

The exploration of the human nature

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



The exploration of the human nature, of the mind and of experience, forms the basis for the works of writers like John Donne or Jonathan Swift. Swift fully utilizes the psychological realism as he tries to be as faithful to the nature of human mind as he conceives it to be, while Donne injects drama and passion into the lyrical form and enlivens the poem through the speaker's voice. Throughout his poems, John Donne considers his own character, expresses emotions, and searches for a place in a society as well as for salvation.

The reader is involved in the drama between the speaker and the "blank" audience and the use of conceits and paradoxes aid in establishing the change and turmoil within the speaker or the poet. As John Carey writes in his essay, "this dramatic mode makes the poems intense, but temporary, like masks or costumes." Thus, Donne can be theatrical, switch roles, expose thoughts and ultimately, "express divergent states of mind, to dramatize the potential for contraries within himself. (Carey, xxv) Similarly, Jonathan Swift in his work *Gulliver's Travels*, utilizes Gulliver's narrative voice as a means of characterizing his person but the notion that the protagonist is also an object of Swift's satire makes the reader aware of the perhaps unreliable nature of the narrator. Thus, in their works, both Donne and Swift trace the path of consciousness and the work of the mind and ultimately provide commentary on broad matters such as religion (Donne) or society and politics (Swift). John Donne's sonnet 5, reflects the mode of dramatic realism in its exposition of the speaker's thought process and change.

The speaker confronts a strong fear of sin and punishment with a plea to be forgiven or "cleansed", either by water or by fire. He recognizes himself as a

microcosm but also perhaps fears that these "elements" or substances that we are built of and which are combined with spirituality or soul-"angelic sprite" will die and be condemned, as expressed in "both parts must die." The speaker then calls for heavenly seas, "new seas" to drown him or at least to wash his world-himself, which if looked through Christian symbolism can indicate his desire to be cleansed or purged from "black sin".

Moreover, the structure of the poem also conveys the idea of psychological realism and of dramatic mode in that the change happens in line 10. Donne does follow the Petrarchan sonnet style in that the change occurs in last 6 lines but instead of it happening in the 9th line he chooses to place it in the next line. The phrase, that signifies the change, "But oh it must be burnt" represents a sharp change because the images of tears and water are replaced by fire imagery. The "flames", "fiery zeal" and burning evoke a more dark state of mind and the final realization that the only way toward salvation is by Lord's "fire".

Thus, this disruption, both in imagery and the poem's structure, common to his style, reflects the thought in process as well as perhaps, Donne's rejection of the form and the accepted. Just as the speaker finds the washing and tears insufficient, Donne perhaps finds the Petrarchan sonnet form insufficient to express his flow of thoughts and emotions. As discussed in class, it is a poetic trick, "a peculiar combination of playfulness and artificiality in a passionate cry." The poet thus, does more than just tell, he shows.

Gulliver's Travels appears to be a shipdoctor's account of his voyages into strange places, but it is actually a criticism of the human race. Book 4 reveals the bestial and brutal view of humanity through the depiction of Yahoos, the servants of a race of horses, called Houyhnhnms who are characterized with Reason. The psychological realism is conveyed primarily through the narrator and the protagonist, Gulliver. For the readers, he is the only source of information and as no contradictory observations are offered, at first it is difficult for the reader to choose a particular attitude.

Although the ending and Gulliver's choice of lifestyle may appear ridiculous or on the verge of insanity, it is still moving and effective. Gulliver, who has undergone a transformation from a proud Englishman to a man ashamed of the entire species to which he belongs. This shame that he finds is the shame that the reader can clearly see. The ridiculism behind war, the concepts of greed and envy, the exposition of lawyers, it is all relatable. However the dramatic or psychological component exists in Gulliver's narrative that ultimately reveals the unreliability and irony of his character.

As a traveled, adventurous man of experience one expects him to be open minded but in the end, by his stern refutation of all humanity, the reader can realize that he is far from a creature of reason, (that he perhaps believes himself to be) and instead he tends to judge and adapt through identification with a group, much like the majority of human beings. Perhaps, then such detail that Swift adds such as the room where Gulliver sleeps is actually halfway between the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms, and this can then be

seen as the position most of us find ourselves in, between pure reason and pure emotion or between stoicism and epicureanism.

Then the character like Captain Mendez also represents this balance and contradicts Gulliver's perhaps over bitter, generalization of humanity. This depiction also offers the reader an excuse to identify with the better more positive side of human nature. However, Swift continues to show the bitterness and contrast between the Yahoos and Houyhnhms. The filthiness of the Yahoos their diet is contrasted to the Houyhnhnm cleanliness and simple diet.

Gulliver cannot live on the repetitive but healthy diet of the Houyhnhnms, and this is perhaps Swift's way of once again pointing at further human barbarism. But at the same time it can be argued that Houyhnhnms are also an "ironic device" and not an ideal. Their language is limited, they use and exploit Yahoos as servants and they cannot even mourn their dead. In addition, Gulliver's hate for the Yahoos should not be taken at face value (like much of his narrative) because the Yahoos, too, are exaggerations. Just as life of pure reason is inadequate so is the life of pure emotion.

Moreover, in the last chapters, Gulliver's behaviour and acts such as buying the stallions and talking to them for hours in the language of Houyhnhnms, or making his wife seat at the far end of the table, are illogical and bizarre. Thus, all the experience he has gone through and the possible understanding, can not be taken very seriously because the narrator who tells us the story lacks critical judgement in a sense that he fails to see his own inconsistencies and flaws. This is what makes the novel a satirical one,

because as discussed in class, Swift has created a gap between the story itself and the voice telling the story.

It is in the place of this gap that the reader enters and needs to make an evaluation. Despite his desire for privacy and the guarding of his poems, Donne appears concerned to involve the reader into the probing and surprising thought process that also perhaps reflects the uncertainty, passion and discovery of the Renaissance period. Thus, both Swift's use of narrative voice and Donne's dramatic mode have the effect of engaging the reader into the work and provoking his judgement. It is through this collaboration that the meaning is generated.