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## Personations: The Political Body in Jonathan Swift's Fiction

Whereas all Writers and Reasoners have agreed, that there is a strict universal Resemblance between the natural and the political Body; can there be anything more evident, than that the Health of both must be preserved, and the Diseases cured by the same Prescriptions?<sup>1</sup>

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726), the single most celebrated work of fiction by an Irish writer in the long eighteenth century, creates a series of fantastic places and populates them with extraordinary beings. But despite its creative exuberance, the fictive qualities of Swift's text have traditionally been viewed with suspicion. As satire that employs narrative fiction for an instrumental purpose, the *Travels* has traditionally been subject to criticisms which question both the morality of this purpose and the text's legitimacy as fiction. These not unreasonable criticisms are, I will argue here, interrelated, and informed by a common anxiety about the failure of Swift's text to fulfil what is now conventionally expected of early modern fictional prose narratives – namely that they should lend form and substance to modern ideas of individuality. Instead, Swift's fiction explicitly attacks these ideas. 'It is a mockery of individualism', John Mullan asserts; a reaction against modernity, according to Ronald Paulson, and 'against the excessive freedom and individualism that had replaced the excessive order' of traditional forms of social organization.<sup>2</sup>

If attacking modernity is the purpose of Swift's satiric fictions, then their method is obsessively to reinstate one in particular of these traditional forms. My epigraph, from the third part of the *Travels*, identifies this as 'a strict universal resemblance between the natural and the political body'. I will argue here that Swift's work exploits this resemblance as a central, animating fiction and uses it to expose modern notions of individuality as deceptions – fictions in a negative, delusive sense. One contribution of *Gulliver's Travels* to the tradition of Irish prose fiction is, therefore, its insistence that sovereignty and integrity are problematic guarantors of personal, as much as political, identity. To underline this insistence, Swift's writing continually draws comparisons between natural and political constitutions. Part three of

*Gulliver's Travels* humorously evokes a parallel that is deployed polemically and provocatively elsewhere – from the parallel history of *The Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome* (1701), through *The Story of the Injured Lady* (1707) to the repeated depictions of Ireland as an afflicted body in his sermons and later pamphlets. Swift's use of such figures invokes a rhetorical tradition which, as Richard Braverman explains, helps to 'legitimate the social order, making it appear to be consistent with the inherent nature of things' and which accounts for contradictions 'by depicting them as individual aberrations rather than systemic faults'.<sup>3</sup> However, Swift modifies this scheme by depicting damaged and degraded bodies so that individual aberrations are made to reflect faults in the system. Metaphorical bodies are ruined like the Injured Lady, reduced to a carcass in the *Contests and Dissensions*, or, as in the sermon 'On the Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland' (1715), cannibalised by offspring who 'draw out the very Vitals of their Mother Kingdom'.<sup>4</sup>

Designed to illustrate the damage wrought by innovation, Swift's deployment of the trope of the political body is also consciously anachronistic. Several critics have remarked that the body-politic image had become outdated by the time of Swift's maturity. Reviewing its use in *The Contests and Dissensions*, Irvin Ehrenpreis's biography of Swift (volume II, 1967) labels it a cliché beloved of 'old impotent thinking', while more recent surveys have emphasised the concept's association with traditionalist modes of thought. *Plot and Counterplot*, Braverman's 1993 study of the body politic in literature from 1660-1730 notes that by the mid-seventeenth century the comparison 'begins to lose its axiomatic character', while Frank Palmeri's *Satire, History, Novel* (2003) comments on a widespread tendency to characterize enlightenment modernity with regard to its having 'abandoned traditional certainties based on correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm'.<sup>5</sup> Swift's works continually acknowledge and subvert this abandonment through fictional reassertions of the equivalence between individual and political bodies.

The insistence with which his texts inscribe this figure also runs counter to one of the projects of early modern fiction which, as Deirdre Shauna Lynch argues, was the depiction of 'modern bodies, unmoored from the traditional corporate identities associated with the Guilds, Church, and Court'.<sup>6</sup> But rather than offer nostalgic, idealized images, of psychically and socially-integrated individuals, Swift's antimodern counter-discourse more often tends to depict political bodies as if they had barely survived the onslaught of modernity. His fiction is realist in the sense that it exploits human bodies' and minds' tendency to injury and infirmity and uses these to exhibit material signifiers of what

Theodor Adorno called 'damaged life': the 'sphere of private existence and ... mere consumption ... without autonomy or substance'.<sup>7</sup> Part three of *Gulliver's Travels* provides the most sustained and literal fictional rendering of this idea through creations like the Struldbruggs and the procession of ancient and modern dead in Glubbdubdrib who serve only to illustrate 'how much the Race of human Kind was degenerate among us within these Hundred Years past', and how disease has 'shortened the Size of Bodies, unbraced the Nerves, relaxed the Sinews and Muscles ... and rendered the Flesh loose and *rancid*'. These observations prompt an appearance by some of the only healthy bodies to take shape in the *Travels* – conjured up by Gulliver's desire for 'English Yeomen ... famous for the Simplicity of their Manners, Dyet, and Dress' (p.188).

Beyond such wistful exceptions, Swift's political bodies testify to violent harms as well as to natural degeneration. This is a common theme in narrative fiction – indeed Frank Kermode pithily summarizes the typical plot of realist fiction as 'perpetually recurring crises of the person'.<sup>8</sup> *Gulliver's Travels* is no exception in that it creates and relieves narrative tension through threats to the individual and social body. More unusually, however, through the text's manipulations of scale and perspective, its hero vacillates between threatening and threatened status. Sometimes Gulliver is the object of such bodily harm, at others he himself constitutes the threat and at yet others he fulfils both roles simultaneously – for example when those plotting his execution within the Lilliputian government realize that Gulliver's enormous size will make his dead body into a hazardous waste problem and outline a plan to 'cut [his] Flesh from [his] Bones, take it away by Cart-loads, and bury it in distant Parts to prevent Infection' (p.64). Death transforms Gulliver from a political to a hygienic threat, and the interrelation of the two is a constant theme in the *Travels* that links the degraded physical body to its corrupt ideological counterpart.

In his 'determination to expose the actuality of a maimed condition', Swift attacked specific forms of modernity such as colonial politics, as Seamus Deane points out. Deane notes that 'the political conflict generated by the English-Irish relationship' is an important correlative for Swift's 'obsessive rhetorical figurings of the autonomous body and the body that has neither identity nor control and that can, as a consequence issue only excrement, vapors, or be represented merely as an object of consumption or derision'.<sup>9</sup> While the techniques of realist fiction are prominent in Swift's figuring of the damaged modern body, *Gulliver's Travels* deploys multiple rhetorical devices to expose and exploit cherished ideological fictions of personhood and statehood. In this regard, one important source for Swift is, I will argue, Thomas

Hobbes's theory of political representation, a non-literary fiction which bears an important relationship to general theories of fiction.

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Some of the most famous accounts of *Gulliver's Travels* perceive an anti-humanist quality in the text and trace it back to the author, who is personified as borderline insane, or misanthropic, or in Deane's summary of this tradition, as possessed by 'something fierce and repellent the explanation for which must be sought ... in Swift's psyche'.<sup>10</sup> A good example of how Swift's deployment of fictive energies might be seen as exciting but ultimately nullifying can be found in Part IV of the *Travels*, the voyage to Houyhnhnmland. At this point in the text, Gulliver is happily settled among the Houyhnhnms and is outlining the material form of his contentment in the shape of his 'little Oeconomy'. He lives on a diet of wild birds, rabbits, bread and honey, and makes his own utilitarian clothes and furnishings. Most of all, though, Gulliver thinks himself happy because he has left modern society behind:

Here was neither Physician to destroy my Body, nor Lawyer to ruin my Fortune: No Informer to watch my Words and Actions, or forge Accusations against me for hire; Here were no Gibbers, Censurers, Backbiters, Pickpockets, Highwaymen, House-breakers, Attorneys, Bawds, Buffoons, Gamesters, Politicians, Wits, Spleneticks, tedious Talkers, Controvertists, Ravishers, Murderers, Robbers, Virtuoso's; no Leaders or Followers of Party and Faction; No encouragers to Vice, by Seducement or Examples: No Dungeon, Axes, Gibbets, Whipping-posts, or Pillories; No cheating Shopkeepers or Mechanicks: No Pride, Vanity: or Affectation: No Fops, Bullies, Drunkards, strolling Whores, or Poxes: No ranting, lewd, expensive Wives: No stupid, proud Pedants: No importunate, over-bearing, quarrelsome, noisy, roaring, empty, conceited, swearing Companions: No Scoundrels, raised from the Dust for the Sake of their Vices, or Nobility thrown into it on account of their Virtues: No Lords, Fiddlers, Judges, or Dancing-masters (pp.258-9).

For all its copiousness and extravagance, there is a clear element of nihilism in this list that gives credence to the idea of Swift's fiction as more destructive than creative. It is, for starters, an anti-list, composed of persons and things that were not actually there. Secondly, it exploits one of the generic features of lists, the ordering of constituent items in an undifferentiated succession, to suggest moral equivalences that are

demonstrably false. People who talk at unnecessary length, collect interesting curios, or work with their hands, are all placed on a level with murderers. But even this levelling effect is deceptively employed because some of the individuals who populate the list are singled out for special attention by being strategically placed. Notable among these are the dancing masters who, by coming last in a string of criminals, buffoons and scoundrels, are thereby subject to the comic misapprehension that they must be the most morally depraved of all. By this token special status is also accorded in the list to those who head it: the physician and lawyer who seek to wreck Gulliver physically and financially. Their prominence is less a joke than a recognition of their agency in providing the primary means by which individuals may be constituted in the emerging bureaucratic society that Gulliver has escaped: as bodies capable of suffering pain and as legal or financial entities capable of enduring loss and punishment.

Subsequent items in the list might be seen as elaborations of a basic premise – that participating in modern society involves either submitting self, body and property to being manipulated, contorted or otherwise damaged, or undertaking to enact such harm upon others. Activities such as informing, highway robbery, and teaching people to dance might therefore be considered as amplifications, sometime humorous, and sometimes grotesque, of this basic idea. Rather than a paranoid rant, the list becomes a critical enumeration of the limited and damaging forms that personhood is allowed to assume in modern society. The ultimate target of this critique is the social and political fiction of autonomous personhood – or ‘personation’ to use the name given to this fiction by Thomas Hobbes.

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*A PERSON, is he, whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing those of another man, ... whether truly, or by fiction.*<sup>11</sup>

Swift's fictions frequently literalize Thomas Hobbes's political metaphors. *A Tale of A Tub* (1704; 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1710) advertises itself as providing a comforting, sacrificial fiction that will make up for Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) having exposed 'all other Schemes of Religion and Government' as 'hollow, and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to Rotation'. The *Tale's* companion piece, *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, directly subverts a Hobbesian fiction of the body politic when the human brain is said to be composed of a 'Crowd of little Animals' who cling together to provide the illusion of a unitary whole 'like the Picture of Hobbes's

*Leviathan*, or like Bees in perpendicular swarm upon a Tree, or like a Carrion corrupted into Vermin still preserving the Shape and Figure of the Mother Animal'.<sup>12</sup> The last image in the sequence exploits a verbal ambiguity between the biological and figurative senses of 'mother' to conflate two different modes, sexual and asexual, of reproduction – parturition and spontaneous or equivocal generation. Vermin literally feed from the dead animal, and while this consumption superficially resembles a mother feeding her young, the feeders are in fact a lower form of life generated by the body's decay. This produces a parodic filial relationship which echoes Swift's subversion of the Hobbesian social contract.

As well as animating Swift's early satiric fictions, Hobbes's metaphoric figures provide a source for both the narratorial rhetoric and the narrative twists of *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver's list of wrongdoers might be seen as an indirect parody of a list of social roles, and therefore of a theory of personhood, offered in *Leviathan*. Hobbes's theory of political representation explicitly depends on fictions and posits personhood as a primary enabling fiction on which all formal social relations depend. The state justifies its assertion of power over individuals, according to *Leviathan*, because it does so on behalf of all members of society, who have individually given up their right of self-government to this higher authority. They agree 'by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man *I ... give up my right of governing myself*'.<sup>13</sup> This dramatization of the moment of a state's founding contains an important qualification: the originary resignation of individual autonomy is a fiction. Rather than actually give their assent, social agents are treated *as if* they had delegated their autonomy and authority to someone else. Hobbes extends the notion of fictionality to include the relationship that is brought into existence through this fiction of consent. He naturalizes this fictive relationship between individuals by linking it to a further originary fiction of personhood. Persons, in Hobbes's reading, are fictions, a point he underlines by tracing the word's etymology:

The word person is Latin: instead whereof the Greeks have πρόσωπον, which signifies the *face*, as *persona* in Latin signifies the disguise, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the stage ... and from the stage hath been translated to any representer of speech and action, as well in tribunals as theatres. So that a *person* is the same that an actor is, both on the stage and in common conversation; and to *personate*, is to *act*, or *represent* himself or another.<sup>14</sup>

Personhood for Hobbes is thus not an individual essence but a fictional representation, which he calls personation. Words like 'disguise' and 'counterfeited' raise the possibility that such representations might be manipulative deceptions rather than empowering fictions. Hobbes sets out to allay the troubling implications of this idea by demonstrating that such counterfeiting is a reassuringly routine feature of everyday life – 'as well in tribunals as theatres'. To do this he offers a list of people who typically personate others in the sense of 'represent officially' – 'a *representer* or *representative*, a *lieutenant*, a *vicar*, an *attorney*, a *deputy*, a *procurator*, an *actor*' – a list, of reassuringly respectable office-holders, primed (with the possible exception of the actor) to act as honest and responsible members of the commonwealth.

By reprising Hobbes's list and amplifying the potential for its members to be seen as willing exploiters of the fiction of personhood, *Gulliver's Travels* offsets Hobbes's theoretical reading of the social contract with a practical illustration of its potential to formally license violence and deceit. Admittedly this is not the way Swift chooses to portray social relations in his explicit pronouncements on the subject, for example in his sermon 'On Mutual Subjection'. But Swift's fiction sometimes offers unsettling alternatives to, or radical critiques of, conventional notions and conscious intentions expressed elsewhere. If read as such a critique, Gulliver's list can be compared to modern and postmodern discussions which question liberal notions of personhood and individual sovereignty, regarding the individual subject not as a free agent but as a construction of linguistic or political power. Judith Butler for example argues that 'the subject is constituted (interpellated) in language' so that the idea of the 'sovereign freedom of the individual' remains an 'impossible notion'.<sup>15</sup> Discussing ideas of collective rather than individual sovereignty, Ernest Gellner describes the modern nation as an 'anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals' and contrasts this bureaucratic model with idealized representations of the nation, which he classes as a 'sociological self-deception'.<sup>16</sup> Being a rhetorical construct which itemizes substitutable individuals but also aggregates them to form a whole which he no longer wants any part in, Gulliver's list may be seen as exemplifying the fictional character of both the autonomous individual and the modern state. And as a fictional character himself, he points to the special role that narrative fiction is often said to have played in popularising and legitimating these models of self and society.

This role continues to be questioned by modern critics. Sandra Macpherson, for example, notes that the novel has been 'persistently associated with the historical and conceptual production of self-conscious personhood', and critically interrogates the ongoing

tendency in histories of early modern prose fiction to regard the form as 'a technology for producing ... the "Person" or the "subject [or] the "individual"''.<sup>17</sup> Deirdre Shauna Lynch argues along similar lines that 'accounts of the novel's eighteenth-century genesis ... have allied the advent of the genre with the progress of individualism and yoked the genre's development to the history of the self'. Though they may be willing to view the term as an ideological construction, "'individual" remains critics' term of choice for the people populating those fictions they call novels'. Against this liberal genealogy of personhood Lynch prefers notions of people as 'transients'; 'bodies in motion ... meeting as buyers and sellers', while Macpherson polemically disregards agentive selfhood in favour of a view derived from the legal doctrine of strict liability, which depicts 'the person as mass', people as 'things' and 'persons as matter in motion that causes bodily harm'.<sup>18</sup>

In similar fashion, Swift subverts ideas of the novel as a technology for producing individuals by using a much older linguistic tool – the list. Walter J. Ong famously argued that 'writing was in a sense invented largely to make something like lists'.<sup>19</sup> Eighteenth-century scholars have adapted this insight to show how lists were an important component of literary modernity. Cynthia Wall points out their importance as a structural tool of 'scientific essays, collectors' catalogs, topographies, mercantile pamphlets, diary accounts, and, of course, satire'.<sup>20</sup> Citing Robinson Crusoe's habitual listmaking as an example, Wolfram Schmidgen adds that lists are 'linked to processes of modernization and objectification ... the accounting habits of modern economic man, the emphasis of the "new science" on particularized observation,' and 'the stress laid by mercantilist economic theory on trade, goods and the circulation of goods'.<sup>21</sup> Gulliver's lists parody these structuring principles through their chaotic compendiousness. As well as the fiction of individual sovereignty they expose the world-encompassing inclusivity of novelistic fiction. I will flesh out this point with reference to general theories of fiction and the specific relationship between fiction and satire.

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Because readers tend to privilege literature almost exclusively among disciplines that employ fictions, it may still be necessary to restate Frank Kermode's assertion that there exists 'a simple relation between literary and other fictions'.<sup>22</sup> One branch of this relationship is beginning to be studied in depth, namely the interdependence between literary and legal fictions in the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> But outside this area, Kermode's argument that literature's fictions should be 'part of the theory of fictions in general' still requires attention. Kermode's



point is indebted to Hans Vaihinger's picture, in *Philosophy of As If* (1911), of social and intellectual life as comprehensively structured by fictions. Fictionalism, as Vaihinger's systematic theory is often derisively labelled, is accorded little credence in modern philosophical circles.<sup>24</sup> But it has obvious attractions, in a looser and more metaphorical application, for critics of enlightenment and postmodern literary cultures often said to be linked by prevailing anxieties about truth and fiction – shown, for example, in common strategies of privileging irony over sincerity, and shared tendencies to simultaneously value and distrust grand explanatory narratives.<sup>25</sup>

Although it presages these postmodern themes, Swift's work is not prototypical of today's radical, secular scepticism. Instead his writing is by and large that of an aesthetic and political conservative driven to create radical and outlandish fictions in order to vitiate, by outdoing, the grotesque schemes and dreams of his own society. Swift's most famous satires, *A Tale of A Tub*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*, expose corruption in religion, politics and economics not by offering what Palmeri calls 'accessible middle grounds', but by employing satiric fictions of madness which imitate, rival, and finally exceed these excesses.<sup>26</sup> Swift's satiric amplifications are not gratuitous but strategic; designed, as Michael Suarez argues, 'to foster critical discernment and cultivate in ... readers the art of disbelief', ultimately replacing received or ill-considered opinions with 'a series of deeper judgments about language, religion, and politics'.<sup>27</sup> But for all their strategizing, these fictions rely heavily on decorum-breaching shock tactics and deploy memorable, often unpleasantly visceral images that threaten to displace the intellectual content of the satire. Swift's fictions of madness, as Melinda Rabb observes, 'achieve striking effects when behaviours ordinarily hidden from polite society' such as defecation, belching, farting, bodily mutilation, or cannibalism, 'are thrust before the reader'. The use of such images, Rabb correctly asserts, 'does not constitute rational public debate' but rather helps create a fervid and 'almost hallucinatory world of imaginative fertility but of political impotence and moral sterility'.<sup>28</sup>

The metaphors of sex, reproduction and generation used by Rabb to describe this hallucinatory world are a common theme both in Swift's own satiric vocabulary and in critical discussion of it. In both, they convey an underlying concern with what fictions might enable and produce. While Swift's single most memorable statement on the subject compares satire to a mirror (which, as Borges reminds us, might itself be seen as an organ of generation in that it can be seen to 'increase the number of men'), a more common object of satiric fictional representation, identified by Rabb and by Sophie Gee, is the 'generation of useless surplus', and 'lavish oversupply'.<sup>29</sup> Suarez

deploys a variation on this vocabulary when he argues that Swift's satiric fictions 'take on a life of their own', being 'vivifie[d]' through 'an excess which serves no clear instrumental purpose'. Palmeri lends a slightly ghoulish cast to this biotic language with his observation that 'through their afterlife [Swift's] narrative forms ... shape narrative forms later in the eighteenth century'. In addition to considering Swift's fictions as fecund producers (or haunters) of other fictions, an alternative line of thought might be to pursue what Paulson calls satire's 'mimetic drift' in an opposite direction by considering these fictions not in terms of what they produce but in terms of what produces them. Robert Phiddian suggests such an orientation when he classes *Gulliver's Travels* among 'reactive rather than "primary" or speculative forms of writing, depending on pre-existing cultural and literary forms for their authority rather than any claim to radical originality'.<sup>30</sup> But Swift's fictions are expository as well as reactive: they say something about the cultural and literary forms they imitate.

Their content can be described with reference to Amy Boesky's assessment of early modern utopian fictions. Such writing, Boesky argues, is about the 'fictional nature of nonfiction' because it demonstrates that 'all texts – statutes, sermons, declarations of war – are representations, that states are not discovered but made, and that values are not innate but artfully and artificially constructed'.<sup>31</sup> Swift's largely dystopian fictions apply this focus not just to states but to individuals, suggesting through parodic imitation that the modern idea of the autonomous individual, being either a harmful deception or an impossible ideal, is a dangerous fiction. Swift's tendency to discredit such fictions by imitating them is summarized in Deane's comment that Swift's 'impersonation of the forms of modernity's assault on traditional morality ... makes him so anomalously and yet decisively a modern writer'.<sup>32</sup> Deane's choice of descriptive term highlights one of the extra-literary fictions mimicked in Swift's work. With and without the prefix, (im)personation is not just a rhetorical strategy but also a criminal offence and a form of political representation – a legal and constitutional as well as a literary fiction, grounded in the common idea of the person as embodied representation.<sup>33</sup> These additional senses of the term emphasise that Swift is engaged in exposing pre-existing fictions as much as creating original ones. Swift uses fiction to achieve ontological as well as narrative revelation, dramatically unveiling a minimalist conception of people as mass and persons as things, generating and degenerating into useless surplus. This effect, I will illustrate by way of conclusion, finds its most forceful expression in *Gulliver's Travels*.

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The foregoing discussion has applied general theories of fiction to two specific fictions of self and society, namely the rhetorical tradition of the body politic and its application in literary and political representations of the individual. Swift adapts and modifies this tradition, I have argued, so that degraded bodies function as material signifiers of modernity's damaging innovations, embodying (or rather bearing the scars of their failure to embody) its systemic flaws. Such representations are informed by Hobbes's notion of personation and offer a 'realist' contrast to the dangerous fictions of his constitutional theory. Although Swift's early satiric fictions engage in more direct and explicit parody of the Hobbesian social body, it remains a lurking presence in *Gulliver's Travels*, specifically when Swift adapts one of the staple features of romance and novelistic fiction to his satiric purpose: namely, dramatic revelations concerning the hero's identity.

*Leviathan* adverts to subversive elements within the body politic, as Daniel Eilon reminds us, when Hobbes compares publicly authorized individuals to the muscles of society, in contrast to self-interested persons and groups, who are labelled 'Wens, Biles, and Apostemes'—tumours and swellings, infecting or feeding off society's useful members.<sup>34</sup> Such imagery, also seen in Milton's *Of Reformation* (1641), harks back to another body of fiction – the tradition of political fables modelled on Aesop's fable of the Belly and the Members, discussed at length in Annabel Patterson's *Fables of Power*.<sup>35</sup> Swift's polemics often invoke this distinction between useful constituents of the social body and useless surplus, and his fictions subject it to dramatic reversal. As well as the 'Mother Animal corrupted into Vermin' in *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, Swift uses an exemplum in *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* (1714; first published 1758) that directly recalls Hobbes and invokes the Aesopian tradition. Objecting to the 1711 act for naturalizing foreign Protestants, the *History* deploys a familiar argument about the negative effects of immigration, stating that 'a Kingdom can no more be the richer by such an Importation, than a Man can be fatter by a Wen; which is unsightly and troublesome at best, and intercepts that Nourishment which would otherwise diffuse through the whole Body'.<sup>36</sup> The list in part four of *Gulliver's Travels* is a grotesque amplification of this notion and presents a metaphorical social body exclusively composed of parasitic excrescences. Literal counterparts of this figure are found in the *Travels'* second part where Gulliver witnesses Brobdingnagian bodies afflicted with wens, tumours and external parasites such as lice, bodies on which 'Vermin ... rooted like Swine' (p.102).

Gulliver finds himself on the receiving end of this perspective when he and his kind are famously described by the King of Brobdingnag as a 'pernicious Race of little odious Vermin' (p.121). Both here and when

the Houyhnhnm assembly move to expel Gulliver for fear that he might lead the Yahoos in a cattle raid, Swift's hero is the victim of a dramatic reversal. His place in a utopian body politic is revealed to be that of a foreign body with the potential to cause active harm. In Houyhnmmland Gulliver is a type of Yahoo, and therefore, as in Brobdingnag, a form of vermin, produced by degeneration of 'corrupted Mud and Slime' or the 'Ooze and Froth of the Sea' (p.253).<sup>37</sup> Instead of bestowing the material and spiritual fulfilments beloved of romance and novelistic fiction, this revelation of kinship exposes Gulliver as so much noxious, dispensable, animate matter. While the nihilistic implications of this revelation are troubling they are also limited – their scope is not universal but specific, applied against perspectives such as those of Gulliver (or Hobbes) that are, in Swift's view, neither sane nor sustainable, however pervasive they may be. It is to expose the pernicious – and fictive – nature of such worldviews that Swift populates his fictions not with persons but personations.

#### NOTES

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1. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.175. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the main text.
2. John Mullan, 'Swift, Defoe, and Narrative Forms' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650-1740*, ed. by Steven N. Zwicker (1998; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.269; Ronald Paulson, *The Fictions of Satire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p.8.
3. Richard Braverman, *Plot and Counterplot: Sexual Politics and the Body Politic in English Literature, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.48-9.
4. *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (New York: Norton, 2010), p.243.
5. Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works and The Age*, 3 vols (London: Methuen, 1962-87), II, 53; Braverman, p.49; Frank Palmeri, *Satire, History, Novel: Narrative Forms, 1665-1815* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p.35.
6. Deirdre Shauna Lynch, 'The Novel: Novels in a World of Moving Goods', in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Cynthia Wall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.123.
7. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2004), p.15.
8. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.35.
9. Seamus Deane, 'Classic Swift', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Christopher Fox (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.252; see also Luke Gibbons's contention that Swift's depiction of suffering bodies seeks, like Burke's, 'to reinstate the wounds of history into the public sphere, and, by extension, "obsolete" or "traditional" societies into the course of history', *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.xii-xiii).

10. William Makepeace Thackeray, *English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*; George Orwell, 'Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels', each excerpted in *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, p.741, p.848; Deane, p.243.
11. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.106.
12. Swift, *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, in Swift, *Essential Writings*, pp.18, 120.
13. Hobbes, p.114.
14. Hobbes, pp.106-7.
15. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.40.
16. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1982; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.56.
17. Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p.23.
18. Lynch, p.123; Macpherson, p.10.
19. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982; London: Routledge, 2002), p.97.
20. Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.71.
21. Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.108.
22. Kermode, p.36.
23. For example, Martin A. Kayman, 'The Reader and the Jury: Legal Fictions and the Making of Commercial Law in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (1997), 1-21; Eleanor F. Shevlin, "'Imaginary Productions" and "Minute Contrivances": Law, Fiction, and Property in Eighteenth-Century England', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28 (1999), 131-54; Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property*; Kieran Dolin, *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapter 4.
24. Arthur Fine, 'Fictionalism', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 27 (1998), 1-18; Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
25. These parallels between Swift's writing and postmodernity are developed by Melinda Alliker Rabb, 'Postmodernizing Swift', in *Reading Swift: Papers from the Fifth Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Hermann J. Real (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), pp.29-43, and also in Rabb's *Satire and Secrecy in English Literature from 1650-1750* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.1-19, 177-88.
26. Palmeri, p.25.
27. Michael Suarez, 'Swift's Satire and Parody', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.127, 112.
28. Rabb, pp.12, 9.
29. Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy*, Sophie Gee, 'The Sewers: Ordure, Effluence, Excess in the Eighteenth Century', in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Cynthia Wall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.115; also Sophie Gee, *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), chapter 4.
30. Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.42.

31. Amy Boesky, *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.22.
32. Deane, p.244.
33. Michael Kennedy, 'Personation', *The Oxford Dictionary of Law Enforcement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), online edition, consulted via *Oxford Reference Online*, accessed 6 December 2010.
34. Daniel Eilon, *Faction's Fictions: Ideological Closure in Swift's Satire* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1991), p.48.
35. Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), chapter four, pp.111-37. Swift's use of fables is discussed in Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001) and Mark Loveridge, *A History of Augustan Fable* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
36. *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Herbert Davis, 14 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939-64), VII, 95.
37. Like Pope, who connects generation from filth and slime with the spurious creativity of dulness, Swift's writing frequently associates autochthony and spontaneous generation with lower or parasitic forms of life. It also became topical in the year of *Gulliver's Travels*' publication when Mary Toft of Godalming in Surrey caused a sensation by appearing to give birth to live rabbits; see Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.1-38, p.196 and pp.283-4, n.28; David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Susan Bruce, 'The Flying Island and Female Anatomy: Gynaecology and Power in *Gulliver's Travels*', *Genders* 2 (1988), 60-76; Marilyn Francus, 'The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope', *ELH* 61 (1994), 829-851.