

WHAT NOT TO DO: LEARNING BY EXAMPLE IN  
*THE REPUBLIC AND GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

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## ABSTRACT

Through aesthetic techniques, Plato's *The Republic* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* provide the reader with efferent knowledge, benefitting the reader's understanding of the entirety of each text. Plato and Swift employ form, characterization, and the theme of vision to challenge readers to find meaning by asking for reader involvement, making the reader an essential part of the text in order for the texts' lessons to be completed. Additionally, the comprehension of Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* requires attention not only to the tools acquired in Parts I-III, but also to the learning experiences of *Republic*. These texts are not straightforward arguments for the perfect society, but carefully crafted exercises designed for the reader.

## INTRODUCTION

*To read a book is to write it.*  
—Jean-Paul Sartre

In his introduction to Plato's *Republic*, Allan Bloom notes that the text strikes many readers as "outrageous nonsense," (vii) and the reaction to *Gulliver's Travels* is often similar. It may be easy to recognize *Gulliver's Travels* as satire, but this scathing satire of human nature has frequently been portrayed as a children's story. Perhaps the strange sense that can be made of turning such a serious work of satire into a children's fantasy is that readers feel as though they have diminished something that made them feel uncomfortable, thus reducing their anxiety. The fact that this work may make some kind of sense no longer nags at readers who have diminished the story into juvenile fiction. Even those who have attempted to view it as a story with more than literal meaning, have felt the need to reduce it. Dr. Samuel Johnson belittled the work by commenting, "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest" (Boswell 136). Johnson's vast oversimplification could arguably be a result of the same psychological phenomena that led the world to view *Gulliver's Travels* as a story for children. It allows the uncomfortable or uncooperative reader with a way out.

However, many who attempt to take Swift, as well as Plato, seriously, end up taking him too seriously. A careful reader will be plagued with problems if he

or she attempts to leave these worlds created by Swift and Plato believing that they were meant to stand as plain examples of perfection; Plato and Swift want to provide readers with the tools to see the flaws in the logic of these supposedly perfected societies by reading about the imperfect examples that preceded them. Moreover, the intertextual relationship between the two works is most likely not coincidental. Swift seems acutely aware of and harnesses the lessons of what not to do from *Republic* in *Gulliver's Travels*. Both *Republic* and *Gulliver's Travels* often unconventionally challenge readers to find meaning by asking that the reader use the tools provided by the rest of the texts, making the reader an essential part of the text in order for the texts' lessons to be completed. Additionally, the comprehension of Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* requires attention not only to the tools acquired in Parts I-III, but also to the lessons of *Republic*. These texts are not straightforward arguments for the perfect society, but carefully crafted exercises designed for the reader.

### THE EFFERENT EXPERIENCE DOES THE TRANSACTIONAL TWIST

The idea that texts require the reader to complete their meaning inevitably brings to mind Louise Rosenblatt's theory of transactional reading. Rosenblatt developed her theory for the purpose of education. As a teacher, Rosenblatt feels that her vocation's purpose is "considered the bringing of books to people. But books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books" (62). Rosenblatt's main concern here is "the democratic appreciation of each human being as an individual, unobscured by any group label" (59). For Rosenblatt, reading is an event. It is an experience, a "lived-through current of ideas sensations, images, tensions, becomes shaped into what the reader sees as the literary work or the evocation corresponding to the text" (45). This discussion will seek to uncover Swift and Plato internally crafting the current the readers live through in parts of their books in order to bring meaning to other parts of their books. To Rosenblatt, texts that are read aesthetically provide different meanings that are each as acceptable as the next. However, in a 1999 interview, Rosenblatt responds to the "deduction" made by students of the transactional theory "that anything goes," by labeling it as a "misconception" (Karolides). Furthermore, Rosenblatt notes that "Any reading act...falls somewhere on a continuum between predominantly efferent (from the Latin, *effere*, to carry away), and the predominantly aesthetic (or "literary") reading (43). As Rosenblatt notes, an efferent reading is a reading for knowledge, and an aesthetic reading is a reading that focuses on the artfulness or beauty of a text. *Republic* and *Gulliver's Travels* seem to fall somewhere near the middle of Rosenblatt's

continuum. Indeed, the aesthetic and efferent are ingeniously designed to share a reciprocal relationship in both works in which the aesthetic aids the efferent and the efferent aids the aesthetic.

## FORM AND FALLACY

This relationship is evident in the very form of *Gulliver's Travels*. As a satire it inherently intends to provide an efferent experience, yet as a work of fiction, it also provides an aesthetic experience. Although Swift is writing a satire, it seems difficult for some to remember when he is writing about such foundational issues. Readers who do this may understandably conflate author with narrator. In fact, Swift purposely added to the tangles between author and narrator. As Robert DeMaria notes in his introduction to a 2003 edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift's addition of the "Letter from Capt. Gulliver, to his Cousin Sympson" artfully and purposefully contributes to the confusion by not only using the same complaints as Swift, but also by simply using the name "Simpson," which Swift had used as a pseudonym for himself when originally attempting to publish *Gulliver's Travels* (xix). While Swift may have used real details from his own life in his characterization of Gulliver, it does not mean that that Gulliver and Swift are the same person. In Swift's case, creating this confusion adds another layer of irony to his satire when readers fail to remember that they are indeed reading satire. Making this mistake denies readers the opportunity to prove that they have learned how to analyze a society. More to the point, missing the fact that the protagonist in a satire is not only the vehicle for but also the object of irony will deny the reader the experience that Swift plans.

Reading satire biographically is a thorny effort. Furthermore, Gulliver may be a protagonist, but he is certainly not a hero. In fact, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* employs Gulliver as its example for the "naïve hero"

entry: “the best-known hero in English literature and the source and linchpin of the work’s structural irony” (287). As a naïve hero, Gulliver is also an unreliable narrator. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, “distinctions are made between reliable narrators, whose accounts of events we are obliged to trust, and unreliable narrators, whose accounts may be partial, ill-informed, or otherwise misleading.” Furthermore, “first person narrators” tend to be susceptible to providing narration that demands skepticism (“narrator”).

Simply by being a first person narrator, Gulliver requires extensive evaluation. First, Gulliver’s narrative is in the form of traditional travel writing during Swift’s era. In *Lemuel Gulliver’s Mirror for Man*, W.B. Carnochan argues that even though boasting was common in these works, “Travelers may lie monstrously, but they don’t usually fabricate an entire voyage.” Further, Carnochan notes, “it is hard to imagine Gulliver, as we know him, practicing conscious deceit. It is even harder to imagine him spinning the fiction of his travels for reasons of personal gain” (118). Readers have little suspicion about Gulliver’s motives, but his perceptions are a different matter. As Carnochan puts it, Gulliver frequently “stresses” the point “by apparently missing” it. (159). Through Gulliver’s mistakes Swift makes it clear that the reader has more insight than Gulliver, and the reader must not forget this fact or they will fall into the fallacious hole of conflating author and narrator and, ironically, missing the point themselves.

*Republic* is not a satire, but it does build meaning in its form, which again falls almost squarely in the middle of Rosenblatt’s reading experience continuum. Although the theory of reader response is new, the recognition of the relationship between the efferent and aesthetic reading modes in the work of

Plato is not. In the late sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy* acknowledges that "even Plato, whosoever well considers shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most of poetry." Sidney specifically points to the "interlacing" of myth, simile, and allegory as part of the work's artfulness (6). *Republic* is, therefore, a work in which the aesthetic and efferent readings depend on each other if the reader is able to apply one reading to another.

This poetry, Sidney notes, is also created by the form of the work: a dialogue. In *The Music of the Republic*, Eva Brann recognizes the significance of the form or *Republic*:

Since it is a conversation recorded between the covers of a book we cannot help but begin by *reading* it, but I think the author wants us as soon as possible to join it, to be converted from passive perusal to active participation, to be drawn in among the other silent "interlocutors." ...The reader is, I think, invited to be present just as these people are, and with them to smile or snicker at witticisms and inside jokes, to groan in outrage at trick arguments, to nod approval at satisfying formulations, to recall contradictory passages of conversation, to appreciate the return of a theme, and in sum, to check and fill out the recorded conversation with an unwritten inner accompaniment—to be always just on the brink of breaking in. (88-89)

Plato seems to have designed *Republic* with the expectation that readers must be active in their reading experience. It is vital that readers go beyond reading *Republic* by becoming a participant in the experience of the text. If Brann is right,

reading *Republic* literally, like reading *Gulliver's Travels* literally, is most likely a mistake. Plato expects the reader to complete the exercise, not to read it as a finished equation.

The form of *Republic* also presents similar first-person problems in *Gulliver's Travels*. While Socrates is not Gulliver, he is not Plato either. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains:

At the base of the genre lies the Socratic notion of the dialogic nature of truth, and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth. The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (155)

Plato attempts to prevent readers from viewing *Republic* as a treatise. Like Jonathan Swift who uses satire, Plato also cloaks himself as an author. As Brann points out, the hidden authorship ironically makes Plato the subject of Socrates' scorn because "Plato is entirely hidden behind this imitation of a conversation between Socrates and others," rendering it "deceptive" (89). The form of *Republic* clearly implies that readers, who Plato asks to contribute to the conversation, are essential in completing the meaning of Plato's work.

While modern readers immediately recognize that Plato is not writing in his own voice, many fail to apply that fact properly to their reading of the text,

seeing it as little more than artful or interesting. It is artful, but Plato consistently provides the reader with more than words on a page. It would have been simpler to write a plain argument, but Plato clearly wanted to do something more. By making the narrator another person, Plato asks the reader to enter the conversation and draw conclusions rather than a patent spelling out of his own conclusions. The lesson is not only in the words, but also in the experience.

## DOUBLE VISION

As Rosenblatt points out “much so-called ‘reader response’ does not make clear what the reader is ‘responding’ to” (45). Plato and Swift designed their texts to provide the reader with a response. Plato and Swift attempt to train their readers. One of the ways that Plato and Swift prepare readers to understand their texts as a whole is through the theme of vision. Interestingly, both authors are using the theme of vision to help their readers to “see” their works.

Although Gulliver secrets away a pair of glasses, which he claims to “sometimes use for the weakness of mine eyes,” (37) in a hidden pocket, he never uses them to actually correct his eyesight even though he carries them through all of his journeys. The only time Gulliver uses his glasses in *Gulliver’s Travels* is to protect himself from a minor physical threat:

My greatest apprehension was for mine eyes, which I should have infallibly lost, if I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. I kept, among other little necessaries, a pair of spectacles in a private pocket, which, as I observed before, had escaped the emperor’s searchers. These I took out and fastened as strongly as I could upon my nose, and thus armed, went on boldly with my work, in spite of the enemy’s arrows, many of which struck against the glasses of my spectacles, but without any other effect, further than a little to discompose them. (50)

Gulliver seems to understand the importance of his vision and is eager to protect it. However, it is ironic that he places importance on his vision when he never uses his spectacles for the purpose of assisting him in using his weak eyes. Not

only does this reinforce the view of Gulliver as being unreliable, but it also applies specifically to “seeing,” the first tool in the comprehension of anything. This is not a coincidence. Swift is essentially providing his readers with spectacles, a tool, to view his work, and the reader had better employ these glasses to see well if he or she wants to understand *Gulliver’s Travels*. If readers make use of Swift’s spectacles as more than mere protective goggles, it appears that Swift is artfully attempting to warn the reader about the reliability of Gulliver.

This becomes increasingly clear in Swift’s abundant use of vision imagery. The reader, if not Gulliver, has an opportunity to learn a lesson from each of these occurrences if he or she is wearing Swift’s spectacle. For example, Gulliver at first seems somewhat impressed by the extraordinary ability of the Lilliputians to see:

their geese about the bigness of a sparrow, and so the several gradations downwards till you come to the smallest, which to my sight, were almost invisible; but nature has adapted the eyes of the Lilliputians to all objects proper for their view: they see with great exactness, but at no great distance. And, to show the sharpness of their sight towards objects that are near, I have been much pleased with observing a cook pulling a lark, which was not so large as a common fly; and a young girl threading an invisible needle with invisible silk. (55)

Shortly after this observation by Gulliver, he shows an appreciation for the “image of Justice” representing the Lilliputian court system. It is “formed

with six eyes, two before, as many behind, and on each side one, to signify circumspection; with a bag of gold open in her right hand, and a sword sheathed in her left, to show she is more disposed to reward than to punish.” (I, VI; 57).

The Lilliputians, as described by Gulliver, seem to be trying to overcome the sticky, inconsistent nature of determining justice by seeing things from all directions, denying truth as being black and white. Moreover, as many have noted, Gulliver may be missing an important aspect of the statue that the reader should not miss: the bag of gold might actually represent bribery.

This could have been an early clue to Gulliver that something was quite wrong with the Lilliputian legal system. Yet, he finds himself the victim of the justice system that he previously admires, desperately wanting to escape after the Lilliputians sentences him to blindness. The Lilliputians tell Gulliver, “Blindness is an addition to courage, by concealing dangers from us” (I, VII; 67). Here, the reader learns what might happen if the recipients of justice, rather than justice itself, are expected to be blind. This makes the point that denying all truth and opting for the extreme of relativism is not an effective strategy for justice. Furthermore, adding still more irony, the visually challenged Gulliver, who fails to use his eyes to their fullest potential, is the one being blinded. Clear vision, literally and figuratively, is not the gift of Gulliver, but if the reader notes and is ready to apply the lesson provided here later, he or she will continue to gain insight as *Gulliver’s Travels* progresses. While the reader may have sided with the Lilliputians and shared Gulliver’s admiration, they now have good reason to be wary of the “remote nations” Gulliver describes and their solutions to societal organization.

In case the reader needs reinforcement, Swift provides it in Gulliver's description of the Laputians who have "one of their eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the zenith," significantly again connecting the lesson to the theme of vision. These examples of what Gulliver sees as the Laputians "of better quality" are so focused on the ideal, "the zenith," and applying it to themselves, "inward," that they do not even notice "the sight of" Gulliver's "foreign habits and countenance" in their midst (148-149). Unlike the Lilliputians who tie down Gulliver or his keepers in Brobdingnag who cage him, the Laputians almost completely miss the presence and threat of an invader. Additionally, Gulliver seems to admire this culture once again, even after encountering the most disgusting and absurd examples of scholarly pursuit. Directly after encountering a projector attempting to reverse excrement to its predigested state Gulliver encounters

a man born blind, who had several apprentices in his own condition: their employment was to mix colours for painters, which their master taught them to distinguish by feeling and smelling. It was indeed my misfortune to find them at that time not very perfect in their lessons, and the professor himself happened to be generally mistaken. This artist is much encouraged and esteemed by the whole fraternity. (168)

It is as plainly ridiculous to act as though the senses of touch and smell can be a substitute for vision when creating color as it is to attempt to get sustenance from human excrement. Gulliver's inability to see this is not only amusing, but is also yet another, and possibly the strongest, hint to readers that they must never fail to second-guess Gulliver's decision-making capabilities. Furthermore, the

accumulation of Swift's use of the theme of vision in this way makes it increasingly clear that readers must be skeptical and draw their own conclusions to understand *Gulliver's Travels*.

Plato also frequently makes use of the theme of vision. The reader encounters this same theme early in *Republic*, significantly also dealing with justice. It is no accident that these two works share authors who attempt to teach the reader to "see" in similar ways. In fact, Jonathan Swift had a propensity in his both writing career as well as everyday life for "ready allusion to Plato and Socrates" (Samuel 447). Socrates encounters difficulty in exposing the true nature of justice in the individual in his dialogue with Adeimantus and Glaucon. So, like a contemporary scientist, he enlarges his object of study under a microscope because Socrates knows that "there would be more justice in the bigger," making it "easier to observe more closely" (45; 369). Not only should it be obvious to the reader that the micro and macro societies created in *Gulliver's Travels* mirror the one created by Socrates and his "interlocutors," but it should also soon be clear to the reader that broadening the subject of justice simply seemed to lead to less justice for the individual.

This is because, as Brann puts it, "this is a city built only for the sake of argument" (104). Rather than accepting that Plato himself is the proponent of individuals losing personal choice in almost every manner, it seems more reasonable to view the city that Plato has Socrates create as the supposed ideal state as a learning experience that asks the reader to contribute to the critique of the city's content in order for the lesson to be completed. Brann believes this lesson is that true justice cannot be found within the micro- or macro-, but that justice "according to Socrates is to be both good on one's own and good for

others" (106). Furthermore, Brann adds clarity to Plato's use of the vision theme, writing that "the image which is not what it seems to be" stands for "that shifting shadow world of mutability, variousness, and seeming that is our world of appearances" (101). Importantly, Socrates breaks from the creation of the supposed ideal society to discuss, among other things, the Cave Allegory:

an invitation to use this very power of image-recognition: We are to recognize our world as a cave. He describes the wrenching, disorienting conversion undergone by the unchained prisoners when they are first forced to turn around to look at the opinion-making and image-manipulating that goes on behind their backs. The first turnabout enables them to recognize as mere images of images the shadow plays performed for them on the screen at the bottom of the cave before which they have been sitting enchained all their lives. (The contemporary application to television viewing is comically obvious.) Then they are dragged and hauled, still unwilling, up into the blinding light of the sun. (Brann 101)

The fact that the story that Socrates tells is allegorical and requires interpretation by the reader is compounded by the fact that the Cave Allegory is dependent on the theme of vision. Plato seems to be attempting to help the reader "see" the entirety of the work more clearly through an interpretive learning experience. The most important factor to getting oneself out of the darkness of the cave is a person's willingness to accept that what she sees may not be true. The captives of the caves only know what they see from their restricted positions. The Allegory of the Cave illustrates this point very well. The fact that it is part of digression

that interrupts the construction of the ideal state means that the reader cannot underestimate the necessity of this exercise to understand *Republic* as a whole.

### IT'S (NOT) ALL GOOD

Another way Plato provides a foundation for understanding *Republic* is through Socrates' conception of the Good. This time, Plato not only designs a learning experience for readers, but he builds a framework that Swift also eventually uses, requiring the reader to apply lessons from *Republic* to the hyper-logical horse society in Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* to most effectively understand Swift's message. Socrates accomplishes this by explaining the Good against the backdrop of the complicated nature of truth, mainly in the form of the Sun Simile:

what provides the truth to the things known and gives the power to the one who knows, is the *idea* of the good....As for knowledge and truth, just as in the other region it is right to hold light and sight sunlike, but to believe them to be sun is not right; so, too, here, to hold these two to be like the good is right, but to believe that either of them is the good is not right. The condition which characterizes the good must receive still greater honor. (VI, 509; 189)

It is essential to note that the story is told in the form of a simile, again significantly asking the reader to use the words about one thing to understand another, and is built on the idea of balance: "hold these two to be like the good is right, but to believe that either of them is the good is not right." Many readers find the Good to be one of the most unacceptable parts of *Republic* because Socrates never defines "good." However, Socrates does make it clear that the "good" he believes in cannot be described in traditional terms. Instead, it must be

experienced, as the reader can find through completing the exercises of the Sun Simile and Cave Allegory that follow Socrates' digression. As Brann argues, "Socrates refuses to explicate the Good directly because it is not to be attained and conveyed in speech" (97). To learn from *Republic*, the reader must experience the books and apply what he or she hopefully gains from the practice that Plato lays out, in part, in the proceeding lesson about justice: doing the right thing demands a balance between the individual and the society.

While most readers begin reading Plato's *Republic* as a genuine argument for a totalitarian-controlled state, many modern readers come to wonder after subsequent readings if some of the claims that Socrates makes are intentionally flawed and intended to lead the reader to another conclusion. From the outset, *Republic* is not simply a conversation about the construction of a utopian society, but a series of constructions that require reconstruction after reconstruction. However, Plato leaves some of the most dictatorial societal recommendations unchallenged by Socrates or his audience. Of course, the perfect city will inevitably create greed among less well off cities, which will lead to war. This fact demands the creation of an entirely new class: the guardian. In fact, the guardian class is so important to the city that society must protect and enhance them in every way. An excellent example of this is the proposed cleansing of poetry that interferes with the development of children who are intended to be guardians of the city. Socrates seemed particularly troubled by the influence of the poetry that unflatteringly portrays gods and goddesses.

However, by granting the gods human emotions and weaknesses, as well as making audiences blatantly fear death and the afterlife, playwrights and poets made their characters identifiable. This is the reason that Greek plays have

endured for millennia. Yet, Socrates is troubled that the poets “dare to make so unlikely an imitation of the greatest of the gods.” The poets gave gods and heroes human emotions that were inappropriate for future guardians, let alone the gods themselves. A specific target is “gods who lament” (66; 388b–c). Plato also makes it clear that it ought to be “impossible for evil to be produced by the gods.” This is interesting because one of Plato’s own examples in making his case for censorship is Theseus, the son of Poseidon (69; 391c–e). In *Hippolytus*, Theseus has been promised three wishes from his father Poseidon. He hastily used one of these “prayers” to slay his son who he believes has raped his wife (64; 886–887). While the audience may have come for the grand spectacle of the gods, they listened and remembered because they could relate to the character’s actions. Modern interlocutors might feel compelled to ask, if Plato wanted Socrates’ intention to be the creation of stories that properly influence people, he should have realized that sterilizing the personalities of heroes would leave the audience without an emotional connection. Without this connection, the censored poetry loses its power as a tool of persuasion. If individuals fear death, then they will avoid activities that might cause it. While Plato correctly recognizes that the writer’s stories have power, he appears to fail to see the power that the fear of death itself holds. If the proposed rewriting of the old tales is to be taken seriously, as well as the statement that lying is acceptable for rulers (67; 389c), then Plato is tossing aside what would be his most effective tool. Even if the reader does not apply what he or she learns in other sections of the books, specifically concerning the need for balance between the society’s and the individual’s needs, these sorts of flaws in the logic that underlie some of *Republic*’s most outrageous suggestions serve as a clue to the reader to look for

more. While the interlocutors in *Republic* may not comment, the reader-as-interlocutor should.

In spite of all this many modern readers may be able to accept Socrates' censorship for the good of the society, but most will not tolerate plans for the breeding of humans as though they were animals. The loss to the individual is too great. Readers who have paid attention to and apply Socrates' lessons to his suggestions for the supposedly perfect society will find that they have learned how to apply the notion of balance to any idea.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, written about 2,000 years later, also ends with conclusions about society that must not be taken as a plainly written argument for conversion to Houyhnhnm-ism. Swift seems to have inserted an extensive exercise that tests the reader's ability to use not only *Gulliver's Travels'* preceding lessons to be skeptical of Gulliver's narration and ability to observe accurately his new surroundings, but also to use the lessons of *Republic* in Part IV, "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms." However, readers must first realize that they are reading a mirror to *Republic*.

The Houyhnhnms did not have debates about right and wrong. They were struck "with immediate conviction" concerning unbiased reality (IV, VIII; 246). The editor notes that Swift may be referring to John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and its notion of "intuitive knowledge"; however, it is likely that both of these works have an older influence. The Houyhnhnms purported inherent objectivity is significantly redolent of Socrates' discussion of the ability to recognize objective truth in spite of the illusive nature of the physical world in *Republic*.

The Houyhnhnms believed that they knew the Good when they saw it and did not “argue with Plausibility on both sides of a question,” preventing what they saw as truth from being “mingled, obscured or discoloured by Passion and Interest.” In fact, getting the Master to be able to comprehend “the meaning of the word *Opinion*, or how a point could be disputable” (IV, VIII; 246) is practically impossible. Swift takes this to the extent of making the idea of lying so foreign to the Houyhnhnms that “they have no Word in their Language to express Lying or Falsehood” (IV, III; 217). To the Master “the Use of Speech was to make us understand one another” and a lie diminishes “these ends” (IV, IV; 221). Ironically, Swift is writing a satire, a lie, to help human beings “understand one another.” Swift illustrates that a lie can lead to truth and that truth is, therefore, not a black and white issue, while the Master and eventually Gulliver assert there is only one truth.

Furthermore, both texts have similar aims. F.P. Lock contends in *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels* that

Swift's primary purpose in *Gulliver's Travels*, like Plato's in *Republic*, was to record in an imaginative creation for the benefit of posterity a vision of political wisdom he had been denied the opportunity of using in the service of his own time. (87)

Furthermore, Lock also asserts that *Republic's* notion of the Good applies directly to “Houyhnhnm society” because “a man born with a capacity to attain a perfect knowledge of the good” does not need law (17). Law acknowledges that there is a decision to be made between right and wrong. The strict social control that is supposedly innate to Houyhnhnms seems to have *Republic's* influence in the practices of breeding and education of the young. Houyhnhnms control the

number of children allowed to each couple, differing by classification of color. The restrictions of color also apply to pairings in marriage. With respect to education, "They have no fondness for their colts or foals, but the care they take in educating them proceeds entirely from the dictates of reason." (246-47).

Gulliver, as usual, admires the Houyhnhnms education of the young:

their method is admirable, and highly deserves our imitation.

These are not suffered to taste a grain of oats, except upon certain days, till eighteen years old; nor milk, but very rarely; and in summer they graze two hours in the morning, and as many in the evening, which their parents likewise observe; but the servants are not allowed above half that time, and a great part of their grass is brought home, which they eat at the most convenient hours, when they can be best spared from work. (247)

Absolutely every aspect of a Houyhnhnm youth's existence is under control.

Moreover, it seems that not all of these intricate laws, rules, and restrictions could be a direct result of some kind of Houyhnhnm instinct, even in a world where horses rule. The fact that it resembles and seems to allude to *Republic's* planning of the perfect city by Socrates supports that rules do indeed exist in Houyhnhnm society. The ideology of the Houyhnhnms requires such carefully constructed and complete control that the belief system includes a denial of choice and of the notion of ideology itself.

Gulliver, who has been previously established as having questionable comprehension skills, uses neither this previous experience nor the lessons from *Republic*. As usual, Gulliver blindly accepts much of what the Houyhnhnms present to him in his new environment, but, this time, he goes even further. As

R.W. Burrow notes, the horses “seem to enlighten Gulliver, but after his return, he becomes an absurd figure, isolated from his men” (495), and Jefferson S. Chase writes that Gulliver allows “the Houyhnhnms’ analyses of Gulliver’s none too flattering descriptions of European society to stand unchanged,” unlike previous sections of the book (332). While Chase correctly recognizes that Gulliver does not learn from his experiences in the previous voyages, he fails to learn from Gulliver’s poor skills in “seeing,” believing that the Houyhnhnms “are mouthpieces for certain opinions their authors wished to express.” Chase attempts to fortify his position by clumsily using Freud’s conception of displacement. Chase believes that Swift displaced his own thoughts onto an animal to cloak his own views (333). This is odd since, as this discussion has already established, *Gulliver’s Travels* is both a fiction and a satire, which was not originally published under Swift’s name. While one can rarely know an author’s intention with certainty, Swift definitely does not need another elaborate guise to hide behind.

Because of this likely error, Chase reads *Gulliver’s Travels* as “a matrix of lies in which no interpretive perspective can establish itself” (332). Brian Corman notes in an essay concerning the difficulty of reading and teaching Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels* that the final book of Swift’s satire has “offended readers of many sorts for over 250 years. Corman quotes source after source expressing their dismay after reading Part IV. He quotes Swift’s contemporaries, as well as later critics, including John Boyle who contends that this “representation of human nature must terrify and even debase the reader who views it” and James Harris who asserts that it is “a worse book to peruse than those which we forbid as the most flagitious and obscene.” Corman further quotes Thomas De Quincey

who attacks Swift via the ad hominem fallacy, saying that Swift's "own Yahoo is not a more abominable one-sided degradation of humanity than is he himself." (63). These critics as well as Chase's faulty and overreaching analysis, demonstrate the importance of carrying all of the knowledge gained from one part of *Gulliver's Travels* to each other part. Gulliver's failure to learn should be a warning to readers not to do the same.

The Master most definitely makes a compelling case to promote his culture. Many readers will feel compelled to join Gulliver's acceptance. For example, the concept of war also presents such confusion for the Master that he thinks that Gulliver must "have said the thing that was not," as close as the Master's language allows him to get to the word "lie." Killing in a society with only one right answer will always be judged as either right or wrong. What he sees as ignorance amuses Gulliver and he launches into a listing of the effort humanity puts into creating tools of destruction, creating another clear example of waste. Swift emphasizes the stark waste of human life to the reader by Gulliver's answer to the Master's request for "Causes or Motives" for the foreign idea of war. Gulliver names many generally trivial and petty reasons that do not justify the astonishing waste of human life to the Master or, Swift hopes, to the reader. These include differences "of opinion" which "hath cost Millions of lives" (IV, V; 226). The "Numbers of those who have been killed in battle" astounds the Master (IV, V; 228). Swift's satire stunningly hits its human targets through the allegedly clear-eyed Master and the unreasonable waste of human life in war. The Master's world will appeal to many who find war senseless; however, readers must remain wary of intellectually joining any society in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Gulliver may be somewhat dimwitted, but that is not exclusively what makes him sound so ridiculous. The Master's purported lack of ideology demands that Gulliver explain human nature in very ironic ways. Alcohol, for example, Gulliver says prevents humans from "the Use of our Limbs" (IV, VI; 232). Gulliver's ironic description points out that humans waste their health on alcohol, which ultimately results in disease and discomfort. Another of Gulliver's ironic descriptions suited to his Master involves men and women eating even though they are "not hungry" (IV, VI; 233). Not only does it seem to be a waste of food, but it is also a waste of health without a decent excuse. Gulliver explains that many of people's health complaints are simply a result of their own actions. Because of the Master's supposedly unbiased view, Swift helps the reader through Gulliver's explanations see the ways in which all men and women waste their own health. The Master views the waste of talent as another disturbing feature of humanity. The Master thinks it is a waste of "prodigious abilities of the mind" for people to employ themselves as lawyers rather than teachers of their "Wisdom and Knowledge" (IV, VI; 230). Instead, lawyers waste their gift of intelligence on memorizing the legal jargon and precedent as well as arguing for what they are paid to argue for rather than arguing for what is right. Indeed, the Master's deconstruction of human institutions is convincing.

The Master is thorough and some might see, at least in the beginning, why Gulliver would fall for a culture that seems to have all the answers. However, the Houyhnhnm culture is hardly balanced between the state and the individual in its notions of societal justice. Readers who can move beyond being the target of a satire may feel drawn to the Master's arguments because they so comically and accurately mock the institutions and conventions of humankind. However, it is

not a simple or foolproof argument against human nature. Gulliver fails to use his previous experiences just as he fails to use his spectacles to see his own situation accurately. It seems likely that Swift intends the reader to question Gulliver's complete and unabridged acceptance because of Gulliver's obvious problems with accurate observation and analysis. Moreover, it is quite clear to a reader who has read *Republic* that Gulliver is missing the cost to the individual in the Houyhnhnms' supposedly unbiased society.

The reader here can reveal one of the biggest problems with the notion of a perfect society where everything is "right" because perfection requires belief in a black and white view of the world in every aspect. Thinking that only one right answer exists can seep into and pervade all levels of societal organization. Swift brilliantly illustrates this by the color stratification the Houyhnhnm society:

Among the *Houyhnhnms*, the white, the sorrel, and the iron-gray, were not so exactly shaped as the bay, the dapple-gray, and the black; nor born with equal talents of mind, or a capacity to improve them; and therefore continued always in the condition of servants, without ever aspiring to match out of their own race, which in that country would be reckoned monstrous and unnatural. (236)

Gulliver does not seem to prick at the suggestion that a horse's outward appearance indicates its mental fitness in the land of the Houyhnhnms, in spite of all that he should have now learned about judging a society. Furthermore, this is the perfect example of how the reader can enhance Swift's work with lessons from *Republic*: societies that do not balance the needs of individuals and state and who do not acknowledge the deceptive nature of the physical world will misjudge humanity's needs.

Furthermore, these hyper-rational horses lack any sense of emotion, even those that the most cynical reader likely holds dear: “they die only of old age, and are buried in the obscurest Places that can be found, their Friends and Relations expressing neither joy nor grief at their departure, nor does the dying person discover the least regret that he is leaving.” One Houyhnhnm actually apologizes for her lateness by explaining that she had to deal with the irritation of her dead husband’s corpse. She is more concerned with her duty to meeting the commitments of her society than she is to any feelings about losing her husband. A careful reader will not fail to notice that the Houyhnhnms are free of all emotions, good as well as bad. Sacrificing all pleasure to avoid pain is one that most humans would not be willing to make. Gulliver, an experienced observer of the flawed solutions of many kinds of societies, does not seem to notice this at all. Furthermore, this is another excellent example for the enhancement of the reader’s experience in *Gulliver’s Travels* with those found in *Republic*. While the widowed Houyhnhnm is clearly loyal to the needs of her group, she has absolutely no regard nor sense for the needs of her emotional self. The reader should have the tools to be able to analyze a society that Gulliver wants to leave as well as one he wants to join.

### THE STATE OF THE SOUL IN THE STATE

The conclusion of *Republic* with the Myth of Er works to calm the irritation caused by what many modern readers might have seen as the preceding “outrageous nonsense.” *Republic* does not end with a straightforward summary of Socrates’ ideal city. Ending instead with a myth affirms in its form that Plato expects readers to complete this lesson, becoming an integral part of a book, to understand the work. Moreover, it is a confirmation that the reader should view the entire *Republic* as advocating a balance between the individual and the state.

This myth features one of the greatest mythic heroes in Greek history; in fact, it is common knowledge that the ancient Greeks generally believed that these events actually took place and that heroes like Odysseus were parts of their cultural ancestry. Homer’s *Odyssey* tells the heroic tale of Odysseus who sacrifices his private life for his public one. He leaves behind his beloved Penelope for a life of heroic torment. In the Myth of Er, Odysseus is given a choice: the life of a hero or the life of an average person. Odysseus has learned from his lifetime of pain and chooses not to sacrifice his life to noble quest, but instead selects a life of boring anonymity, “a private man who minds his business” (303). Obviously this is applicable to the frequent argument that this myth intends to promote a life of philosophy over politics, yet it also contributes to the idea that *Republic* promotes balance between individual and society. Here, Odysseus must weigh the importance of his heroic deeds against his need for inner peace. The truly right thing is not simply right externally, but internally as well. People who use reason well will make personally and publically just choices that also make them the happiest. This message clearly contradicts many

of the aspects of the state that Socrates constructs, yet it seems to be the most consistent message of *Republic*. Therefore, it seems likely that Plato purposely inserted instances of “outrageous nonsense” as exercises—not so far removed from the more obvious ones found in the Sun Simile and Cave Allegory—to prove to the reader that he or she does indeed understand the central message of *Republic*. Learning is not in reading, but in experience.

Like Odysseus’ previous incarnation, Gulliver opts for a life away from his family and his friends. In fact, he chooses to leave again and again without any insight to the consequences for his happiness. Even once Gulliver returns home, he rejects his own society, holding fast to the supposedly superior values and customs of the Houyhnhnms. The Master has only replaced Gulliver’s old shadows on his cave walls with new ones. The ways of the Houyhnhnms only serve to isolate Gulliver further from his family, friends, and world. Sharing his story for the good of humankind is the only way that Gulliver decides to reach out to the world, but that has been perverted by his cousin’s editing of his original story of the adventures. The result of Gulliver’s choices is alienation that he believes is due to his recognition of the Yahoo-ness of humanity; however, it is critical to notice that Gulliver’s happiness suffers as a result of his own choices to separate and then isolate from everything that would otherwise bring human pleasure.

## CONCLUSION

Swift and Plato communicate messages of balance between the individual and society that readers can find through experiencing the carefully crafted lessons of these authors. Yet, the emphasis on the valuing of readers' involvement in and of itself must not be underestimated. Plato might have disliked being called a "poet"; nevertheless, Sidney finds, as previously mentioned, that his work meets the Sidney definition of poetry, heavily leaning on creativity to make its point. Through the use of a first person narrator, dialogue, and figurative storytelling methods, Plato communicates more than simply balance, he promotes the view that readers are responsible for contributing to their reading in general. Likewise, Jonathan Swift uses the ultimate unreliable first-person narrator in the form of a satire to accomplish the same task.

Sidney observes that the potential of works that employ the language of poetry in order to teach is so valuable because learning is in *praxis* rather than *gnosis*: "as Aristotle says, it is not knowing but doing must be the fruit" (23). Because Plato asks the reader to become a part of *Republic* in form and characterization, readers become part of the action, carrying away knowledge gained from experience that they can apply to other experiences inside and outside of his book. Sidney, and perhaps Plato, knows that "the inward light each mind hath in itself, is as good as a Philosophers book." Perhaps the best way "to be moved with desire to know" (Sidney 23) is to require a reader's participation. Whether or not Swift, the master of satires that require reader contribution, learned this from Plato or another source, he certainly did not miss

this insight. While Gulliver might find “the honour of [his] own kind not worth managing,” (237) readers who use their own and Gulliver’s experiences in reading *Gulliver’s Travels* and the practice provided by Plato’s exercise in *Republic* will conclude otherwise.

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