms; and whose whole study seems directed to be as expensive as they possibly can in every useless article of living, who by long practice can reconcile the most pernicious foreign Drugs to their health and pleasure, provided they are but expensive; as Starlings grow fat with henbane: who contract a Robustness by meer practice of Sloth and Luxury: who can play deep severall hours after midnight, sleep beyond noon, revel upon Indian poisons, and spend the revenue of a moderate family to adorn a nauseous unwholesom living Carcase.¹¹

This passage makes the same economic assumptions about female adornment that we have associated with mercantile capitalist ideology, and with the same reversal of agency and object typical of the celebratory versions of that ideology. But here the attack on female luxury concludes with an attack on the body of the woman. Easily and unobtrusively, by the end of this passage the female body, rather than her dress, becomes the locus of cultural corruption, and this "nauseous unwholesome living carcase" brings us back to the revolting female body that stands behind the representation of women in the misogynist poetry. The reversal of cause and effect at work here is characteristic of Swift's misogyny throughout his corpus. Through a kind of metonymy, the products of mercantile capitalism with which women surround and adorn themselves come to be implicated with the female body itself. That is, the pernicious corruptions of an expansionist culture are so intimately and inevitably associated with the figure of the woman that they are represented as internal rather than external to her; the nauseousness of the female body is thus a visceral represen-

¹⁰ "A Proposal that All the Ladies and Women of Ireland should appear constantly in Irish Manufactures," *Prose Works*, ed. H. Davis (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), XII, 126–27.

¹¹ "Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons," *Prose Works*, XXII, 80.

tation of what Mandeville, and Swift himself in the Irish tracts, describe as an economic and social corruption. Even when the woman is absent, melted away by the disease she embodies, or when she is supplanted altogether by the products that she wears, we see her body as the epitome of essential corruption. And reciprocally, when she is present but undressed—presumably stripped of the corrupting commodity—she still appears as the essential incarnation of the evils of luxury and accumulation. Present or absent, dressed or undressed, the figure of the woman is made to bear responsibility for the cultural crisis of mercantile capitalism and imperial expansion. Thus, though the evidence of the Irish tracts suggests that Celia's corruption originates in the products of her adornment, her dress, in the misogynist poetry those products appear no longer as a cause of corruption; instead they are an innocent adjunct, an effect of Celia's essential corruption, simply absorbing the stench that arises directly from the inherent corruption of the "Female Kind":

So Things, which must not be exprest,
When plumpt into the reeking Chest;
Send up an excremental Smell
To taint the Parts from whence they fell.
The Pettycoats and Gown perfume,
Which waft a Stink round every Room.¹²

Excrement taints the female body, then her dress, then "every Room" she visits, so that the world inhabited by this female figure seems to receive corruption from her rather than bestow it upon her.

If we use the Irish tracts to locate Swift's misogyny in relation to the widespread contemporary discourse of women and commodities, then, we can begin to see—beneath the claim of essential female corruption that dominates the poetry—the fundamental implication of Swift's misogyny with mercantile capitalism. In the poetry, this implication is unacknowledged and probably unconscious, but it supplies us with one way of understanding the seemingly supererogatory violence of Swift's attack on women; and one way of placing misogyny in the context of Swift's corpus. In short, it enables us to provide a particular account of the historical status and ideological significance of these otherwise anomalous texts. The misogynist poetry records the cultural consequences of the historical crisis of this period with a vehemence and horror that is significantly absent from any explicit contemporary commentary. In other words, at a time of comparative ideological consensus in England, when the benefits of empire were rarely disputed, Swift's misogyny occupies the place of a critique of mercantile capitalist expansion. This observation is not a justification for misogyny, but it complicates a political reading of Swift, and more important, it leads us to other images and other critiques of imperialism elsewhere in Swift's writing.

¹² Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room," in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 524–30.

II

If we bring this reading of the misogynist poetry to bear upon *Gulliver's Travels*, we can move from the ideological status of women in Swift's writing and the connection of the representation of women with capitalist expansion to the historical problem of colonialism as it shapes the most important satire of the eighteenth century, and we can begin to see the mutual interaction of race and gender in Swift's major satire. Predictably, Gulliver's account of female luxury in Book IV reproduces the economic trope of the Irish tracts and of Mandeville's more fully-faceted account of capitalism:

I assured him, that this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female yahoos could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in. (203)

But Book II supplies the famous images of the gigantic female body which put Gulliver in precisely the place of Strephon in "The Lady's Dressing Room" when he picks up the magnifying mirror:

The Virtues we must not let pass,
Of *Celia's* magnifying Glass.
When frighted *Strephon* cast his Eye on't
It shew'd the Visage of a Gyant.
A Glass that can to Sight disclose,
The smallest Worm in *Celia's* Nose,
And faithfully direct her Nail
To squeeze it out from Head to Tail. (59–66)

Broddingnagian gigantism is intimately linked to misogyny. Indeed, the scenes that emphasize the scale of size in Book II are all centered around the female figure. The hideous, gigantic corporeality of the Broddingnagian women is represented first in the anti-madonna scene that Gulliver witnesses almost upon his arrival in Broddingnag—the woman nursing her child:

The nurse to quiet her babe made use of a rattle . . . but all in vain, so that she was forced to apply the last remedy by giving it suck. I must confess no object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious reader an idea of its bulk, shape and colour. It stood prominent six foot, and could not be less than sixteen in circumference. The nipple was about half the bigness of my head, and the hue both of that and the dug so varified with spots, pimples and freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous. . . . This made me reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through a magnifying glass. (74)

The nauseous scent against which Strephon ought to stop his nose amost overwhelms Gulliver in the apartments of the maids of honour:

They would often strip me naked from top to toe, and lay me at full length in their bosoms;

wherewith I was much disgusted; because, to say the truth, a very offensive smell came from their skins. (95)

And disease, like that which wastes Celia in "The Progress of Beauty," gives Gulliver his most horrific fantasy of female corruption in Brobdingnag:

One day the governess ordered our coachman to stop at several shops, where the beggars, watching their opportunity, crowded to the sides of the coach, and gave me the most horrible spectacles that ever an European eye beheld. There was a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my whole body. (90)

Though Gulliver thinks to stop his nose with rue only at the end of Book IV, the nauseous scent, the disease and corruption, and the hideous corporeality that we have seen elsewhere in Swift's texts to be so powerfully and specifically associated with the female figure pervade the second book of his *Travels*. But if we look to the fourth book, we can see all these qualities again embodied in the Yahoos: their offensive smell, their naked corporeality, their connection with disease, and their uncontrolled sexuality are, as we have seen, the essential attributes of the female figure. From this perspective, the whole context of Book IV takes on a new significance. The Yahoos are the prototypical women of Swift's works.

But Gulliver's relationship with the Yahoos themselves suggests another dimension to the role of the woman in the *Travels*. Gulliver begins at a seemingly unbridgeable distance from the Yahoos, which are represented as some species of monkey, perhaps, having little in common with the human. But the main import of Book IV is the increasing proximity and eventual identification between the Yahoo and the human, despite Gulliver's own resistance and disgust. This process of association with the creatures that seem at first utterly and hideously other suggests a dynamic of aversion and identification that we will find to be central to the ideological significance of the satire. In Book II, likewise, Gulliver's disgust with the maids of honor is balanced by a titillating voyeurism that singles out the "handsomest" and suggests that he is sexually implicated in the scene: figuratively, in the sense that he is evidently desirous himself, but also—and more grotesquely—physically, in that once we entertain the fantasy of a sexual connection between Gulliver and the maids of honor, we are implicitly invited to imagine the actual physical incorporation of the tiny male figure into the sexual body of the woman:

The handsomest among these maids of honor, a pleasant frolicsome girl of sixteen, would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples, with many other tricks, wherein the reader will excuse me for not being over particular. (96)

The story of the cancerous breast, in this context, supplies a parallel image of explicit incorporation, in which Gulliver responds to the sight of female corruption with the extraordinary and unexpected fantasy of creeping inside and covering his whole body in the "nauseous unwholesome living carcass" of the diseased woman.

In fact, Gulliver actually does take the place of the female figure at more than one prominent point in the *Travels*. In the relativist comparison between Gulliver's own form as a giant in Lilliput and his encounter with the giants of Brobdingnag, he repeatedly occupies the position of a woman. The overpowering scent of the Brobdingnagian maids of honor puts Gulliver in mind of the occasion in Lilliput when:

an intimate friend of mine . . . took the freedom, in a warm day, when I had used a good deal of exercise, to complain of a strong smell about me . . . I suppose his faculty of smelling was as nice with regard to me, as mine was to that of this people. (95)

And similarly, in the anti-madonna scene, after describing the "spots, pimples and freckles" of the nursing woman's skin, Gulliver provides a Lilliputian account of his own skin for comparison:

an intimate friend of mine . . . said that my face appeared much fairer and smother when he looked on me from the ground, than it did upon a nearer view when I took him up in my hand, and brought him close, which he confessed was at first a very shocking sight. He said he could discover great holes in my skin . . . and my complexion made up of several colours altogether disagreeable . . . On the other side discoursing of the ladies in that emperor's court, he used to tell me, one had freckles, another too wide a mouth, a third too large a nose, nothing of which I was able to distinguish. (74-75)

These comparisons too establish a routine and consistent interchangeability between Gulliver and the female figures of his narrative.

Similarly, in Book II Gulliver is dressed by his little nurse, Glumdalclitch, in a manner that would have evoked a common contemporary female image. As Neil McKendrick has shown, the fashion doll was the major implement of the rise and popularization of female fashion in the eighteenth century. Originally imported singly from Paris and displayed in the London shops wearing the latest Parisian dress, these life-sized dolls were subsequently miniaturized and made widely available in rural as well as urban parts of England. Supplied with sample suits of the latest fashion, they were dressed both by clothing merchants and by children and adult women, and served as a major means of teaching the new and unfamiliar concept of rapidly changing styles of dress, and of spreading the notion of a market-conditioned obsolescence.¹³ In Brobdingnag, Gulliver plays precisely this role; for Glumdalclitch and the contemporary reader he takes the place of this miniature commodified female figure.

To say that Gulliver occupies the place of the woman at recurrent moments in the *Travels* is not to say that Gulliver is the same as a woman, but to suggest a systematic pattern of implication, which moves from the various forms of interchangeability that we have seen in Gulliver's connection with the fashion doll and the Yahoos to a full incorporation like that offered by Gulliver's relation to the cancerous breast and the maids of honor, and which begins to problematize Swift's attack on women and to complicate our understanding of his relation with the female other. Gulliver's implicit identification with the female

¹³ McKendrick, pp. 43-49.

figure—a figure which we have seen to be systematically underlying the ideology of mercantile capitalism—suggests that his *Travels* must be read in the context of that major historical conjuncture. Those panegyrics on women that I cited earlier to exemplify the mercantile capitalist context of Swift's misogyny unconsciously function, as we saw, to displace responsibility for the historical consequences of capitalism upon womankind, to make her a locus for the male anxieties of empire. Swift's Irish tracts certainly participate in this common assumption of displaced responsibility, though with a different valuation. But the implicit dynamic of aversion and identification that we have begun to discern in *Gulliver's Travels* suggests that in this major text that effort of displacement partly fails, that the shifting status of the male observer (which we have been taught by formalist criticism of Swift to describe as the “persona controversy”) makes the designation of a separable other, upon whom the anxieties and responsibilities of mercantile capitalism and imperialism can be displaced, symptomatically impossible.

III

But symptomatic of what? Here in order to invoke the dialectical connection of gender and race toward which I have been aiming, we must turn to another fictional account, contemporary with *Gulliver's Travels*, at least as disturbing, and much more offensive. This is the account that we can construct from the writings of travellers, naturalists, and colonialists of the nature and society of the Negro in what they describe as his native habitat in Africa or under slavery in the colonies of the new world. Unlike *Gulliver's Travels*, of course, this fiction was accepted as objective testimony in the travel literature and ultimately encoded as science in the most widely read volumes of travel and natural history through the middle of the next century.¹⁴ At stake was the status of the Negro on the chain of being, his proximity to man or ape. And those two standards of deviation determined the definition of the Negro race. Janet Schaw, in her journal of a voyage to the West Indies and North Carolina (1774), spontaneously reproduces, in her account of her first sight of Negro children upon her arrival in Antigua, an association quite typical of the period:

Just as we got into the lane, a number of pigs run out at a door, and after them a parcel of monkeys. This not a little surprized me, but I found what I took for monkeys were negro children, naked as they were born.¹⁵

If we juxtapose the details of two prominent contemporary accounts which served as compendia of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observations of

¹⁴ See Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” in *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985) and reprinted in (*Race, Writing, and Difference*), pp. 204–42.

¹⁵ *Journal of a Lady of Quality; Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies . . . 1774 to 1776*, ed. Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), p. 78.

the inhabitants of Africa, we can set the context for Janet Schaw's predictable mistake. George Louis Leclerc Buffon's massive and influential *Natural History* (relevant volumes in French, 1749–1760) and Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774) both summarize accounts of the Negro from earlier writings in French and English dating from the early seventeenth century on.¹⁶ Buffon and Long actually take opposite positions on Negroes, Buffon arguing, against contemporary sentiment, that they are of the same species as the European, and Long arguing, against Buffon, that “they are a different species of the same *genus*” (356): “Let us not then doubt, but that every member of the creation is wisely fitted and adapted to the certain uses, and confined within the certain bounds, to which it was ordained by the Divine Fabricator. The measure of the several orders and varieties of these Blacks may be as compleat as that of any other race of mortals; filling up that space, or degree, beyond which they are not destined to pass; and discriminating them from the rest of men, not in *kind*, but in *species*” (375).¹⁷

But though they arrive at very different conclusions, Long and Buffon produce very similar accounts. Buffon sets up the comparison between apes and Negroes most explicitly:

To form a proper judgment between them, a savage man and an ape should be viewed together; for we have no just idea of man in a pure state of nature. The head covered with bristly hairs, or with curled wool; the face partly hid by a long beard, and still longer hairs in the front, which surround his eyes, and make them appear sunk in his head, like those of the brutes; the lips thick and projecting, the nose flat, the aspect wild or stupid; the ears, body, and limbs are covered with hair, the nails long, thick, and crooked . . . the breasts of the female long and flabby, and the skin of her belly hanging down to her knees; the children wallowing in filth, and crawling on their hands and feet; and, in short, the adults sitting on their hams, forming an hideous appearance, rendered more so by being smeared all over with stinking grease. This sketch, drawn

¹⁶ Among the relevant additional sources are Wouter Schouten, *Voyages de Gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales, commence l'an 1658 & fini l'an 1665* (Paris, 1725), 2 vols. (trans. from the Dutch); Claude Counte de Forbin, *Memoires du Compte de Forbin* (1729); Pierre Francoise Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de Lisle Espagnole ou de S. Domingue* (Paris, 1730–31), *History of Paraguay* (London, 1769) [original French publication 1757], *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1744); Jean Baptiste Dutertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles* (Paris, 1654); Willem Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1705; rpt. 1721) [English trans. from the Dutch]; Hans Sloane, *A Voyage To the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica . . .* (London, 1707). Furthermore, A. H. Mackinnon describes the Augustans' fascination with the native “other” as depicted particularly in the narratives of William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697), Francois Leguat, *A New Voyage to the East Indies* (1708), and Woodes Rogers, *A Cruizing Voyage Round the World* (1712); he suggests that Swift may have been influenced by Dampier and Woodes Rogers. See “The Augustan Intellectual and the Ignoble Savage: Houynhym versus Hottentot” in J. Bakker and J. A. Verleun, ed. *Essays on English and American Literature and a Sheaf of Poems* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987).

¹⁷ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica . . .*, 3 vols., Vol. 1 (London, 1774), pp. 356 and 375. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

from a savage Hottentot [a Negro], is still a flattering portrait, for there is as great a distance between a man in a pure state of nature and a Hottentot, as there is between a Hottentot and us. But if we wish to compare the human species with that of the ape, we must add to it the affinities of organization, the agreements of temperament, the vehement desire of the males for the females, the like conformation of the genitals in both sexes, the periodic emanations of the females, the compulsive or voluntary intermixture of the negresses with the apes, the produce of which has united into both species; and then consider, supposing them not of the same species, how difficult it is to discover the interval by which they are separated.¹⁸

Buffon, unlike Long, ultimately dismisses the argument that apes and Negroes are of the same species; in other words, this passage indicates the position of a defender of the Negro's humanity.

The themes of nakedness, filth, and stench are persistent in this and in Long's account, alongside claims for nimbleness in climbing, running, or swimming (Long 365). Long describes as one of the Negro's distinctive features: "Their bestial or fetid smell" (352). Buffon argues that the Hottentots are not true Negroes, but rather whites who make themselves dirty by wallowing in filth, noting that "they seldom live longer than 40 years; and this short duration of life is doubtless caused by their being continually covered with filth, and living chiefly upon meat that is corrupted" (298-99). Numerous reports summarized by these writers describe the Negro's habit of eating carrion: according to Long, "They are most brutal in their manners and uncleanly in their diet, eating flesh almost raw by choice, though intolerably putrid and full of maggots" (382); "at their meals they tear the meat with their talons, and chuck it by handfulls down their throats with all the voracity of wild beasts" (383).

Buffon's and Long's accounts agree that Negroes are incapable of civil government. According to Long: "In general, they are void of genius, and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. They have no plan or system of morality among them. . . . They have no moral sensations" (353). "In regard to their laws and government, these may, with them, be more properly ranged under the title of customs and manners; they have no regulations dictated by foresight . . . they seem to have no polity, nor any comprehension of the use of civil institutions" (378). "Their genius (if it can be so called) consists alone in trick and cunning, enabling them, like monkees and apes, to be thievish and mischievous, with a peculiar dexterity. They seem unable to combine ideas, or pursue a chain of reasoning" (377). In short, they are "a brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, and superstitious people" (354).

¹⁸ George Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Buffon's Natural History, Containing a Theory of the Earth, A General History of Man, of the Brute Creation, and of Vegetables, Minerals, etc.*, 10 vols. (London, 1797), IX, 136-37. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text. A recent note suggesting a contemporary influence upon Swift's depiction of the Yahoo suggests another sort of connection between Yahoo and Hottentot: in terms of the debate over the "natural man"; this Hottentot, however, represents a philosophical rather than a racial category. See Daniel Eilon, "Swift's Yahoo and Leslie's Hottentot," *Notes and Queries* (December 1983): 510-12.

Buffon summarizes various visitors' explanations for the difference between the facial features of Negroes and those of white Europeans; blacks have flat noses and faces from being carried against their mother's chests:

While at work or travelling, the Negro-women almost always carry their infants on their backs. To this custom some travellers ascribe the flat nose and big bellies among Negroes; since the woman, from necessarily giving sudden jerks, is apt to strike the nose of the child against her back; who in order to avoid the blow, keeps its head back by pushing its belly forward. . . . Father du Tertre says expressly, that if most negroes are flat-nosed, it is because the parents crush the noses of their children . . . and that those who escape these operations, their features are as comely as those of the Europeans. (282–83).

One need not be a close reader of Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* to pick up the numerous echoes there of this other major eighteenth-century fantasy of difference: Swift's Yahoos are "prodigiously nimble from their infancy" (214); their countenances, too, are "flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large, and the mouth wide . . . distorted by . . . suffering their infants to lie grovelling on the earth, or by carrying them on their backs, nuzzling with their face against the mother's shoulders" (186). The picture that Gulliver provides upon his first glimpse of the Yahoos sounds very much like Buffon's image of the natural man or the Hottentot:

Their heads and breasts were covered with a thick hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had beards like goats . . . they climbed high trees, as nimbly as a squirrel, for they had strong extended claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, and hooked. They would often spring, and bound, and leap with prodigious agility. The females were not so large as the males; they had long lank hair on their heads, and only a sort of down on the rest of their bodies. . . . Their dugs hung between their fore-feet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. . . . Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong antipathy. (181)

Gulliver makes much of their nakedness, distinguishing himself from the Yahoos by emphasizing his own clothes. Their bodily hair, their "strange disposition to nastiness and dirt" (212), their stench—especially the "offensive smell" of the female Yahoos (213)—all belong to the eighteenth-century accounts of racial difference focusing on the Negro.

Furthermore, the Yahoos feed mainly upon raw flesh:

I saw three of those detestable creatures . . . feeding upon . . . the flesh of some animals, which I afterwards found to be that of asses and dogs, and now and then a cow dead by accident or disease. . . . they held their food between the claws of their forefeet, and tore it with their teeth. . . . [the Houyhnhnm] brought out of the yahoo's kennel a piece of ass's flesh, but it smelt so offensively that I turned from it with loathing: he then threw it to the yahoo, by whom it was greedily devoured. (186)

And they are by definition incapable of reason or government; according to Gulliver "the yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals, their capaci-

ties never reaching higher than to draw or carry burthens. Yet I am of opinion this defect ariseth chiefly from a perverse, restive disposition. For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardy, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel" (214-15).

But perhaps one of the most commonplace anecdotes of eighteenth-century racial fantasy was that of the sexual connection between Negroes and apes or orang-outangs alluded to in those arguments about the species of the Negro. These stories represent a kind of radical trans-species miscegenation that evidently captured the imagination of Swift's contemporaries. We can encounter several versions of the story retold by both Buffon and Long. Long's conclusions summarize his notion that whites and Negroes are different species, since the import of this story is that Negroes and apes are the same:

it is also averred, that [orang-outangs] sometimes endeavour to surprize and carry off Negroe women into their woody retreats, in order to enjoy them. . . . that they conceive a Passion for the Negroe women, and hence must be supposed to covet their embraces from a natural impulse of desire, such as inclines one animal towards another of the same species, or which has a conformity in the organs of generation. . . . [this is taken as proof that] the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied. (360, 364, 370)

At this point, we need hardly remind ourselves of the encounter that teaches Gulliver that he is "a real yahoo in every limb and feature":

[As he is bathing in a stream], a young female yahoo, standing behind a bank . . . and inflamed by desire . . . came running with all speed, and leaped into the water within five yards of the place where I bathed. I was never in my life so terribly frightened . . . She embraced me after a most fulsome manner; I roared as loud as I could and the nag [his protector] came galloping towards me, whereupon she quitted her grasp, with the utmost reluctancy, and leaped upon the opposite bank, where she stood gazing and howling all the time I was putting on my clothes. . . . now I could no longer deny that I was a real yahoo . . . since the females had a natural propensity to me as one of their own species. (215)

The Yahoos' greatest threat to Gulliver is here epitomized in the figure of the female whose sexuality stands as proof of the identification with the other that Gulliver abhors.

In short, Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is pervasively connected with—indeed essentially compiled from—contemporary evidence of racial difference derived from accounts of the race that was in this period most immediately and visibly the object and human implement of mercantile capitalist expansion. This is not to say that the Yahoos are meant to stand for African blacks in any straightforward allegorical fashion. Indeed, the Houynhnms also participate in this general allusion to the cultural experience of imperialism: their aversion to untruth is modeled upon the common contemporary notion that native peoples

cannot lie.¹⁹ What we have observed in Book IV of the *Travels* is not an allegory, but a pervasive contextualization in which the shifting status of the male observer, the dynamic of aversion and implication, difference and incorporation, that we have already observed in Swift's satire is given a specific historical referent: English imperialism and the trade in slaves.

Swift's miscegenation scene—in which the female Yahoo sets upon the male European—gives us an opportunity to define the mutual interaction of gender and race that shapes this text's relation to history. In this period, and even into the nineteenth century, accounts of the sexual attraction between apes and Negroes were invariably represented as exchanges between a male ape or orang-outang and a Negro woman.²⁰ The anecdote in Swift's text—where the human male is set upon by an apparently bestial female—stands out for its evident violation of the sexual categories of this racist fantasy. Why, at this point, should Swift's text tamper with the materials that constitute the satire's representation of difference? The reversal of sexual roles in this scene could be seen as part of the persistent dynamic of identification or interchangeability that we found in Gulliver's relation to the female figure elsewhere in the *Travels*: once again Gulliver is taking the place that the woman would occupy in the contemporary imagination. Or is he? Isn't it equally relevant to read this reversal as a racial interchangeability, where the white European Gulliver takes the place of the Negro, while the Yahoo takes the place of the ape, and the question of species is ironically restated? To see Gulliver as the Negro here, when the Yahoo has so consistently taken that role, is a striking new version of interchangeability that figures this reversal of the construction of racial difference. Programatically, if in contemporary racist ideology the ape's lust for the Negro is supposed to prove them to be of the same species—non-human, then by the logic of Swift's satire the Yahoo's lust for Gulliver—the Negro's for the white European—proves them to be of the same species as well, equally human or non-human. In placing Gulliver in the position of the woman, then, this scene simultaneously puts him in the place of the Negro.

Like the female other in relation to the male observer in Books I and II of the *Travels* and in the misogynist poetry, the native other of Book IV stands in a contradictory relationship with the colonialist, a relationship of aversion and implication, difference and incorporation. And Gulliver's position in this voyage—simultaneously identified with and absolutely differentiated from the Yahoo—itself suggests the contradictory nature of identity in Swift's redaction

¹⁹ For instance, of the Mosquitos Indians, "there is nothing more hateful to them than breach of Promise, or telling an Untruth, their Words being inviolable." Sloane, *A Voyage To the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* . . . , I, lxxviii.

²⁰ See Sander Gilman for a description of the focus on the sexuality of the female Negro, with the corollary absence of any interest at all in the sexuality of the Negro male.

of the colonialist fantasy. The colonialist, for that reason, cannot reconcile himself to his own reflection in the mirror: "When I happened to behold the reflection of my own form in a lake or fountain, I turned away my face in horror and detestation of myself, and could better endure the sight of a common yahoo, than of my own person" (225). The dynamic of difference and incorporation that characterizes this text makes it inevitable that Gulliver's ultimate efforts "to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus if possible habituate myself by time to tolerate the sight of a human creature" (238) must by definition be futile. On the one hand, the fourth voyage brings Gulliver into contact with an absolutely alien and hideous other, in the face of which all the brutality of colonialist repression—genocide included—must seem justified. On the other hand, it proposes an intense identification with and incorporation by the native that destabilizes any secure constitution of a distinct colonialist subject and even suggests an implicit critique of such a position.

The mutual interaction of the native and the woman through the mediation of the fictional Gulliver reproduces the historical relationship between imperialist exploitation abroad—with its economic dependence on slavery—and commodification at home—with its ideological emphasis on the figure of the woman. Thus Swift's satire registers the complex interdependency of categories of the oppressed in this period of English imperialism, and the interchangeability figured in Book IV enables us to move beyond misogyny in itself or racism in itself to a dialectical critique that provides equal priority to both gender and race. Neither Swift's contemporaries nor Swift himself would have been able to move, as I have done here, from the misogynist attack on women to an understanding of its historical basis in commodification and trade. On the other hand, the active undermining of the ideology of racial superiority that we have observed in *Gulliver's Travels* certainly would have been accessible to an eighteenth-century audience. Contemporary readers—steeped in the racist images associated with English colonialism in that period and indeed through the mid-nineteenth century—would have been much more ready than modern ones to register the crucial evocations of racial difference in Book IV, and much quicker than we are to pick up that text's pervasive playing with ideas of racial superiority and its perverse leveling of whites and non-whites to one common depravity. Indeed, the vitality and cultural power of *Gulliver's Travels*—and perhaps even its longevity in the canon of English literature—may be explained in part by the fact that it represented a challenge to an ideology that itself had a vital and powerful current function.

IV

Let me return to the problem of the "politics" of political criticism. Let's say that this essay shows that Swift's misogyny is appropriately understood in the context of mercantile capitalism, that the structure of that misogyny opens up a critique of the treatment of racial difference which is essential to Swift's strategy in a crucial part of *Gulliver's Travels* and which was accessible from the moment of its publication. Why should we see these conclusions as radical,

as opposed to other arguments that might be equally subtle in their use of historical context? This argument describes a certain odd configuration within a dominant ideology, certain surprising articulations among misogyny, imperialism, and racism. It should be no surprise to find that eighteenth-century imperialism is both misogynist and racist. The political utility might arise first through seeing that different forms of oppression—misogyny and racism—are not independent variables within the complex of a hegemony, but interdependent categories with mutualities of their own. But this reading of Swift also suggests that a basis for opposition can arise out of the interdependence of different forms of oppression: the unpromising materials of misogyny enable us to perceive the critique of racism. The sacrifice of women might seem a high price to pay for the problematization of racial difference. Ironically, though, it is this price that distinguishes a literary criticism of a distinctly liberationist cast from one more generally committed to a politicized thematic. The extreme case of Swift that I have been pursuing here is the rule rather than the exception; its ultimate political utility, as I see it, is as a positive model and not as a negative lesson. The lesson it might teach some critics is to infer from the compromised or problematic historical situation in which we always find ourselves the appropriateness of defeatism or despair. This lesson authorizes a criticism of withdrawal. But the model it provides is one of articulation and interdependence—the difficult negotiations that are the point of departure of a liberationist politics.

Let's say that Swift's travesty of true consciousness is the true radical political criticism.

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