

To reveal the true nature of the world devoid of illusion is a task of some difficulty for projectors to whom reality is a stranger. For an author well versed in life's problems the task is made herculean by the twin problems that life is pretty dreadful and there is no obvious earthly solution to this. By any estimation Swift and Johnson lived their lives in a real world of pain and disappointment, and their urge to communicate something this has taught them is the prime motivation of their works *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. That their conclusions are not far different would have galled Johnson whose dislike of Swift is proverbial, but their style in getting their reader to see the world as they do, is characteristically their own.

Each author exhorts us to observe their very different presentations of the world. Johnson's work is a densely packed, highly poetic vision which uses examples from past history to illustrate the way men's souls are driven, and catalogues the false hopes of riches, power, learning, conquest, longevity and beauty. He even provides a solution to man's desires, which while conventional, admits the unhappy state of life, and as such the high style belies the directness of Johnson's vision. Swift's idea of the world is refracted and distorted through the eyes of Gulliver and the fantasy lands he is stranded upon. He uses both topical satire of recent history and more general comment upon man from the creatures Gulliver encounters. The reader is given no direct solution to the problems raised by the novel and is left to the fallen nature of man and his evil desires.

Their techniques can be contrasted when themes such as age and war, common to both works, are studied. Johnson consciously uses past warriors to show not only that the glory of success in war is transient, decaying even for Alexander and the Roman Empire, but also with his example of Charles XII of Sweden that even a vastly talented man is unable to withstand his own ambitions and as such is betrayed by excessive desire. With Charles XII, as for Xerxes and Charles Albert, the ignoble consequences of their actions are emphasised with words that ring of humiliation:

His fall was destined to a barren strand:

A petty fortress, and a dubious hand: (lines 219-220)

His foes derision, and his subjects' blames, (line 253)

And heap their valleys with the gaudy foe: (line 236)

In keeping with a recurring practice in *Vanity*, Johnson shows that even for those who achieve greatness their success is incomplete and unsatisfying, and that most fail. Swift's approach is to show conflict as instinctive and aiming at complete subjugation. In Lilliput, Gulliver is put on trial for providing only the fleet from Blefuscu, rather than bringing the country under Lilliput's control. More tellingly, he has Yahoos fighting battles over food where plenty exists or for no reason at all. The addition of reason to European Yahoos merely makes them more dangerous.

Swift and Johnson both initially encourage the hope of a long life, Gulliver with his naïve hypothetical plans for immortality and Johnson with the exclamation, "enlarge my life with multitude of days!" (line 255) The destruction of this optimism is quickly achieved by Johnson's crushing line, "life protracted is protracted woe" (line 258). Disease, senility, and scheming relatives make for a depiction of despairing old age. That this appears to be softened by the portrait of a more hopeful old age is no relief, as even this ideal is made sorrowful by the loss of friends and the loss of relevance, so that death is looked for even by those whom age appears to bless. Swift conveys the horrors of age, disease and senility by taking age to the extreme of immortality with his Struldbruggs. The sadness of the situation is heightened by the realisation that the release the poor creatures desire is what man fears most. The indirectness of Swift in the use of an extreme and imaginary life form to expose the true nature of man is characteristic of Swift.

The ultimate extreme Swift uses is that of the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms. The Yahoo as man without reason, and the Houyhnhnm as purely rational creatures give a contrast with which Swift intends the reader to form a true vision of man. Williams points out that in *Gulliver's Travels*, "no one person or group of persons is put forward for our approval," (139) and so it is with the

Houyhnhnms who, while they impress Gulliver, are in no way Swift's ideal for man, significantly being made and entirely different species. Their cold rationalism precludes love and family ties and like the projector in "A Modest Proposal", they can contemplate extreme behaviour like the extinction of the Yahoo race as a logical and beneficial idea. Gulliver under their influence, and after he equates himself with the Yahoos, barbarically uses their skin and tallow in his boat. The Houyhnhnms in part function to highlight the Yahoos as primitive and without reason, and their comments on Yahoos convey Swift's view of the nature of man, albeit in his usual distorted way. The evil tendencies of the Yahoo must be innate, as they have no reason, and Gulliver insists they can't learn, and these match the vices of man in their desire to fight, their avarice and sloth, and the behaviour of the females such that Gulliver notices, "that the rudiments of lewdness, coquetry, censure and scandal, should have been placed by instinct in womankind." (2152)

Johnson's style, while more direct than Swift, has its subtleties. He may be satirising Swift himself by calling him the laughing philosopher Democritus, as Swift is alleged to have only laughed twice in his whole life. Johnson said of Swift that, "he seemed to have wasted life in discontent, by the rage of neglected pride and the languishment of unsatisfied desire." (Bate 126) This makes Swift a logical contender amongst the examples used elsewhere in *Vanity*. Swift's misanthropy is hinted at in, "such was the scorn that filled the sages mind / Renewed at every glance on humankind." (lines 69-70) His involvement and fall from grace in politics would presage the false hopes of power exemplified in later lines describing Cardinal Wolsey.

The conclusion of Johnson's poem in which patience, faith and resignation to the will of God in a life in which unhappiness is the rule is the best suit he can put on the world. If all men's hopes delude him because to succeed is pointless and to fail causes humiliation, then man's desires must be redirected towards "a will resigned" (line 300). Swift shows man's desires to be at base instinctively repellent and reason provides no solution, only making us more dangerous and more prideful. The factor which is absent is the divine redemption that his description of man as

inherently fallen and evil implies to be necessary. It can be said then, that these authors have much in common in outlook, and their disparate styles are used to achieve similar effects with comparable effectiveness.

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