

The Voice of the Author in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift

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Abstract

Gulliver's Travels was first published in 1726 and several reprints, each with minor changes in text, were issued within a few years' time, with the 1735 edition being generally regarded as the more authentic version. Since then, the popularity of the book has never ceased to increase. Swift was as hostile as Pope and the other founders of the Scriblerus Club to the regime of his time and the Hanoverian court and this attitude is reflected in various ways throughout the book, but *Gulliver's Travels* suggests that we should look further than the confines of the eighteenth-century world. This paper explores the author's voice in the narrative in order to look closely at the impact of Swift's ideas on the reader. The attempt to identify several roles of the author suggests that the reader is perplexed by the narrator's attitude and challenged to reformulate the entire perspective on the human race. The article, therefore, surveys the book by looking at different authorial voices used by Swift as a technical device to communicate his radical critique of human nature.

Keywords: the author's voice; author-narrator; irony; satire; age of reason

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1. Introduction

Jonathan Swift's most popular work, *Gulliver's Travels*, has been approached, explored and reviewed from numerous literary and historical perspectives. The full name of the book, published in 1726 without its author's name (Quintana, *Encyclopedia Britannica*), is *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World – in four parts – by Lemuel Gulliver first a Surgeon and then a Captain of several Ships*. It continues to generate lively literary debate, being analysed by turns as a novel, as literary utopia or a representative philosophical work within the broad framework of the eighteenth century. "Though there has been debate and controversy as to the objects of Swift's satire and the allegorical meaning of the book, in

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particular in the latter two adventures, the popularity of the work has never been in doubt" (Bauer, 2018).

Brief literature review

No genuinely documented literature on the age of reason is complete without generous comments on Swift's work. Paul Hazard's celebrated book *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* identifies *Gulliver's Travels* as a true outcome of the century of universal criticism in an initial chapter devoted to the *ubiquitous critic*. One category of critics would include the travellers associated with the topic of multifarious Utopias: "Swift, however, takes a firm grip on the human nature; [...]. He is not content with giving us the finest lessons in relativity there have ever been. With sinister zeal, which becomes devastating as he warms to his task, he attacks everything we were ever taught to believe, to revere, or to love" (Hazard: 7). Hazard also places Swift among influential English writers who set the trend at the epoch and speaks about a mimetic attitude towards the English intellectual elite in general: "For it was a fact. People did copy the English now. They were not content with having given to the world the most illustrious of philosophers, an army of deists, ingenious apologists, a liberal supply of moralists [...]; they were now setting out to lead people along unfamiliar paths. Among their exports were the works of such people as Defoe and Swift, Richardson, Fielding, [...]; a whole school of original literature" (Hazard: 451).

Traditional historians of literature consider that *Gulliver's Travels* belongs to the years of Swift's maturity and disillusionment and list the book among the three perpetual volumes that "furnished the juvenile libraries of the western world", namely *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robison Crusoe* (Sampson and Churchill, 1970: 390). However, when it comes to tracing *Gulliver's* sources, they believe this is a vain enterprise. "What matters in a book is not whence it might have come but what it is. Everything that makes *Gulliver* immortal has its sources in Swift, and in Swift alone" (Sampson and Churchill: 390).

Studies on Swift's views on language make up an interesting chapter in recent critique. Each voyage in the book poses the problem of language from different perspectives and Swift is prompt in communicating his concern about the degeneration of the English language to the reader from the very beginning; in the *Letter from Captain Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson*, Gulliver deplores the rapid pace of change in the

structure of the language, to the extent to which people can no longer understand each other: “*Sea-Yahoos are apt, like the land ones, to become new-fangled in their words; which the latter change every year. ... And I observe, when any Yahoo comes from London out of curiosity to visit me at my own house, we neither of us are able to deliver our conceptions in a manner intelligible to the other*” (Swift, 1973: 27). Gulliver makes similar remarks while visiting Luggnagg, “where the Struldbrugs, who have the dubious gift of immortality, are a living testament to the impermanence of linguistic meaning” (Mulhan, 2002: 7/21).

Language alienation is therefore part of the entire process of the author’s distancing himself from his own world.

Apart from cultural and philosophical considerations emerging from a complex tapestry-like description as that of Hazard, the literary genres like utopia and dystopia have often been mentioned in relation to Swift’s most popular work by more recent research. These dimensions look at a genre which was made popular by literary works describing ideal lands, among which Thomas More *Utopia* stands out as a founding, but by no means a solitary book. *Gulliver’s Travels* can be seen as “utopian in its refusal to concede that the ideal society can exist in the real world”, but the book can qualify as “simultaneously utopian and dystopian” (Houston, 2007: 425). The term *dystopia* can equally apply to Swift’s work as the societies presented before the readers are distorted, and at times, terrifying worlds where Gulliver is exposed to all sorts of evil and thus communicates a feeling of helplessness before representatives of the human race, whatever the dimensions.

Aim of the article

The article addresses the identity of the author in *Gulliver’s Travels* since; as readers we often feel from the beginning of the first book, and especially from the preface, that there are discontinuities and contradictions between the presumed author and the narrator of the travels. The relationship between Swift himself and Gulliver is also a play between identities and perspectives. This paper looks at Swift’s work through a basic literary device for unraveling meaning: *the author’s voice*, and relates to what Gerard Genette calls *mood* and *voice* in his reputed book, *Narrative Discourse - An essay in method*. Overall, the article aims to study the authorial voice in a selection of situations, in an attempt to suggest the

intricate nature of this voice and how strongly the author's approach is highlighted by ironic discourse.

Genette sees the narrative "representation" or the narrative information as having degrees, as the narrative provides the reader with a fluctuating amount of detail. "The narrative can also choose to regulate the information it delivers, not with a sort of even screening, but according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant in the story (a character or group of characters, with the narrative adopting or seeming to adopt what we ordinarily call the participant's "vision" or "point of view". ... "Distance and perspective, thus provisionally designated and defined, are the two chief modalities of that regulation of narrative information that is mood" (Genette, 1980: 162). Exploring perspective and distance as they are signaled by the voice of the author is also meant to convey the perplexity of the reader when confronted with the story of a man "who begins as a prideful modern man and ends as a maddened misanthrope" (Baker et al., Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Throughout the article, the term *author* is used to designate Gulliver as a narrator, the voice that tells the story, and the name *author-narrator* is used with the same meaning. It is this voice and the perspective it unveils that are the focus of the discussion below. This impersonation of the narrator cannot be separated from the ironic discourse; in fact, they are joined together to an extent to which we can say that there is *no author* apart from Swift's masterful manipulation of many voices and perspectives in order to convey meaning. However, exploring the multiple voices through which ideas are communicated in the book has proven a useful enterprise for the way the reader is introduced in this process, which I believe explains at least one of the modern, enduring facets of *Gulliver's Travels*.

2. Disguises of authorship

2.1 Author's identity

Significant literary criticism on Swift's work discusses the identity of the author's voice at length and brings to surface plural identities related to the writer's aims. Distinctiveness of the author is as shifty, it seems, as the veracity of the story: "From the beginning, *Gulliver's Travels* is a trap for innocent readers; "... Swift appears at first sight as a classic example of the ingeniously "normal" observer" (Rawson, 2012: 2).

At this point we can bring up Genette's distinction between *mood* and *voice*, in other words between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* (Genette, 1980: 186). Things appear simple enough: there is an author, Lemuel Gulliver, with an identity seemingly constructed with a lot of detail (as we read in the beginning of the first book), who is also the narrator of the voyages. The book is a first-person narrative, but dialogues and third-person perspectives are also present throughout. However, the narrative line adopts so many variations in the *voice* of the author that we are sometimes invited to wonder whether the author is not actually mirroring his readers' views or even gives them a certain identity of which they were completely unaware in the beginning.

The author pretends to be a real author discovering new worlds and the book starts as a real journey (Defoe before him used the same technique) meant, perhaps, to amuse the reader. A preface was commonly used in voyage journals at the time, but the preface we are invited to read *as a preface* resembles in tonality the final pages of the last travel and looks very much like an arching structure, announcing a hidden intention that only becomes clear at the end of the book. The intriguing character of the preface lies in its tonality, which is irritated, deceptive and profoundly bitter, as well as in assigning the readers the identity of Yahoos. It is difficult to see this from the beginning, as Yahoos, an inferior race, or rather a species of degraded humanity, only appear in the fourth book *A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms*. It is also a first hint to the perception of England as a *dystopia*, a perspective that has been approached by research on Swift, as I have already said. I would like to give below three examples from the preface entitled *A Letter from Captain Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson* (his presumed publisher, in fact) which show both the author's identity with Yahoos and how close the reader is to being a Yahoo without knowing it:

(a) *"If the censure of Yahoos could any way affect me, I should have great reason to complain, that some of them are so bold as to think my book of travels a mere fiction out of mine own brain; and have gone so far as to drop hints, that the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos have no more existence than the inhabitants of Utopia"* (Gulliver's Travels, 1973: 27). The focus here is more distant, implying that publishers, other authors of travel books, people in general, are Yahoos.

(b) *"And I observe, when any Yahoo comes from London out of curiosity to visit me at my own house, we neither of us are able to deliver our conceptions in a*

manner intelligible to the other" (p. 27). There is an insinuated distance between all other people (readers included, we may say) who are Yahoos, and the author, saying that language itself is a barrier to communication inside the same race.

(c) *"Do these miserable animals presume to think that I am so far degenerated as to defend my veracity? Yahoo as I am, it is well known through all Houyhnhnms-land, that by the instructions and the example of my illustrious master, I was able in the compass of two years (although I confess with the utmost difficulty) to remove that infernal habit of lying, shuffling, deceiving, and equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very souls of all my species; especially the Europeans"* (p. 28). This fragment is among the first examples of the author's assuming an identity ("Yahoo as I am") before taking on another one, a device that is being used throughout the book. Immediately afterwards, the first chapter begins as a regular story of the author's life: "My father had a small estate in Nottinghamshire; I was the third of five sons ... ", ... "I was bound apprentice to Mr. James Bates, an eminent surgeon in London" ..., "I was surgeon successively in two ships ..." (p. 31); the final lines of this brief characterization, written in the style of the age, announce the background of Gulliver's future adventures and are meant to explain the versatility of his character: "My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books; and when I was ashore, in observing the manner and disposition of the people, as well as learning their language, wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory" (p. 32).

Thus, the book starts with a sort of riddle that the readers are left to sort out for themselves as the story advances.

2.2 Author as witness

Constant reader awareness of the author's part in these stories is invited and is highlighted throughout by informative headings at the beginning of each chapter. This was definitely in tune with the manner of writing in the eighteenth century when travel reports were frequent and cherished by reading audiences. However, in contrast to well-known characters of the eighteenth-century novels, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the author-narrator in *Gulliver's Travels* is not really a character in the literary sense, but rather a witness of his own story. There are times when we seem to hear Swift's voice from behind the narrator, but there is

always a doubt in the reader's mind as to whether Swift wishes to suggest a model or not.

The book does not actually offer models (of individuals or societies) and the dilution of Gulliver as a real character is in tune with classicist writing, where we do not find characters in the modern sense, but rather human features disguised as characters. The witness-like identity is very obvious in the third book, *A voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbudrib and Japan*. The author's visit to the Academy of Lagado is a memorable moment in the history of satiric literature but the purpose of this example is to show how the author's reaction is handled along the passage from one invention to another. He witnesses the inventions and their expert explanations and the only response from him is, at times, an indirect ironic comment. Therefore, the author is not entirely passive and distances himself from the story he is telling with a short and often spicy remark. Some of the fragments illustrating this aspect reveal this structure.

The reader is invited to a real treat in terms of inventions or projects: an eight-year project intended to extract sun-beams from cucumbers, an attempt to reduce human excrement to its original food, a new method of building houses, "by beginning at the roof, and working downwards towards the foundation" (p. 170), a blind master teaching his apprentices to mix colours, an effort to extract silk from spider webs; a large project meant to improve human life had the purpose to prevent the growth of wool upon two young lambs and the inventor "hoped in a reasonable time to propagate the breed of naked sheep all over the kingdom" (p. 172). Ironic comments are recurrent: "there was a most ingenious architect", "this artist is much encouraged and esteemed by the whole fraternity", "I was highly pleased with a projector", "it is not doubted that this invention may be capable of great improvement", "I was fully convinced", "I made my humblest acknowledgement to this illustrious person for his great communicativeness" (pp. 169-174).

The school of languages offers, among other projects, a scheme for abolishing words altogether:

"... since words are only names for things it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on"; "... many of the most learned and wise adhere to the new scheme of expressing themselves by things, which has only this inconvenience attending it, that if a man's business is very great and of various

kinds, he must be obliged in proportion to carry a greater bundle of things upon his back, unless he can afford one or two strong servants to attend him" (p.174).

The narrator simulates agreement with the solution proposed by scientists and laments the role of women and ordinary people in opposing such a brilliant invention: "this invention would certainly have taken place, ... if the women in conjunction with the vulgar and illiterate, had not threatened to raise a rebellion, unless they might be allowed the liberty to speak with their tongues, after the manner of their ancestors; *such constant irreconcilable enemies to science are the common people"* (p. 174).

Comments like this, disguised as expressions of an objective narrator (whereas, in fact, Gulliver's objectivity is artfully simulated) show how Swift uses irony to illustrate his attack on the rationalization of the world proposed by contemporary science; the extreme use of logic and reason distorts the world, including the view of language itself; in spite of the satiric, lively context, this part of the voyage to Laputa announces the bitter irony in the last book where, in the land of the Houyhnhnms, we are faced with "the very violence of reason" (Colebrook, 2004: 59). The rational horses in the fourth book do use language, but certain words are missing from their language as they lack the corresponding concepts in real life. I believe the Laputa episode anticipates the dramatic story at the end as it satirizes not only the abandonment of language from our identity but the removal of human feeling as well.

The historical context that inspired this account of the Academy, and the voyage to Laputa in general, points to the activity of the Scriblerus Club, an eighteenth-century British literary club whose founding members included Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot. Research nowadays acknowledges that "the imprint of Scriblerus on Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, especially Book III, describing the voyage to Laputa is unmistakable" (e.g., Kathleen Kuiper, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The club aimed to ridicule the pompous erudition and knowledgeable jargon that characterized the British scholars in the Royal Academy. Swift's activity at the Scriblerus Club is also related to a famous topic under debate in the cultural world of the eighteenth century: the dispute between the ancient thought and the modern one. Although Swift is generally associated with a position favouring the ancient world view at the expense of the modern one, especially where science was concerned, and in spite of some of the best instances of ironic discourse ever written by Swift, directed to the work of the Royal Academy, no clear position on this debate emerges from

Gulliver's Travels. From the perspective of this article, the character's attitude can also be connected to the author's voice. Irony is unleashed on the *projectors* (as researchers or professors at the Academy are called), but there is no ultimate commitment from the author for any form of knowledge or intellectual system.

2.3 Author as contemporary voice

Another instance of author reaction reveals itself in Gulliver's participation in dialogues with educated, refined and sophisticated people and with his "master" in Houyhnhnms land. The best examples are the lengthy discussions with the king of Brobdingnag and the horse character in the fourth book. During these episodes, Gulliver becomes the voice of the contemporary English citizen, whose values were shared throughout the civilized world.

All chapters start by giving an account of the author's actions, but very often an ironic mechanism is introduced in the narrative and the result is a duplicitous author whose intentions seem innocent but the consequences of his actions indicate a fiasco. The reader witnesses a moral catastrophe that the author initially tried to disguise as a perfectly honest and respectable society; the author-narrator appears as a victim whereas in fact, he means to sound like a proud and powerful instance. To the eighteenth-century reader, the praise of England's achievements or the enthusiastic approval of the values shared by the European civilization in Gulliver's accounts would have seemed natural, in spite of obvious irony.

Throughout the book, such moments are designed in a similar way. Chapter VI from the *Voyage to Brobdingnag* contains the author-narrator's accurate account of the government of England and Chapter VII starts with the following description "Author's love of his country - He makes a proposal of much advantage to the King, which is rejected". As in other cases in the book, the reader's complicity is summoned: "Imagine with thyself, courteous reader, how often I then wished for the tongue of Demosthenes or Cicero, that might have enabled me to celebrate the praises of my own dear native country in the style equal to its merits and felicity" (p. 124). At the king's request, Gulliver describes the activity of the Parliament, the Courts of Justice, the lives of the young nobility, the election system, the management of the treasury in a manner that could have been adopted by any common English citizen. The disclosure of evils is actually conveyed by the King's voice, one of the few positive characters

in a book where characters are merely character traits. His conclusion runs as: “by what I have gathered by your relation, and the answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth” (p.128). This extremely bitter sentence at the end of a fragment written in an alert, jocular style comes as a powerful blow, the severity of which would have probably been approved with mixed feelings by a contemporary audience.

In a further attempt to show us that what the entire, universally approved system of values is under scrutiny in the book, Swift inserts next Gulliver’s presentation of “an invention discovered between three and four hundred years ago”; guns and gun powder secrets are rejected by the king who is again charged with the task of uncovering a cruel and unhappy world: “The king was struck with horror at the description I have given of those terrible engines ... He was amazed how so impotent and grovelling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation, which I had painted” (p.130). This discussion is one of the best designed scenes in the book inviting the readers to reflect, through the use of different voices, on the very principles of the society they have produced and the outcomes of which they are enjoying. It is, however, unlikely that, apart from a few great thinkers of the age, including Pope and the other members of the Scriblerus Club, the normal reader would have accepted the satiric implications to the very end. The labels of “conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres” and the implication that everything is tainted by “avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, envy, lust” and many other vices are so radical that one wonders whether there is anything left of the European values so revered by other authors of the age. In a similar way to fragments from the *Voyage to Laputa* discussed in the previous section (2.2), this part from the second book lays the ground for the sombre conclusions in the last book.

The construction of the scenes above is founded on the satire of an entire civilization; irony, exaggeration and mockery are the most prominent devices used to communicate this idea. Yet Swift also uses other means of sharing his discontent with his own age with the reader and this appears in the fourth travel, described in the *Voyage to the country of Houyhnhnms*, as will be shown in the next section.

2.4 Author as *converted* character

Whereas in the first three books, the author is mostly an observer and his satire is directed to the evils in the English society, in the fourth book he is affected deeply by the encounter with the Houyhnhnms. His life changes completely when he meets the rational horses and the world they created. It is not perhaps without importance that the journey which brings Gulliver to this distant land is one of the most terrible experiences with his human fellows: the sailors on the ship he was commanding “formed a rebellion to seize the ship” and deserted him on an unknown island. It is degraded human behaviour that Gulliver deplores at the end of the book in Chapter XII, and not natural events or catastrophes, as in the other books, that is at the origin of this voyage.

This part of the article discusses authorial perspective along the same ideas as those in the previous section - namely, the author’s attitude when he is supposed to uncover the true dimension of his country’s values as well as the long-standing values of European societies. As the narrative progresses (a narrative which is in fact a long exposition) the reader is introduced into a world where horses are masters and Yahoo creatures are slaves, and has to cope with a strange inversion not only where species are concerned but where the distribution of reason and human faculties in general is reversed. The inevitable subject of origins and the author’s world emerges as the narrator is shown to undergo a conversion from the proud man coming from the most powerful empire in the world to a humble creature trying to find his identity in the shadow of a rational horse. The word *master* is not used for the first time, it also appeared in the *Voyage to Brobdingnag*, but its meaning is different. In Brobdingnag, the master was the giant who discovered Gulliver and made a living out of showing him to people throughout the country, but in Houyhnhnms land the *master* is associated with absolute reason, nobility, greatness, refinement and honesty.

In his attempt to describe his world to a purely rational being, the author captures the main features of his society in talking about wars, justice, the nature of government and the constitution. The reader looks at a new Gulliver now, who seems to have come to his senses, who is brutally honest and speaks about massacres, corruption or the crimes of the state without any trace of ironic disguise. The usual wit however, accompanies his stories, while his accounts reflect the absence of reason in the actions of his human fellows. When he tries to explain the causes of wars in Europe

he invokes “the ambition of princes, who never think they have land or people enough to govern; sometimes the corruption of ministers, who engage their master in a war in order to stifle or divert the clamour of the subjects against their evil administration” (p. 223). Most wars are occasioned by “difference in opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent”. Justice is in the hands of men “bred up from their youth in the art of proving by words multiplied for that purpose, that white is black, and black is white, according as they are paid. To this society all the rest of the people are slaves” (p. 226). In the same vein, the author portrays the First or Chief Minister of State who “was a creature wholly exempt from joy and grief, love and hatred, pity and anger; at least made use of no other passions but a violent desire of wealth, power and titles; ... that he never tells a truth, but with an intent that you should take it for a lie; nor a lie, but with a design that you should take it for a truth” (p. 231). Finally, in his attempt to finish the full portrait of a society he now despised, the narrator told his Houyhnhnm master in a sermon-like account that “nobility among us was altogether a different thing from the idea he had of it; that our young noblemen are bred from their childhood in idleness and luxury”; and “... without the consent of this illustrious body, no law can be enacted, repealed, or altered; and these have the decision of all our possessions without appeal” (p. 232-233).

The author’s main discomfort lies in the difficulty with which he communicates the nature of evil to creatures who cannot really understand evil and have no word in their language to designate a lie. Beyond moral, ethical or even psychological explanations, this may be Swift’s way of saying that evil has such huge power in our world that it is almost uncommunicable. In these instances, the author disposes of the ironic veil in which he covered every account of his own race and the society it created. The author’s voice is almost cold and resigned to a situation that cannot be improved. Moreover, he no longer wants to leave the island where he has found the truth about his identity. His condition has changed as well; the author-narrator is now a humble creature, very much aware of his *animal* status, looking at Yahoos as his own race. This shift in attitude is paralleled by a shift in language towards perceiving humans as animals, in contrast to the other books where animals were fully controlled by humans.

We should not, however, be carried away by this attitude, as irony is embedded in the meaning of the story itself. As more recent research has pointed out, in his ironic approach Swift brings to the surface *the paradox of*

a critique of reason as the Houyhnhnms “have no writing, no medium that allows for interpretation; indeed, they regard reason as pure, immaterial and incapable of error, difference, alteration or corruption. Reason is not a power to question; it is a rectitude that has lost all need of inquiry” (Clairebrook, 2004: 80-81). The excess of reason is something that the previous books have anticipated, especially the *Voyage to Laputa*, which voices acute criticism towards science without limits, towards understanding science as a solution to all problems. It is in fact criticism against the lack of common sense.

In the last voyage, however, the author himself is under the tyranny of pure reason, a tyranny which he accepts and embraces without any shadow of a doubt. “Swift presents an image of a reason that has taken itself as a law. The narration of *Gulliver’s Travels* implies, ironically, that the all too reasonable Houyhnhnms are far from rational” (Clairebrook, 2004: 80). In other words, Swift uses reason not merely as a mechanism through which irrationality is criticized, but as a means of criticizing itself; in the final stages of the book the same *reason* that he had been praising throughout separates the author from his ideal world. At the end of his travels, we find an author who is unable to settle in either world: he can no longer accept the human society and he is evicted from the rational horses’ land against his will.

Authorial intent is disclosed in the famous passage in Chapter XII of the last book where the reader is finally told the truth about this apparently authentic account “Thus, gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years and above seven months; ... I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; *because my principal design was to inform, and not to amuse thee*” (p. 261). Here, as well as in the following passages, the reader is offered the experience of interlaced authorial voices. The whole chapter reveals the masterful design of a many-level authorial identity: we believe we can hear both Gulliver in his various hypostases, including the status of an isolated human being (“I am not altogether out of hopes in some time to suffer a neighbour Yahoo in my company” p. 266), and Swift himself shooting arrows at various human enterprises of his age: travel books, discoveries of new worlds and the way the empire manages its colonies. The ending of the book, while being an echo of its beginning, expresses the assumed ambiguity of voice that has both guided the reader in the intricate universe of this book and created confusion and perplexity in understanding the ultimate meaning.

3. Conclusions

This paper has looked at several instances of authorial voice in Swift's most popular book, *Gulliver's Travels*. This aspect could be further explored, as I believe it shows how resourceful Swift's use of narrative perspective is, in spite of his classic constitution as a writer. It is perhaps his way of saying how relative everything is about human nature. The relationship with the reader has been emphasized since, in spite of one author who guides us through unknown worlds, the multiplicity of voices and literary perspectives conveys the fact that the human status is never firm or safe. Swift's persistent criticism of institutions deprives readers from enjoying the comfort of a stable system of values and a cohesive world view. Moreover, there is a constant fear in the book originating in the exposure to foreign worlds, which enhances the feeling of relativism. The fear propagated by the author's voice arises during encounters with small or huge human beings or with a different species altogether.

Although there is obvious reference to the English and French societies of his age, portrayed mainly in the voyages to Lilliput and Laputa, throughout the book, the local topics are always connected to the topics of general human nature; " ... what is under scrutiny is not any particular society or group of societies, but all societies, and indeed the radical character of the human animal itself, independently of race, sex or geographical habitat" (Rawson, 2012: 2).

Irony is so powerful that we can often see Swift's personality emerging from behind the character-narrator. However, as readers, we never seem to reach an ultimate point of view that would enable us to claim we have understood Swift's commitment to a firm belief. The horses' land is an illusion of an ideal society and Swift plays here a very dangerous authorship game; he may have had the reader (temporarily) on his side in the first three books, but it is very difficult for the common reader to be in agreement with his fictional projection in Houyhnhnm-land. Ironic scaffolding can be seen at all levels: language, situations, change of perspective and entire book construction. It permeates all pages, in all its varieties, down to the very last words of the last chapter. Ultimately, the overall ironic perspective of the story shows its narrator as the final object of his satire.

However, what makes the book unique is that in spite of the obvious references to the society he lived in (Britain, Ireland and Europe in

general), Swift manages to create a vision of the human nature that transcends the frontiers of his own age. The ironic perspective is embedded in the vision of this book which brought humanity both an outside mirror and an inner, struggling impulse to discover itself in the long, unfinished quest of the self.

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