Swift and Orwell: Utopia as Nightmare

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Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters 15.3 (1985): p189-210. Rpt. in

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 [(essay date 1985) *In the following essay, Mezciems compares the utopian fiction of Jonathan Swift and George Orwell.*]

It seems appropriate that, at a Utopian conference in 1984, one should think of Swift in relation to this significant date and with substantial reference to Orwell's view of *Gulliver's Travels* as well as to his own dystopian fictions. Utopian fictions (to give definitional priority to the positive side of the genre), being essentially timeless and placeless, cannot be considered only in terms of the time at which they were written, or of particular local circumstances in the real world. They have a habit of breaking down tidy period divisions and neat chronological ordering. The year 1984 will pass; indeed it was pointed out several years ago by some expert on our calendar that we are some six years adrift in our calculations, so that here we all are in 1990.1 With the suspense gone, and also the pressure to pass or fail Orwell's novel according to how accurately it predicted the way we now live, we may set about the serious task of placing it in the broader utopian literary tradition.

*Gulliver's Travels* is a long-established utopian text in its own right, but it is also one of direct importance to Orwell. Eric Blair, as he then was, read *Gulliver's Travels* at the impressionable age of eight--or, rather, just before: I first warmed to him as a human being on reading that he had stolen the hidden birthday present from his mother to read surreptitiously in advance. If he then felt guilty at the difficulty of pretending sufficient surprise on the day, the occasion perhaps provided an appropriate foundation for the guilt he so regularly expressed in his own writings. In 1946, between publishing ***Animal Farm*** and writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* Orwell wrote his essay "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*", and there he lists Swift's book among the six which he would preserve if all others were to be destroyed (*CEJL,* IV, 257).2 The conditions themselves sound suitably Swiftian, and the selectivity is reminiscent of Gulliver's (or Swift's) reduction, to the same number, of those "heroes" who deserve the name throughout history: "*Brutus* ... his Ancestor *Junius, Socrates, Epaminondas, Cato* the Younger, Sir *Thomas More* ... A *Sextumvirate* to which all the Ages of the World cannot add a Seventh" (p. 196).3

My comparisons between Swift and Orwell, however, must go beyond the obvious relationships between the best-known fictions of each. For both, the creation of a utopia or dystopia was a climactic achievement in a lifetime of political writing, and the form chosen may be seen as one way of putting into literary perspective the urgent concerns of each with the conditions of his own time. Rival prognosticators can no longer limit our attention to the merits or demerits of Orwell's last book as any kind of specific prophecy,4 and while our fears for the future are more about whether there is to be one than about what form it may take, we are likely to think of our own time as not post-utopian but post-*dy*stopian.5 Among all the other posts we are passing is this year: 1984, like 1948, will be lost to us as a period of particular impact, but using a date for his title was a clever choice on Orwell's part, and showed that he knew the rules of the utopian/dystopian game. Just as distance in space was once essential to the positive utopia, so the date of a dystopia had to press hard and close on readers urged to avoid its seeming inevitability. Hence the usefulness of such teasing ambiguities as Thomas More's punning on the good place being noplace, of Butler's Erewhon being Nowhere spelt backwards: the fact that Nowhere, without any reordering tricks, is also Now Here, might almost serve as a mnemonic for definitions of the genre.

But since time passes, and we must look at the relationships between ephemeral and permanent features, we can, as "post-realists", stand back from the *form* of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a novel, to adjust the perspective in which it stands alongside the slighter but equally powerful text of ***Animal Farm,*** which uses the ancient form of the fable and gives an interesting twist to a theriophilic tradition reaching back through Swift's Houyhnhnms to Erasmus, and further back to Plutarch and to Cynic and even Stoic philosophies.6 The animal fable, as both Orwell and Swift used it, simplifies and universalizes at the same time, to make a statement that cannot be confined to one series of events or set of particular circumstances. ***Animal Farm*** is a warning, if you like, just as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, as well as a fictionalized account of actual happenings, but it is also, like *Gulliver's Travels,* a description in narrative form of natural and social forces perennially interacting in an imperfect human world, its central concern being not only with Party but with the old civic morality and its expression in government.

While we rescue *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from temporal limitations, *Gulliver's Travels,* too, is enjoying the insistence of critics on its wider scope. A recent book by F. P. Lock, *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), is one that urges universality of application for the seemingly most local of satiric attacks. He cites, for example, that passage in the "Voyage to Lilliput" (p. 39) where "the Emperor lays on a Table three fine silken Threads of six Inches long. One is Blue, the other Red, and the third Green. These Threads are proposed as Prizes, for those Persons whom the Emperor hath a mind to distinguish". Obligatory footnote references usually gloss this allusion to the Orders of the Garter, the Bath, and the Thistle, and, as Lock puts it, "most readers ... would ... be surprised to learn that [in the first edition of 1726 these were coloured] purple, yellow, and white". He then offers the suggestion that, far from being motivated by fear of censure, the purple, yellow, and white were chosen for the universally symbolic values of silver, gold, and imperial purple, and that blue, red, and green were introduced in later editions to sharpen and update the satire with topical allusions to Walpole's exercise of patronage (pp. 79-80).

Lock is speculating, but in doing so he is looking for a broader relevance of the kind not only Swift but also Orwell may claim in the utopian tradition. The impulse seems ahistorical, which lifts concepts out of the temporal confines to which a choice of words (or even literary forms) may confine them, when the "real" values of those words have been corrupted by the world's usage. There is significance in the number of worldly things for which Swift's Houyhnhnms have no words (their language has an innocent perfection which Orwell's Newspeak aims to pervert), but the model for this particular utopian concern with language is, I think, in Thomas More's ironic dismissal of Hythlodaye's Utopia, of a communism that "utterly overthrows all the nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty which are, in the estimation of the common people, the true glories and ornaments of the commonwealth" (p. 245).7 With "nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty", More puts emphasis on concepts which have in European life, never mind "the estimation of the common people", been sullied by local practice but *could* be restored and purified and given the original and timeless meanings of *nobilitas, magnificentia, splendor, maiestas: Utopia* was not written in the vernacular.

The same sense of perspective can be applied to literary forms. ***Animal Farm*** and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* it is suggested, were intended as two parts of a trilogy, which would show life before, during, and after a particular kind of revolution.8 The fable sandwiched in the centre breaks up the consistency of form we might expect from a series of novels, but not the expectations we have of works in the utopian tradition, where the useful term Menippean satire enables us to bridge gaps not only between Orwell's separate late fantasies but between Books I and II of *Utopia,* and as one way of accounting for disunities between the four books of *Gulliver's Travels.* It then does not matter that Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has what may already be seen as the outmoded "novel" form, with its limiting representation of ordered reality. That form may eventually be looked at as a concession to, and comment on, the time for which it was written, just as *Gulliver's Travels* exploited a prevailing fashion for traveller's tales, or Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* make use of a popular vernacular tradition of anonymous "Chronicles". The juxtaposition of ancient with modern forms forces us to become conscious of the relationships of literature to life, learned to popular culture, written to oral modes of transmission, and is, I believe, indicative of an author's claim on tradition for the permanence and universality of his values.

I have already mentioned the centrality of *moral* philosophy in the politics of the great utopists. For Swift this is a crucial element in the battle between Ancients and Moderns, Homer versus the Royal Society. I want to highlight the part played by the animal fable in the fictions of Orwell and Swift because both seem uneasy with man's dependence on that reasoning faculty which should make Utopia so easy to realize and which instead appears to bring about dystopia. The theriophilic fable undermines the basic distinction men like to make between themselves and the beasts, either by suggesting identifications, and thus equality (as in Aesop's fables) or by making animals superior to men.9 A Renaissance *locus classicus* is the adage which Erasmus might almost have written expressly to place alongside Pico's "De dignitate hominis", reminding us as he does that "dog does not eat dog, fierce lions do not fight each other, there is peace between snake and snake, venomous creatures agree together", but men "use instruments invented against nature by the art of demons, to arm men for the destruction of men".10 In one of his most striking essays, "Shooting an Elephant", Orwell works hard to discover in his human self the fellow-*feeling* (not reason) that enables him to register the nobility of the falling elephant, and it is a *dog* that shows him the humanity of a prisoner about to be executed in "A Hanging". No one should be surprised that the discomfort we feel on getting to know certain domestic details of Houyhnhnm life in *Gulliver's Travels* (their threading needles, or riding on sledges for long journeys) is due to the fact that these creatures are neither men nor horses, as we recognize each with our Lockean faculties. Orwell brings us back to Aesop's humbling simplifications, when men and pigs become indistinguishable at the end of ***Animal Farm.*** The rat that is Winston Smith's undoing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a creature I shall return to: the creature of the sewer that, with Swiftian recognition of heights meeting depths, Orwell chose as the ultimate inhuman weapon of the Party's political science, when words had failed to persuade and convert.

When I offered the title "Utopia as Nightmare" I meant to suggest a paradox, for it is of course the *dys*topia that is the nightmare in Orwell, presented, as is generally the rule, as a positive utopia by those in the fiction who take pride in its realization. It is easy enough to discover dystopia behind the initial attractions of Swift's Lilliput, less easy to appreciate that the grossness of life in Brobdingnag, a mirror which distorts only the superficies of human life, may offer some sober recommendations after humbling our vanity. But the Houyhnhnms, whether or not one believes as I do that Swift offers their principles seriously as a model for humanity, are both utopian and nightmarish. They are classically utopian in the strict forms of Spartan conduct that Swift took from Plato, with Stoic embellishments.11 Their lifestyle denies most of the human values we treasure. They are nightmarish (to us) in their deviation from the natural, from a nature that we know has room for both the innocent brutish strength of the horse and the perverse passions of feeble man: above all in their usurpation of our precious capacity for reason.

Swift, calling man *rationis capax* instead of rational, aimed to vex rather than divert the world, but he, like Orwell, has been variously misunderstood. Partly he meant to mislead of course--to have his fiction taken for real, to shock all the more for being amusing, to anger those in power by making accusations which were not quite actionable. Both Swift and Orwell have been seen as traitors to their own parties, advocates for the wrong side. But this is *because* they may be read too narrowly, with application to local and specific temporal allegiances: Orwell was certainly a Socialist; Swift was variously a Whig and a Tory. But then, Thomas More was some kind of communist. The labels are too small, and therefore open to contradiction. Raymond Williams aptly describes Orwell's attachment to England, for example, as a "conscious affiliation" rather than "membership" of a society (*Orwell,* pp. 16-17). Swift and Orwell experienced colonial rule in opposite situations, but some of Swift's local espousals might similarly be called "conscious affiliations", principled but pragmatic, necessary but lacking the freedom of the Erasmian spirit he might have preferred to imitate. Texts *about* propaganda are easily adopted and misunderstood *as* propaganda, in a narrower and thus misleading interpretation of what the author may have thought he intended, let alone what he believed.

Some sympathies and similarities between Orwell and Swift have all along been generally recognized, and my concern here is to investigate differences in spirit, which interestingly are most striking where the two writers seem superficially most close. Bernard Crick, in his introduction to the new Oxford edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* refreshingly absolves Orwell from blame for inaccuracies in his picture of the world we have experienced in 1984. The reorientation Crick presents concentrates on Orwell's intentions, and emphasizes the connection with Swift. *Nineteen-Eighty Four,* Crick says, is "specifically 'Swiftian satire'". "Many of the features of Oceania", he goes on, are "wickedly comic" Even the scenes in Room 101 are "not uncomic" (the litotes suggests some awareness that his reading may be a provocative one), and when "smell and oppression, as well as dirt, are once more linked", "all this is farce". The end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Professor Crick sees as "comic, grotesque", centring on the phrase "two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose" to describe the emotional force of Winston's final submission to Big Brother, and pointing to the textual significance of the words "The End" as echoing the winding-up of a Hollywood B-movie at the close of the narrative.12 A new bit of significance perhaps creeps in at this stage in Crick's edition, for there the words "The End" are accompanied prominently by the superscript number "102", which, though presumably merely a footnote reference, accidentally opens up a whole new dimension for speculating that Winston's struggle with the Party may not, after all, be over.

The reader who comes to Orwell from Swift is unlikely to find the smells and squalor and oppression funny in either writer; and Orwell lacked the "savage indignation" which makes a certain *kind* of comedy possible in Swift. Orwell, for that matter, did not seem to find *Gulliver's Travels* funny when he wrote about it in 1946. He calls it "a rancorous as well as a pessimistic book" and describes "the inter-connexion between Swift's political loyalties and his ultimate despair" as "one of [its] most interesting features". He then goes on to puzzle over what it is that makes the book enjoyable (*CEJL,* IV, 243, 257-58). He is right about the pessimism, and my argument is, first, that though the pessimism of Orwell's own dystopia is apparent, there is a world of difference between presenting a dystopia on the assumption that it can be avoided, and offering a *u*topia (that of the Houyhnhms) from which man is by nature excluded; secondly, that if Orwell is like Swift, then the affinity is to be found more at an unconscious than at a conscious level.

Orwell allows that "Swift was an admirable writer of comic verse"; he also recognizes that Gulliver is "ridiculous" and "silly" at times, and that (presumably like Winston Smith, given that both protagonists are provided with names to express their social status and values), he represents the average Englishman of his time: "bold, practical and unromantic, his homely outlook skilfully impressed on the reader" (*CEJL,* IV, 256, 242, 241). It is important to the effect of both narratives that the reader should be obliged to identify with the "hero", not just initially but to the end of each work, but if Gulliver is eventually ridiculous (particularly in neighing and trotting like a horse on his return home), an element of humour is available only through the reader's determination to separate himself from Gulliver (not entirely what Swift intended). Winston Smith's "two gin-scented tears" may also be ridiculous, but he remains a steadily sympathetic character, a victim of social circumstances, not culpably perverse by nature, and I doubt whether laughing at him would serve Orwell's purpose. As for Swift, we have it on good authority that he *could* "laugh and shake in Rab'lais' easy chair", but Pope's words (*Dunciad,* I. 22) do not necessarily refer to *Gulliver's Travels.* Moreover, Pope admitted that he did not understand Rabelais at all, and Swift told him that he did not always understand Swift.13

Rather than reiterate accounts of those features which make Swift's clean, rational, passionless Houyhnhnm utopia so unattractive to most readers, its lifestyle reminiscent not only of ancient Sparta but of the rigours of English public-school life (so often rendered as a nightmare experience), I will summarize very briefly a few salient points. What is most fully realized in Houyhnhnmland is glimpsed earlier on, in the three previous Voyages, as something lost, forgotten, or disregarded by most men. The faint "otherworldliness" of the good life is made more striking by the fact that it tends to be presented not so much as Gulliver's own experience but at second hand: in discussions reminiscent of Socratic debate (for example in audience with the King of Brobdingnag) or in surveying the history of the land he visits. This usually happens somewhere near the centre of each Voyage, or, more accurately, at the deepest point of discoveries before leaving a country (in Book III there is an actual visit to the underworld), all of which may remind us of classical and even epic procedures.

It is, Gulliver reminds us, only in their "original Institutions", not their current corrupt application, that the Lilliputians "have more Regard to good Morals than to great Abilities" in government, and "suppose Truth, Justice, Temperance, and the Like, to be in every Man's Power" (pp. 60,59). Crimes against the State are (were) severely punished, but good men are honoured. The Lilliputians believe in divine Providence. Their children are removed from their families to be educated by the State, and parents may occasionally visit but not fondle their offspring. Training is modified according to class and gender, but breeding, as distinct from nurture, is not strictly controlled as in Houyhnhnmland, or More's Utopia, or in Plato's Republic. From the King of Brobdingnag we learn more about ourselves, as Gulliver takes his turn at giving an account of our own customs, our degenerate aristocracy, our warring religious and political factions, our invention of gunpowder as a triumph of civilization. The King's values are those of "common Sense and Reason", "Justice and Lenity", and he believes that "whoever could make two Ears of Corn, or two Blades of Grass to grow upon a Spot of Ground where only one grew before; would deserve better of Mankind ... than the whole Race of Politicians put together". The Brobdingnagians have no standing army, no colonizing ambitions, their learning is limited (in that they have need of few books), and they write simply and economically in a "clear, masculine, and smooth" style (pp. 135-37). (The Houyhnhnms have of course no written literature, though they excel in poetry on "exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence, or the Praises of those who were Victors in Races, and other bodily Exercises" (p. 274).

Book III is the most thoroughly dystopian, in that it presents a fragmented society (morally, physically, geographically, and institutionally disorientated) which is seen by its privileged classes, and by Gulliver at salient points, as utopian. Only one character, Lord Munodi, in his would-be Horatian retreat to a country estate, is admirable: out of favour at court, perhaps suggestive both of Sir William Temple and the Earl of Oxford, he cultivates his land and cares for his tenants in the old way, but is vulnerable to the imposition of disastrous new methods in estate management. The Houyhnhnms, whose Spartan and Stoic features are too well known to need description here, are of course most striking in their relationships with their subject race of Yahoos: troublesome creatures mainly because Gulliver identifies himself (and therefore the reader) as one of them. One way in which Houyhnhnmland is nightmarishly utopian is in its presentation of the passions, which, like the imagination that includes Swift's own fantasy, are governed by reason: not human reason but Houyhnhnm reason. Gulliver is allowed by Swift to come home, but only to confirm that passionate unreason can indeed not be eradicated in humanity. His return to the cave, or the stable, shows him devoid of the qualities Socrates, and Thomas More, envisaged in the hypothetical figure of the philosopher. The Houyhnhnms would leniently have castrated him, their reason allowing something mercifully short of extermination, hinting even at scope for improvement.

I am on the side of those who believe Swift seriously admired Houyhnhnm values, to their last degree of severity. The other nightmare quality, at the climax of Gulliver's (or the reader's) educative adventures, is the way he must be expelled from his utopia, however creditably he has performed to show himself superior to other Yahoos. I believe we are not meant to laugh at his wish to be a Houyhnhnm and if we find him ridiculous when he tries to be a horse, back home, we risk a lot by dissociating ourselves not only from his practices but from his desires as well. We make distinctions too easily, while Gulliver does not make them easily enough.

Orwell and Swift plainly hated and feared extremism, but Orwell saw that Swift's utopia was itself extremist: a totalitarian state in which the Yahoos, he notes, are treated like Jews in Nazi Germany. Swift might argue that the whole point of *Gulliver's Travels* is that the extremism of Houyhnhnmland is not for man; that man cannot handle the absolutism of a virtue which is pure reason since human reason is perverted by passion. Orwell proves the point with his invention of Newspeak: the society of Oceania, like that of Houyhnhnmland, has simplified language to a level at which there *can* be no ambiguity of meaning, and *should* be no variety of experience. "Neither is *Reason* among them a Point problematical as with us, when Men can argue with Plausibility on both sides of a Question; but strikes you with immediate Conviction", as Gulliver says of the Houyhnhnms (p. 267). For Swift the enemy is not unity of opinion but open disagreement.

There are awkwardnesses in Orwell's illustrations of non-reason disguised as reason, however. "2 + 2 = 5" does not strike Winston Smith with immediate conviction. The sum is an innocent abstraction abused for the sake of power which is craved and exercised with passion, but the "common sense" opinion that 2 + 2 = 4 is also an abstraction. Winston's real appeal is to the individual reader's experience, and it might be more interesting if some men thought that 2 + 2 = 3. It is not reason but lack of imagination that disables the innocent Houyhnhnms from believing that Gulliver travelled across the sea in a boat. Swift's reader, laughing at their naivety, draws on a fund of human knowledge, which is not always the same as wisdom, and there are circumstances in which Swift *would* ask us to accept that 2 + 2 = 5. Orwell described him as a "Tory anarchist" (*CEJL,* IV, 253), and probably recognized that the term allows some breadth and variety of reference.

The real difference between the two, and between the effects of their powerful fictions, is that Orwell had faith in human nature, which he achieved by dint of taking on himself certain kinds of expiatory guilt; whereas Swift had no such faith and projected guilt on to his fellow men as punishment for the fact that he was one of them. This is why Orwell's dystopia is in fact optimistic, if not comic, and Swift's utopia is pessimistic. One of Swift's more notorious statements, in a letter to Pope, was "principally I hate and detest that animal called man", as he prepared to launch *Gulliver's Travels* in a mood of defeatist irony that it would "wonderfully mend the World" (*Correspondence,* III, 103, 87). Orwell, believing in progress, and in revolution if unavoidable, recognized the basic dilemmas which separate the methods of the Romantic utopist from the Classical utopist: "The one, how can you improve human nature until you have changed the system? The other, what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature?" (*CEJL,* I, 469). His outlook is clear in the application of "change" to "system" and "improve" to "human nature", and his use of "until and "before" instead of "unless".

Swift's orthodox Christian pessimism *was* extreme: man is wilfully depraved, using his reason only to perverse ends (Gulliver's excuses for travelling are vain, worldly, scientifically curious, and socially irresponsible, and the outcome is total disorientation). Man is seen as corrupt when in power, ignorant, lazy, and dirty when poor, full of proud self-delusions that guarantee an interdependence between fool and knave, the gullible and the dishonest. Swift's realistic aim might be that men could be protected from their worst excesses by being forced to live with an appearance of tolerable civility within a decent orthodox institutional framework. This is not to say that Swift had no ideals, only that his ideals were too radical for human application, and his conservatism was *all* application, shallower than any creed--so Orwell's phrase "Tory anarchist" may be about right.

Orwell, forgiving *us,* is able eventually to forgive himself. He thought Swift sick and diseased in mind. "The most essential thing in Swift", he says, "is his inability to believe that life--ordinary life on the solid earth, and not some rationalized, deodorised version of it--could be made worth living" (*CEJL,* IV, 253). The protest, like some of Orwell's comforting (and nowadays embarrassing) beliefs about the English (for example in "England your England"), suggests a degree of romantic self-delusion which Swift would have dealt with savagely. "Part of our minds", says Orwell, "--In any normal person it is the dominant part--believes that man is a noble animal". He talks of Swift's "endless harping on disease, dirt and deformity", expanding repeatedly, and with gratuitous inventions of his own, on the kind of thing he means. "Something in us", he claims, though with a comforting generality,x18 "responds to [Swift's pessimism] as it responds to the gloomy words of the burial service or the sweetish smell of corpses in a country church" (*CEJL,* IV, 259, 260).

Orwell's own poking about in the hovels of the poor, his obsessively detailed recording of stinks and other human unpleasantnesses (but especially stinks) is mostly justified in *The Road to Wigan Pier* by its propagandist aim against social inequality and in his evident assumption that a general decency of spirit will come to light if given material decency of circumstance. The insanitary rooms and smelly drains around which Orwell seems to linger are, I think, never satirically presented, in the manner of Swift's poem (which Orwell cites) "The Lady's Dressing Room", where Strephon has his illusions shattered about art and nature in woman:

But oh! it turn'd poor *Strephon*'s Bowels,

When he beheld and smelt the Towels,

Begumm'd, bematter'd, and beslim'd

With Dirt, and Sweat, and Ear-Wax grim'd ...

Nor be the Handkerchiefs forgot

All varnish'd o'er with Snuff and Snot.

(11. 43, 48)14

Swift puts the fascination and the shock equally far from himself through the mediations of both a character (Strephon) and a moralizing narrator, but Orwell's habit is to grasp these emotions to himself. His sense of guilt is at being clean, not at the rest of humanity being dirty. He evidently never recovered from the trauma of being told as a boy that the poor smelt, and privilege seemed to be a cross he continued to bear, with self-inflicted punishments reminiscent of Thomas More's famous hairshirt: "It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist", he remarks of slum dwellings in *The Road to Wigan Pier,* but it is rather as though he undertakes this duty on our behalf, protecting us where Swift would expose us.15

If we grant that both men, in their writings, were in some sense idealists (as one might expect a utopist or dystopist to be), we may suspect that the idealism at its deepest was a private affair. In Swift's case it is not just that, as a satirist, he conventionally leaves positive views to be taken for granted, but that he deals with the world in manageable fragments through a range of personae each of which can contain one particular issue at a time. He is rarely the authority speaking for all men, but by turns the mad, wordy prose hack of *A Tale of a Tub;* the hoaxter gossip Isaac Bickerstaff; the commonsense materialist who argued for all the wrong reasons "Against Abolishing Christianity"; the solid Dublin Drapier defending the rights of a nation he disliked being a member of; the Modest Proposer whose cold logic reveals the distress Swift felt for that same nation's inhabitants. The partiality is usually eccentric and provocative, so that it is we, the rest of society, that must unite in common sense to resist. Gulliver is the obvious exception in so far as he is Everyman--but then that is even more of a shock, requiring efforts of dissociation which leave the reader asking "what must I do to be human?".

Orwell, on the other hand, makes himself a kind of universal social conscience, putting aside, as Swift does, his own private identity, though in favour not of a multiplicity of occasional voices but of the one figure, George Orwell, whose name of course has the stability of a refuge--if not pastoral then certainly bucolic; of the land, specifically of England. Orwell, running away from the stigmas of Eton and imperialist officialdom in Burma, tried hard to be a tramp, one of the faceless proles that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may eventually rise in revolt but have meanwhile the saving grace of being irresponsible. In a totalitarian dystopia they are city slum dwellers, though the woman hanging out washing, and even the unattractive and corrupted Parsons, have a physique suggestive of rural peasant origins in a happier world, the Golden Country.

Orwell's attempts at anonymity, or at belonging unobtrusively to the mass in order to speak or even fight for it, are not entirely successful, though the regular expression of a sense of superiority, when not unconscious, shows that he is aiming at those who need converting, hardly the proles themselves. There are, however, moments when he sounds comfortingly snobbish, as when Winston Smith observes Parsons making up his notebook in "the neat handwriting of the illiterate" (p. 205). More deliberate, in its self-mocking honesty, is the class-directed moralizing of "Down the Mine": "In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an intellectual and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior" (*The Road to Wigan Pier,* p. 31).16 There is even a hint of that theriophilic strain I mentioned earlier, in Orwell's description of the miners' "most noble bodies": they have "wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs" (p. 21), sounding not unlike Blake's "Tiger, tiger, burning bright / In the forests of the night", an awesome conjunction of the divine and the infernal.17

But Orwell, taking us on a conducted tour, doing the thinking and, more importantly, the feeling, for us may no more be Eric Blair (though I am not suggesting deception or dishonesty) than Swift is the Modest Proposer, whose description of the Irish poor moves along at so brisk a rate as to leave no space for the feelings we must find for ourselves, in order to protest at the inadequacy of his emotions: "It is a melancholy Object to those, who walk through this great Town" is his opening response to "*the present deplorable State of the Kingdom*", in which the "prodigious Number of Children" is a "very great additional Grievance", though the old are no problem, who "are every Day *dying,* and *rotting,* by *Cold* and *Famine,* and *Filth,* and *Vermin,* as fast as can be reasonably expected" (*Works,* XII, 109, 114).

It was as the Drapier, stirring up resistance to the imposition on the Irish of one of Walpole's shadier fiscal schemes (or so it seemed to them), that Swift became a public hero. Orwell, a less provocative, and less isolated, fighter for less local causes, seems to have indulged in heroic acts of a more private kind. At an Orwell conference in Birmingham early in 1984, a surprise guest was Douglas Moyle, a retired (and retiring) veteran of the Spanish Civil War whom Orwell mentions several times as a comrade alongside him during incidents he records in *Homage to Catalonia.* Mr Moyle's own anecdotes (which had not been available to Orwell's biographers) included lively memories of Orwell's personal courage and highly individualistic leadership. He instigated night patrols to reconnoitre enemy positions, and on one occasion asked Mr Moyle to accompany him so far, then to wait (as an observer, or witness, perhaps) as he went on alone. Mr Moyle recalled being terrified on his own account, let alone Blair's, since it was a night of brilliant moonlight which made every detail of the landscape clearly visible--though Blair would not have it that they, too, could be seen. In the book, Orwell underplays his personal leadership, mentioning merely that "at night small patrols *used to be sent* into no man's land to lie in ditches near the Fascist lines", etc. (my italics).18

Swift had no occasion to flirt with death is such a manner. Instead he is often censured, as Orwell is not, for seeking out dirt, disease, and depravity and rubbing the reader's nose in all three. It may be natural enough that his houyhnhnm utopia is a cleaner place than Orwell's dystopian London (except for the messes made by the Yahoos), but Swift's real world of Dublin was almost certainly more depressing, and without the same prospects for renovation, than Orwell's London in 1948. In a recent study Carole Fabricant supplies documentary evidence of conditions in Dublin at the time that make Swift's responses to life about him seem not especially perverse.19 To be Dean of St Patrick's was not a privileged situation to a man who had once had hopes of preferment in England, on Orwell's side of the colonial fence. London's streets might flow copiously, in 1710, as

Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood,

Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud,

Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood,

("A Description of a City Shower", *Poems,* I, 139)

but Dublin struck people used to ordinary eighteenth-century city filth elsewhere as particularly appalling. St Patrick's was in the oldest and poorest part of the city, among the Liberties, an area exempt from the city jurisdiction.20 A survey later in the century reported that, as Carole Fabricant quotes (pp. 27-28):

The streets ... are generally narrow, the houses crowded together; the rears or back-yards of very small extent, and some without any accommodation of any kind. ... I have frequently surprised from ten to sixteen persons, of all ages and sexes, in a room not 15 feet square, stretched on a wad of filthy straw, swarming with vermin and without any covering, save the wretched rags that constituted their wearing apparel. ... This crowded population wherever it obtains is almost universally accompanied by a very serious evil--a degree of filth and stench inconceivable except by such as have visited these scenes of wretchedness.

This could easily be a passage from *The Road to Wigan Pier;* the scandal for the twentieth century is that the reports should be so similar. But Orwell had to go and look for squalor, sometimes offending his northern hosts by finding it, as Crick reports in his biography (pp. 281-82), whereas for Swift it was all on his own doorstep: closer, in fact, for his cathedral, built on very low ground, was periodically flooded to a depth of some seven feet. Such floods were not, of course, made up of clean water, in a district where, as Carole Fabricant reminds us (pp. 29-30), ordure was simply thrown out of the windows, or deposited directly in the street by its human donors, in the manner, but more offensive in matter, of Gulliver's admired Houyhnhnms.

With his eye firmly on the world as it is, since its improvements seem largely cosmetic, Swift's ideal of civilization might have been relatively available in London, were it not for other kinds of corruption in spheres less physical. To leave the court for a cultivated Horatian retreat, in the style of Sir William Temple (of course in *England*), and locate a pastoral or even a Tory landowner's utopia in some country estate, was a model sharply in contrast to the reality of Swift's own exile in an unhospitable Irish environment where (again according to Carole Fabricant's description of the typical Irish "cabin") his own house was a poor thing he had largely to build for himself, and his church or churches were in ruins. W. B. Yeats, who admired Swift's spirit and elitist values, and who was himself an "Ancient", (with a nostalgia for Swift's own time, at that), regretted the "high horse riderless, / Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode". Sharing Swift's ambivalent feelings about his fellow Irishmen, he was nevertheless, as he claimed, one of "the last Romantics" as Swift was not (even in poetry), and could make much, in verse, of custom and ceremony while a protégé of the Gregorys. Swift's familiarity with great houses showed him only an aristocracy hardly worthy of the name, for he saw them as absentee landlords or as frivolous incumbents, with none of the traditional virtues of the outcast Lord Munodi in Gulliver's third voyage--their lands resembling more closely the Balnibarbian norm: "I never knew a Soil so unhappily cultivated, Houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a People whose Countenances and Habit expressed so much Misery and Want" (p. 175). Swift's "Market-Hill" poems best express his unillusioned irreverence towards his social superiors the Achesons, whose hospitality is described in thoroughly un Yeatsian fashion, and to whom the guest could best pay tribute by building a privy in their grounds, as though to teach them better manners.21

Orwell did find sources of trust and hope in nature, human and other. His adopted name asserts it, as does his choice of "Animal Farm" for the location of a utopian experiment; his period as contented rural shopkeeper and allotment-gardener confirms it; his final retreat to Jura stretches it to the limit. Even there, though making much of the complicated journey in a letter of travel itineraries to Sonia, he characteristically refers to daffodils planted, hoping for "quite a nice garden" next year--and Bernard Crick reminds us that the climate in those parts is quite mild.22 It is as though Orwell chose for himself, however, the utopian Spartan existence that Gulliver recommends, but privately, not with any zeal to impose it on society at large. His was self-consciously a working man's idyll, though one cannot imagine many real "working men" sharing his ideal. By contrast, Winston Smith's "Golden Country" seems classically pastoral, a recurring dream, a nostalgia for something he cannot be sure was ever real, until it materializes in the woodland scene with Julia at the novel's centre to sharpen our sense of treachery before and after, But the strength (more than hope) which Winston finds immanent in the proles could give rise to Gulliver's dream of Houyhnhnm aggression. "They needed only to rise and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies", says Winston (p. 216), and Gulliver asks us to "imagine twenty Thousand [Houyhnhnms] breaking into the Midst of an *European* Army, confounding the Ranks, overturning the Carriages, battering the Warriors Faces into Mummy, by terrible Yerks from their hinder Hoofs" (p. 293).

The animal association brings fear, as well as hope, most strikingly in the rat (which was not only Winston's undoing but Orwell's own pet phobia: "If there is one thing I hate more than another", he confessed in *Homage to Catalonia,* "it is a rat running over me in the darkness" (p. 81), as "the filthy brutes came swarming out of the ground on every side"). Orwell's socialism obliges him to envisage a classless utopia in ***Animal Farm,*** but there are barriers to overcome. The animals are presented in a natural hierarchy, and their attempts to change it are not entirely convincing. "'Comrades, [asks Major] ... the wild creatures, such as rats and rabbits--are they our friends or our enemies? Let us put it to the vote. ... Are rats comrades?' The vote was taken at once, and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that rats were comrades".23 This has about it an elementof 2 + 2 = 5, and is also reminiscent of the unashamed squeamishness with which the creatures of the Wild Wood are treated in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows.* Raymond Williams notices "the speed of [Orwell's] figurative transition from animals to the proletariat ... showing as it does a residue of thinking of the poor as animals: powerful but stupid" (*Orwell,* pp. 71-72). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the proles are in fact reassuring in their passivity, lacking the noble violence inherent in the horse, and the treachery of the rat: "Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern" (p. 217).

Hope, on the other hand, seems captured in the washerwoman's singing, her words ironically those of a mechanically-composed song, on the theme of "it was only an 'opeless fancy"--but life-renewing (she has "powerful mare-like buttocks") regardless of the words: "though it might be a thousand years, they would stay alive against all the odds, like birds, passing on from body to body the vitality which the Party did not share and could not kill", Winston thinks, a moment before Charrington's treachery is revealed (p. 348). He is remembering the thrush in the wood:

A thrush had alighted on a bough not five metres away. ... It ... began to pour forth a torrent of song. In the afternoon hush the volume of sound was startling. ... The music went on and on, minute after minute, with astonishing variations, never once repeating itself, almost as though the bird were deliberately showing off its virtuosity. Sometimes it stopped for a few seconds, spread out and resettled its wings, then swelled its speckled breast and again burst into song. Winston watched it with a sort of vague reverence. for whom, for what, was that bird singing? No mate, no rival was watching it. What made it sit at the edge of the lonely wood and pour its music into nothingness?(p. 263)

Orwell's source for this epiphanic passage (and if it is imitative the literary allusion brings extra support for its power) is surely in the work of a different kind of pessimist--and pastoralist--Thomas Hardy, in a post-millenial New Year poem (31 December 1900):

I leant upon a coppice gate

          When Frost was spectre-gray,

And Winter's dregs made desolate

          The weakening eye of day.

The tangled bine-stems scored the sky

          Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted nigh

          Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be

          The Century's corpse outleant,

His crypt the cloudy canopy,

          The wind his death-lament.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth

          Was shrunken hard and dry,

And every spirit upon earth

          Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among

          The bleak twigs overhead

In a full-hearted evensong

          Of joy illimited;

An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,

          In blast-beruffled plume,

Had chosen thus to fling his soul

          Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings

          Of such ecstatic sound

Was written on terrestrial things

          Afar or nigh around,

That I could think there trembled through

          His happy good-night air

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew

          And I was unaware.

The optimism in Orwell's thrush, as in Hardy's, passes humanity by, enabling Orwell both to render acceptable the class distinctions which continually associate the proles with animals, and to avoid Swift's dismissal of all humanity (in the King of Brobdingnag's terms) as "the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (p. 132). The pessimism of Swift, savage rather than gloomy in its excesses, is not, as Orwell thought, life-denying, however. It offers not hope but energy, an energy Orwell recognized as anarchic: a radical energy of intolerant and intolerable ideals, and of the utopian nightmare.

**Notes**

1. *The Guardian,* 6 December 1978, p. 2.

2. References in the text are, unless otherwise stated, to the Penguin edition of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (*CEJL*), ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols, Harmondsworth, 1970, rpt. 1984.

3. *Gulliver's Travels* is quoted from *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift,* ed. Herbert Davis and others, 16 vols, Oxford 1939-74, XI, rev. 1959.

4. See Raymond Williams, "Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984", in *Orwell,* Flamingo edition, London, 1984, pp. 95-126, and compare his Chapter 6, "Projection", pp. 69-82.

5. Marijke Rudnik's account of "Women and Utopia: Some Reflections" (to be printed among selected papers from the Amsterdam Conference in 1986) mentions a number of recent feminist utopias. Their authors would probably not subscribe either to the view that utopias are not meant to be realized, or to the classical definitions of the genre as I am using them.

6. The term may originate with George Boas. For a detailed treatment see James E. Gill, "Beast over Man: Theriophilic Paradox in Gulliver's 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms'", *SP,* 67, 1970, 532-49, and "Theriophily in Antiquity: A Supplementary Account", *JHI,* 30, 1969, 401-12.

7. *Utopia* is quoted from the Yale *Complete Works,* Volume IV, ed. Edward Surtz, S.J., and J. H. Hexter, New Haven and London, 1965. I have discussed this point in "Utopia and 'the Thing which is not': More, Swift, and Other Lying Idealists", *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 52, 1982, 40-62 (pp. 55-56). On ideas about language in Swift and Orwell, see Charles Scruggs "George Orwell and Jonathan Swift: A Literary Relationship", *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 76, 1977, 177-89.

8. See Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life,* Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 387-89. On *Animal Farm* and its Swiftian fable form, see Scruggs, p. 178.

9. J. A. van Dorsten, in "Recollections: Sidney's Ister Bank Poem" (pp. 231-44 below) argues for an interesting variation. For complexities in Stoic and Cynic views which filtered into the Renaissance and beyond, see again James E. Gill, "Theriophily in Antiquity".

10. "Dulce bellum inexpertis", quoted from Margaret Mann Phillips, *Erasmus on his Times: A Shortened Version of the Adages of Erasmus,* Cambridge, 1967, pp. 111-12. Erasmus's "demons" perhaps partly absolve "natural" man.

11. The fullest recent discussion is Ian Higgins's "Swift and Sparta: The Nostalgia of *Gulliver's Travels*", *MLR,* 78, 1983, 513-31.

12. *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* ed. Peter Davison, with a Critical Commentary and Annotations by Bernard Crick, Oxford, 1984, pp. 7, 50, 55. Quotations from the novel give page references to this edition hereafter. On "Swiftian satire" Crick is quoting Czeslan Mitosz, *The Captive Mind,* New York, 1953. For farce *without* comedy, Crick might aptly have included among his "bodysnatchers" Richard I. Smyer, *Primal Dream and Primal Crime: Orwell's Development as a Psychological Novelist,* Columbia and London, 1979. Smyer quotes C. M. Kornbluth, who in 1959 saw Room 101 as "the uterus ... these numerals [being a] sketch of the female genitalia" (p. 159).

13. See, for example, the tone of slight rebuke in the letter of 29 Sept. 1725, answering one from Pope of 14 September (*Correspondence,* ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols, Oxford, 1963-65, III, 102-03, 96). For Pope on Swift and Rabelais, see Spence's *Anecdotes,* ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols, Oxford, 1966, I, items 133, 511, 512.

14. *The Poems of Jonathan Swift,* ed. Harold Williams, second edition, 3 vols, Oxford, 1958, II, 527.

15. *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1962, rpt. 1984, p. 16.

16. The sentiments expressed here have, for a British reader in 1984, a rather different poignancy from anything engendered by *Nineteen Eighty-Four.*

17. Interestingly, he contrasts Swift's treatment of the body with Blake's, in his Swift essay (*CEJL,* IV, 259).

18. *Homage to Catalonia,* Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1962, rpt. 1983, p. 72. The occasion referred to was an Extra-Mural Dayschool on "George Orwell: The View from 1984", University of Birmingham, 11 February 1984, at which an earlier version of this paper was read, and at which Bernard Crick was introduced to Douglas Moyle. I have since confirmed details of the anecdote with Mr Moyle, and am grateful for his permission to relate it.

19. *Swift's Landscape,* Baltimore & London, 1982.

20. *Swift's Landscape,* p. 25.

21. See "A Panegyrick on the D[ea]n, in the Person of a Lady in the *North*", *Poems,* III, 886. Swift cultivated a certain boorishness when among friends, which contained an element of mock-insult, so it is never easy to know how seriously to take the apparent rudeness, even when the relationship is known to have been quarrelsome.

22. *CEJL,* IV, 375; *Orwell: A Life,* p. 511.

23. Quoted from Secker & Warburg "Cheap Edition", London, 1949, rpt. 1955, pp. 13-14.

24. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy,* ed. Samuel Hynes, Oxford, 1982, Volume I, pp. 187-88.

**Source Citation**   (MLA 8th Edition)

Mezciems, Jenny. "Swift and Orwell: Utopia as Nightmare." *Short Story Criticism*, edited by Joseph Palmisano, vol. 68, Gale, 2004. *Literature Resource Center*, go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GLS&sw=w&u=txshracd2512&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1420056276&it=r&asid=926e4fe97bc197701e2fc47cc8a1b3e9. Accessed 4 Mar. 2017. Originally published in *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1985, pp. 189-210.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|H1420056276