

## A Lacanian Study of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*

Mahdiye Abasy

Ph.D. Student in English Language and Literature

Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch, mahdiyecabasi.1993@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the Lacanian study of Gulliver's Travels. Swift employed devastating images, such as the infant, to undermine man's pride. This study deals with the unconscious and the infantile in Gulliver's Travels. The infantile/unconscious is critical (in satire and psychoanalysis) to decoding our shame, pride, desires, and language. Gulliver is a signifier of man and of the ego and the ego/self, the mirror and narcissism are examined. The mirror stage (6-18 months) provides the individual with an external view of the self. The self becomes the center of a signifying network of words and images. There is a fusion of language, identity, and desire (narcissism). The sliding of signifiers into one another reflects the primitive linguistics of the unconscious. Language is also the functioning, ordered system of consciousness.*

**Keywords:** *Gulliver's Travels, Lacanian study, the mirror stage, desire, the symbolic*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Gulliver's Travels draws on the political and historical figures and events and the social, moral, and religious issues of the eighteenth century in England. This study focuses on the human unconscious in Gulliver's Travels. It tells the story of a lack of self-awareness. Gulliver's Travels is a journey through the human unconscious that demonstrates how humans can have both negative and positive characteristics. This study could claim in Gulliver's Travels, that what characters desire and endeavor to construct refer back to the manner of their Symbolic Orders' development. To elaborate more; Symbolic Order is the acquisition of language; a significant occurrence for Lacan that he claims is the beginning of the Symbolic Order, for that language is first and foremost a symbolic of signification [1]. Lacan and Freud; put their demanding focus on analyzing the roots of neurosis in the family and the procedures of child growth. Not only does the vital function of the parents affect the infant's future, but it also impacts the future society on a wide scope. Therefore; this researcher has decided to scrutinize the ancestral relationship of the leading characters of Gulliver's Travels*

### 2. METHODOLOGY

*Applying the following method to study Gulliver's Travels, the Lacanian post-psychoanalysis, contributes to this study to inspect the construction of the character's identity in infancy. To elaborate more; unlike Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, Lacan's main center of theories is not sexuality. It would not mean that he has changed Freud's focus on sexuality; he has imported post-structuralist language theories into psychoanalysis as a fundamental issue. Moreover; his theories about the impact of sexuality and language on the human mind will be elaborated on a short account; in the subsequent paragraphs.*

*As Freud divided the mind into three sections: Id, Ego and Superego; Lacan separated the mind into three Orders: Imaginary Order, Symbolic Order and Real Order. Lacan claims about his tripartite classification system that is related to Freud: "Without these three systems to guide ourselves by, it would be impossible to understand anything of Freudian technique and experience" [2]. The three mentioned above Orders are profoundly heterogeneous, and each one ascribes to an entirely distinct notion of psychoanalytic experience [2]. Consequently; it would seem that they do not share any common aspects; however, it could be implied that*

when Lacan refers to all of them as “orders” they have similarities [2]. In contrast to the general misconception about these Orders, they are not three agencies, as mental forces, in Freud’s structural model, actually, they are mainly considered as mental functioning that together they cover the whole field of psychoanalysis [2].

The pre-verbal state that the infant feels undivided with the world, which is dubbed Imaginary Order; is the sphere of images that the infant makes identifications with [3]. This world of completeness, fullness, and delight is experienced through the images, not the words. The child recognizes itself as an inseparable identity from its mother, with whom it feels a union of mutual satisfaction [1]. The mother is an agent who helps him at this stage with the basic instinctual needs. Before acquiring a language; the “Desire of the Mother” [3] is the central issue in the child’s mind, which is a dyad, mutual desire of both the mother and the child. During this experience, the child feels a connection between her/his mother and herself/himself, a twosome one, which is the first and most significant experience of the infant [3].

The acquisition of language is a significant occurrence for Lacan that he claims is the beginning of the Symbolic Order, for that language is first and foremost a symbolic of signification [1]. This first signifying system, which is imposed on the child’s mind, contributes the child to recognizing itself as a separate being. With the child’s access to the Symbolic Order, its separation from the harmonious union of the world around, especially its unification with the mother, is distorted. In Lacan’s idea, this detachment from the child’s sense of the union of the Imaginary Order will haunt the rest of its life. Unconsciously; the child seeks after a replacement by pursuing the Symbolic Order that may help the child recapture the feeling of the unification [1]. Not only does the child unconsciously learn every sign has meaning due to its difference from the other; but also, he assumes that each sign represents the absence of the thing it signifies [3].

The most controversial concept of Lacan’s theories is the “Real Order” [1] which he has difficulty in elaborating. One definition of Real is that is beyond any signifying system, which lies outside the world created by the ideologies society uses to explain its existence [1]. In other words; Real exists as an indefinable part of human life; it lies beyond humans’ signifying filters and divisions. To illustrate Real; this study can argue that is the experience humans gain during daily life, even temporarily, as doubting the meaning of life or suspecting religions and rules of governing society. To be more exact; this can be inferred that when humans in a momentary experience perceive that the world as they know is only the conventions of ideologies. Lacan coins a term as “Trauma of the Real” [2] in which humans’ sense that there is something beyond all the signifying systems of this world. This makes humans anxious and terrified because they feel that society only replaces a meaning with a meaning that they cannot properly perceive.

The above Schema appeared in Lacan’s study of ‘Purloined Letter’, which illustrates the unconscious relation between the subject to the Other. In advance; The Barrier of the Imaginary axis hinders the relation of the symbolic association between the Other and the subject [2]. In accordance with Lacan’s theory of communication: “the sender receives his message from the receiver in an inverted form” [2]; the discourse of the Other attains toward the subject through the ‘wall of language’ in an altered and disrupted form [2]. Lacan’s particular announcement about the relationship between the subject and the Other can contribute to further explanations:

Lacan’s Subject is not a Humanistic one; particularly it is not a conscious subject who comprehends his very own thoughts and actions. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the subject is related to the symbolic register [2]. Moreover; the law modifies the drives of the subject, and the restriction that is required by the symbolic castration bears upon the subject’s drives. Lacan claims about the desire of the subject: “the desire of the Other’s desire” [2]. Thus; what the Other demands would insinuate as the drives of the Subject [2].

### 3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. The Mirror and Ego

Gulliver’s Travels is an imaginary voyage. For Yahoos, language continues to be fictitious, a component of the unconscious, and separate from the conscious (Houyhnhnms) as a conversational partner. According to Freud and Lacan, the ego and the superego are only given secondary cathexes while the unconscious represents the vast, hidden basis of the conscious mind, similar to the submerged portion of an iceberg [4]. The Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Laputans, and especially the Yahoos are reflected images of man in Gulliver’s Travels. The Yahoos contain an exaggerated version of Lacan’s alien mirror. Swift uses reflection on Gulliver’s pride in Book One to deflate Gulliver’s narcissism. Self-awareness proves even more dangerous in Gulliver’s sane vanity. Psychoanalysis also recognizes these two meanings of the image-casting mirror/reflection from the mirror. For Lacan... “Stability and wholeness is an illusion... The imaginary number

is the order of the mirror of images are the realm of delusional and fixed ego identities" [5]. However, Gulliver represents man, the image functions as a mirror.

In Swift's universal satire, Gulliver is a signifier for Everyman. Gulliver is a satirical tool, not a literary character. He couldn't be an individual for the satire to work. Swift's portrayal of Gulliver is purposefully mundane. Swift emphasized Gulliver's financial history and the incentives that drove him to embark on his various voyages. Gulliver goes through his own *Stade de Mirror*. Gulliver is proud to distinguish himself from less scrupulous medical practitioners: "My Conscience would not permit me to imitate the bad practice of too many of my brethren" [6]. He's a decent, well-read traveler on a quest for wealth and experience. Gulliver possesses the necessary combination of skills, knowledge, pride, and drive, as well as a minor disability, the "Weakness of my Eyes" [6]; Gulliver is human. Gulliver says:

*if I may speak it without Vanity ... as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his Hoof, he did me the Honour to raise it gently to my Mouth ... so illustrious a Person ... to give so great a Mark of Distinction to a Creature so inferior as I [6].*

Gulliver's masochism before superior existence balances through the pride that comes from being associated with a great master. Gulliver's cult of the prince was simply postponed to a new parental existence. Gulliver (as a child) is humbled by his father/superego. Gulliver's position has been swapped with the midget he threatened to eat. Here this has been replaced by babies, an infantile fantasy. For Gulliver, as an unsuspecting, uncivilized child, the threat is real. "Roared so loud that the Urchin was frightened" [6]. The Yahoos are an exaggerated mirror image of human orality:

*The Use of ... Liquor filled us with Diseases, which made our Lives uncomfortable and short .... we fed on a Thousand Things which operated contrary to each other ... we ate when ... not hungry [6].*

When Gulliver is in England, for the first year he does not permit his family "to eat in the same Room. or drink out of the same Cup" [6]. While the breast is a key signifier in the oral stage, Lacan stresses the mouth as an equally significant component of the oral erotic, and like the breast, it becomes an unconscious signifier [7].

### 3.2. Narcissism

Gulliver and Lilliputians both exhibit narcissism in Lilliput (Europeans). Gulliver's enormous stature has given him the ability to fulfill childish fantasies. Gulliver, surrounded by Lilliputians, "roared so loudly that they all ran back in fear, and some... were hurt with the Falls they got by leaping from my Sides" [6]. To the Lilliputians, he is a giant; "a full Sight of my Face, [one lifted] up his Hands and Eyes in Admiration" [6]. "I had reason to believe I might be a Match for the greatest Armies they could bring against me," Gulliver says [6]. Gulliver is a strong narcissist Fortified with Lilliput, where he "marvels at this audacity" The little human who dared to walk on my body While one hand is in Liberty without trembling at the tip. The spectacle of such an amazing creature [6]. The Strongest Men Who Lift Gulliver [6]. In Lilliput, the first reference to Gulliver's urinary function Shows elements of aggression and narcissism:

*... relaxing the Chords ... I was able ... to ease myself with making Water, which I very plentifully did to the great Astonishment of the People, who conjecturing by my Motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the Right and Left on that Side, to avoid the Torrent which fell with such Noise and Violence [6].*

"Men seem particularly proud of the way they urinate" [6]. Gulliver How he "urine... in such a crowd. Applied So good in all the right places that the fire went out completely in three minutes disappeared" [6]. Gulliver's words could imply phallic narcissism. "As the soldiers parade between Gulliver's legs". King's orders to the military "couldn't stop some of the young officers from showing up. Her eyes as they passed undermine... my jodhpurs were on then so that they gave them a little chance to laugh and praise" [6].

Particularly Lilliputians have superiority and pride in such physically small beings. The emperor's height alone is enough to inspire awe in all who see him because he is "taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his Court" [6]. The love of titles and honors, "colored Silk" [6], and other gifts from the superego are just a few examples of the Lilliputians' pretensions. The titles of the emperor mock European aristocratic conceit. He is:

*most Mighty Emperor of Liliput, Delight and Terror of the Universe, whose Dominions extend ... to the Extremities of the Globe: Monarch of all Monarchs ... whose Feet press down to the Center, and whose Head strikes against the Sun ... pleasant as the Spring, comfortable as the Summer, fruitful as Autumn, dreadful as Winter [6].*

In contrast to more common salutations, titles signify position and power. The usage of these titles (when addressing their possessors) complies with social and political norms that call for acknowledgment and, to



varied degrees, submission; failing to use these titles could imply a challenge or threat. Despite trade and travel, Lilliput England and Blefuscu/France are narcissistic mirror versions of one another, with "each Nation priding itself upon the Antiquity Beauty, and Energy of their Tongues, with an avowed Contempt for that of their Neighbor" [6]. The similarity between the two nations is the source of conflict since each undermines the other's egotistical demand for uniqueness, much as Gulliver and the dwarf did.

### 3.3. Obsessive Desire to Record Imaginary Object

Gulliver says that because the Lilliputians' "Thoughts in their Love-encounters were elsewhere employed" [6], i.e., were focused on love rather than procreation, children in Lilliput did not have to pay taxes to their parents for their births. Desire is primarily portrayed as a feminine quality in Gulliver's Travels. Flimnap worries that despite their inability to consummate their relationship his wife "took a strong affection" [6]. The tone and diction in Book Two imply that the Brobdingnagian maids' actions are motivated by libidinal desire "having fun looking at and stroking me. They frequently stripped me completely naked, head to toe" [6]. The degree of Gulliver's "Horror and Disgust" [6] may indicate an underlying dread of female sexuality or maternal rejection, even though his "Uneasiness" [6] may be related to the corporeality of the huge girls. He is treated more like an anatomically accurate "doll" than a powerful man among young women. In Laputa, libidinal desires as a female trait:

*The Women of the Island have an Abundance of Vivacity; they condemn their Husbands and are exceedingly fond of Strangers... Among these the Ladies choose their Gallants: But the Vexation is, that they act with too much Ease and Security; for the Husband is always so rapt in Speculation, that the Mistress and Lover may proceed to the greatest Fadiarities before his Face [6].*

### 3.4. Symbolic Order

Another constitutional point in the mechanism of repression that should be noticed, as Lacan asserts, the object of the repression would recoil in the unconscious of the subject; both the repression and the return of it are tantamount. Henceforth, for analyzing the oppressed object in the mind of a neurotic, the effects of its reappearance should be studied. The repressed may revert in various ways, such as symptoms, slips and dreams. An obsessive subject's fantasy is to avoid any interaction between the object and the Other; however, after the Other's separation, the desired object dematerializes. Recognizing the fundamental fantasy of an obsessive may help in defining the Obsessive neurotic. Hence, the consideration of the presence of the Other could contribute to diagnosing an obsessive. According to Lacan and Freudian psychoanalysis, the unconscious is Other [6]. There is no distinction between the subject and the object in the hallucinatory domain of the id. "In the id, the pleasure principle... rules without restriction" [8].

Swift communicates The Brobdingnagian King, the Houyhnhnm, and Gulliver Master as superego in Gulliver's Travels. The satirist is the Name-of-the-Father. In Lilliput, the superego recalls the equitable society's past. But it is speaking to us, not to the inhabitants of Lilliput. Lilliputians/Europeans play a role in the father's naming procedure. Gulliver is impacted by the contrast between this former ideal and contemporary Europe: "I felt deeply humiliated" [6]. Gulliver received a superego. Gulliver's resolve to remain with the Houyhnhnms represents the superego. Gulliver's "respectful Love and Gratitude, that [the Houyhnhnms] would condescend to differentiate me from the rest of my Species" shows his secondary narcissism [6]. Gulliver, like a young kid, starts to "see himself... as others see him," indicating that "the ego ideal has usurped the place of the Other" [6].

According to Freud "The ego symbolizes what we term reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which comprises the passions" [6]. Gulliver essentially stands in for the ego in Book 4, the Yahoos for the Id and the Houyhnhnms for the "ego" [9]. The ego is challenged with temptations in the form of suppressed impulses. When Gulliver claims that many Englishmen, including his crew, "are compelled to seek their Livelihood by Begging, Robbing, Stealing, Cheating, [and]..." [6]. He is speaking with the voice of the satirist (superego). "Such pious an Expedition... to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous People [who] do not appear to have a Desire of being conquered, and enslaved, murdered, or driven out" [6]. Gulliver is (as a satirist) mockingly of colonizing European countries like England.

Gulliver is connected with the phallus in Book Two and faces the possibility of death or disintegration. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, cutting the body may represent castration, with the enormous "Monsters... with Reaping-Hooks" [6] playing the part of the castrating fathers. Castration worries (fragmentation) are connected to Gulliver's concerns of being "an oral in the Mouth" [6] of a Brobdingnagian, being eaten by a baby or by rodents, or being clawed by the cat, and these all lead to the "castrative Brobdingnagian beheading" [10]. The Malefactor was fixed in a Chair upon a Scaffold erected for the

*Purpose, and his Head was cut off at one Blow with a Sword of about forty Foot long. The Veins and Arteries spouted up such a prodigious Quantity of Blood, and so high in the Air [like] the great [6].*

*Whenever the Court had decreed any cruel Execution ... the emperor always made a Speech ... expressing his great Lenity and Tenderness, as Qualities known and confessed by all the World. This Speech was immediately published through the Kingdom; nor did anything terrify the people so much as those Encomiums on his Majesty's Mercy; because it was observed, that the more these Praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the Punishment, and the Sufferer more innocent [6].*

*The meaning is intentionally reversed here. Symbolic order means a gentle emperor. People understand this reversal. People are frightened and pretend to believe. For Swift, verbal abuse and perversion inevitably reflect the corruption of the courts (the laws of the Fathers) and other political and social institutions of the state of Lilliput to avoid aggressively portraying the leader.*

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*In conclusion, Gulliver is the voyage of identity. Gulliver is a signifier of man and of the ego. Language, identity, and desire are combined narcissism. The way signifiers blend into one another is a reflection of the primordial unconscious linguistics. The working structure of awareness is also language. A symbol of Gulliver's pride in Lilliput is the phallus. Threatening to castrate the Yahoo species is the superego, father, or satirist. Swift's satire portrays man as aggressive, selfish, and unreasonable when he is seen for what he truly is. Psychoanalysis and satire both have an interest in human behavior and personality. Gulliver sets off on a journey or search for self-knowledge; he learns about and personifies human frailties. Swift and Lacan both found language to be fascinating since it is the key to understanding human signifiers.*

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