Gulliver in the History of Race

Nicholas Hudson

Abstract: This essay revisits the vexed issue of race and racism in Part Four of *Gulliver's Travels*, as analyzed brilliantly in Claude Rawson's *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination,1492-1945*. Whereas Rawson both resisted charges that Swift's presentation of the Yahoos is racist and cast doubt on defenses of Swift as anti-racist, I argue instead that the tale of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos marks the crossroads between the older, early modern vision of the human species with the modern ideology of racial science coalescing just at that moment in history. Swift draws on the one hand from older myths such as the "Wild Man" or bestial savage but also reflects contemporary debates on the definition of "man" provoked particularly by John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Our difficulties in placing Swift in the history of race reflects emerging problems of definition and taxonomy that he deliberately exploited in order to perplex the reader.

Keywords: Swift; *Gulliver's Travels*; race; racism; Locke; Leibniz; Linnaeus; Buffon

Author: Nicholas Hudson is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of four monographs, *Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, *Writing and European Thought, 1660-1800*, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England*, and *A Political Biography of Samuel Johnson*. He co-edited *Swift's Travels: Eighteenth-Century Satire and its Legacy* with Aaron Santesso and most recently edited *The Cultural History of Race from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*.

There are good reasons to consider Claude Rawson's *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* (2001) as his finest book. In a sweeping survey that spans from the Old Testament to the late twentieth century, combining rich historical knowledge with his characteristically incisive close readings, Rawson shows how Jonathan Swift's satire foreshadows with prescient insight the violence and genocide that has since characterized the history of race, colonialism and imperialism. This study broaches themes that continue to preoccupy modern scholarship and our current culture wars. Nonetheless, Rawson refuses to align himself with any critical faction or ideological tendency. As he states in the introduction, "My hope is to open up this topic in a way that will uncouple Swift from the indignant diatribes of self-righteous post-

colonial censors, as well as from the well-intentioned ministrations of 'liberal' sensibilities in the late Ph.D. era." The Swift who emerges from this book is "neither a benevolent defender of good causes, nor the demonic xenophobe or misogynist of some post-colonial opinion" (16).

At the heart of *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* is the question of race, for here is where Swift's work, and particularly part four of *Gulliver's Travels*, has provided considerable fuel for ideologically-tinged controversy. If, on the one hand, some scholars have condemned Swift's presentation of the Yahoos as racist, an equally large group has lauded Swift for exposing the evils of racism, slavery and political tyranny, as supposedly exemplified by the Houyhnhnms.[1] Rawson's argument is that neither of these approaches does justice to the subtlety and complexity of Swift's satire. In constructing the Yahoos, Swift certainly drew from contemporary and historical perceptions of the debased "savage," including degrading representations of the Catholic Irish. Nonetheless, he essentially turned this disgust back on the Anglophone reader, troubling the effort of supposedly "civilized" people to distance themselves from this despised type. As Gulliver comes to believe, we are all "Yahoos" by dint of all being human beings. Yahoo-like corruption and irrationality lie at the heart of many "civilized" human activities. The identification of the whole human species with a despised subgroup differs from "racism," which typically seeks to separate and diminish a despised group. Indeed, Rawson doubts whether the terms "race" and "racism" have any validity in speaking of *Gulliver's Travels*: "there is no critique of racism except one which insults 'civilized' humans by imputing savagery to them" (177).

As Rawson is well aware, moreover, it is arguably anachronistic to apply the term "race" to the era when Swift published *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Some writers, like François Bernier, had already begun to divide the human species into several subgroups or "races" by the later seventeenth century, though in a brief and tentative

1 For various positions on the issue of race and racism, see Laura Brown, "Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift," *Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift*, edited by Frank Palmeri, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1993 and *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 183-186, 195-198; Clement Hawes, "Three Times Round the Globe: Gulliver and Colonial Discourse," *Cultural Critique* 18 (1991): 187-214; Cristina Malcolmson, *Studies of Skin Colour in the Early Eighteenth Century*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 169-187; Allen Michie, "Gulliver the Houyhoo [sic]: Swift, Locke, and the Ethics of Excessive and Individualism," *Humans and other Animals in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, edited by Frank Palmeri, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 67-81; Michael Stewart, "Yahoos and the Discourse of Racialism in Gulliver's Travels," *Lumen* 12 (1993): 35-41; Michael Wilding, "The Politics of Gulliver's Travels," *Studies in the Eighteenth Century: II. Papers presented at the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar*, edited by R. F. Brissenden, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973, 302-322.

way. The first naturalist to utilize "race" systematically as a name for human groups, the Comte de Buffon, did not publish his work on human varieties until 1748. He was followed by many authors who imitated his methodology and language in reducing the human species to a hierarchy of five or six "races" with the white race on top.[1] These authors did not, of course, invent hatred for the non-European Other. They nonetheless gave systematic order and scientific authority to attitudes that had previous existed only as dispersed expressions of bigotry. Although Iago, for example, despises Othello because he is black and from a Muslim background, his insults constitute, as Michael Neill observes, "a gallimaufry of quite unsystematic prejudices and superstitions" (395). To a remarkable extent, Buffon and other prominent authors like Hume, Voltaire, and Kant, built their own "scientific" racial theories on long-standing tales and legends. They tailored travelers' reports to their needs, often ignoring details or nuances that would muddle their neat hierarchy. Race science was nonetheless systematic and categorical, postulating that the traits of large racial groups were fixed, consistent and innate rather than the variable accidents of climate and lifestyle.

Here is where Swift's depiction of the Yahoos bears similarities with the race science that emerged not long after *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift was drawing in part on earlier models of human difference like the wild man, the ancient myth of the hairy and mute savage. To this old model, as Rawson shows, Swift added traits of "savagery" from travelers' accounts of peoples like the Khoi, known popularly as "Hottentots." Gulliver nonetheless foreshadows racial ideology when he indicates that the Yahoos represent a "degeneration" from a lighter skinned and less hirsute original (perhaps even English people). The debased characteristics of Yahoos are fixed and innate, offering no opportunity for palliation, nuance or improving. It is little wonder, actually, that modern readers have mistaken them for a racial group, or that Gulliver sounds like a racist when he describes them as "the most filthy, noisome, and deformed Animal which Nature ever produced [...] the most restive and indocible, mischievous and malicious" (Swift 253). As Rawson notes, "This is a description of group-character, not a list of actual transgressions" (263). "Yahoo" is a category of inherent being, not a temporary or accidental malformation linked to a savage lifestyle or the lack of Christianity. This is why even a well behaved "Yahoo" like Pedro de Mendez is still a "Yahoo," very much as a "good Negro" or

1 See Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3 (1996): 247-264; Suman Seth, "Race and Science," *A Cultural History of Race in the Reformation and Enlightenment*, edited by Nicholas Hudson, London: Bloomsbury, 2021, 71-86.

"good Jew" still belongs to a hated group in racist ideology. This essential Yahoo nature can be covered up or controlled but it cannot be removed or denied. As Gulliver says in his letter to his Cousin Sympson, added to the 1735 edition of the *Travels*, there could be no more absurd project than "reforming the *Yahoo* Race of this Kingdom" (Swift 10).

In this passage and others, "race" is presumably used in a traditional sense as equivalent to the "human race." Nonetheless, there is a tension here and elsewhere in the *Travels* with that other repeated term "Species." Even in older usage, "race" usually referred to a subgroup or line of generation within a species, such as a "noble race" or a "race" of horses. What Swift reflects is an instability of terminology generated by recent philosophy and ethnographical reports. I will particularly draw attention to John Locke's challenge to the definition of "man" as "animal rationale" in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), a work that profoundly influenced the epistemology and methodology of later science. Locke's discussion of the "Boundaries of the *Species*" (257) deployed a similar set of beings—horses, apes, mute humanoids—that populate part four of *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift seems to be stirring doubts about the real division between humans and beasts for satirical effect in order to upset human pride. Nonetheless, Swift was pointing towards the future rather than just drawing from the past. *Gulliver's Travels* marks a turning point, as I will argue, from an early modern understanding of humanity to a later re-categorization that would enfold humans in the order of animals and plants, giving rise to the category of "races" as large sub-groups within the human species.

My point here is not that Swift is a racist. The point is rather that Swift is exploiting changing language and ideas about humans and their place in nature that would, very soon, open the way for the beginnings of race science. Changes were beginning to stir within the intellectual and cultural climate, and *Gulliver's Travels* represents an early expression of those stirrings in satirical form.

I. Before "Race"

Although race science did not create prejudice against despised groups, this hatred remained disorganized and associated with factors such as religion and level of "civility," the latter category implying the superiority of urban to rural people. Othello's conversion to Christianity cannot dispel his predominant identity as a "Moor" or Muslim infidel, an association that seems uppermost in his own mind when he finally stabs himself, recalling as he does his killing of a Turk: "I took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him thus" (Shakespeare 5.2, lines 358-359). Dennis Britton rightly observes that religious difference was associated in

the early modern era with corporeal difference, particularly darker skin color (24-27). Nonetheless, skin color was conventionally linked to climactic conditions, especially the darkening effect of the sun. Sir Thomas Browne knew that he was challenging an orthodoxy in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) when he denied that the skin color of Black people was caused by the sun or heat, insisting instead that it "was evidently maintained by generation" (3: 241). The term "race" was normally used for any line of generation, such as a family or breed. "Race" was also close to "nation," meaning any small national group rather than all the inhabitants of a continent with similar features. Hence, Leo Africanus, writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, described a wide variety of African "nations," some "most base and rustical" and others "exceedingly rich and civil" (3: 827, 837). For Africanus, the important factor was not the color of nations, which he regarded as variable, but rather whether a nation had achieved civility or remained "rustical." Similarly, historians of the Americas such José de Acosta or the Baron de Lahontan identified many different "Indian nations" of many different levels of civilization and even skin color.

These dominant features of ethnographical thinking in the early modern period implied that human difference was circumstantial and widely variable, not innate, fixed or uniform over continental regions. There were certainly some groups that were regarded as particularly debased and close to "beasts," the bottom line approached by groups furthest from civility. Like other scholars, Rawson stressed the similarity between the Yahoos and "Hottentots," the name given by the Dutch to the Khoi people living in the southern-most region of Africa. It is true indeed that these people were the subject of special hatred, becoming even a by-word for dirtiness and savagery. Johan Neuhoff was typical of Europeans, especially in the early years of contact, who described the Khoi as "the most savage folk of the whole earth" (Raven-Hart 1: 20), being even "less intelligent than the unreasoning beasts" (Raven-Hart 1: 20) and eating raw guts "greedily like dogs" (Raven-Hart 1: 17). Writing in 1691, John Ovington portrayed the Khoi as representing the "Medium "between a Rational Animal and a Beast," and "having lost all kind of Religion Devotion" (Raven-Hart 2: 394). It was this supposed absence of religion that Eustace Budgell particularly recalled in an essay on atheism that Swift surely saw, *Spectator* No. 389. There Budgell described the Khoi as "*Atheists*" who were "Scarce one degree above Brutes, having no Language among them but a confused *Gabble*" (408). The significance of religion in descriptions of the Khoi is significant, as we will see, for Swift leaves out all religious questions from part four of *Gulliver's Travels*.

It is significant, however, that Ovington and others regarded the supposed lack of religion among the Khoi not as an innate "racial" characteristic but as the result of their idleness and resistance to conversion by the Dutch. Increased contact with the Khoi convinced most Europeans who met them that they were in fact not unintelligent, however dirty and illiterate. Guy Tachard, writing in 1685, described them as "gay, lively, of few words, and [...] intelligent" (Raven-Hart 2: 289). The Khoi had many virtues. In particular, "they have more charity and faithfulness one to another than are usually found among Christians" (Raven-Hart 2: 286). Increasingly, Europeans were able to perceive the Khoi as having a sophisticated culture, even a kind of alternative to European ways. Many of the myths proved untrue: they did not eat raw guts and they spread grease on their bodies not because they loved dirt but as protection against the sun. Curiously, though their children were born pale, they preferred darker skin. Their women were chaste and they followed well-defined religious practices. The Khoi certainly had a language ("Hottentot" is a transliteration of what it sounded like), though it was characterized by clicks that Europeans had a hard time learning. These various corrections to previous myths were collected by the German traveler Peter Kolb in *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, first translated into English shortly after *Gulliver's Travels* in 1731.[1]

Significantly, later racial scientists had no interest in these nuances or palliations. Buffon described the "Hottentots" as a different "race" from other Africans, distinguished by their lighter skin color and their uniquely "nasty" lifestyle. The French naturalist also perpetuated the myth that the Khoi deliberately flattened the noses of their children, an old story that Gulliver alludes to in his description of the Yahoos (Buffon 3: 154, 158). Clearly, the image of the filthy, beastly "Hottentot" served some kind of function within European culture. John Wesley even expressed anger against Kolb for defending them, for "Hottentots" served as a good example of the degraded fate of atheists (345-347). Similarly, Swift had little interest in these nuances or corrections, at least for his purposes as a satirist. Gulliver repeats the stories circulated in popular culture, including not only the supposed habits of "all savage Nations" (Swift 215) but the belief that large people are cruel and that red-haired people are lascivious (Swift 78, 248). Gulliver's vulgarity facilitates Swift's satiric technique of reductiveness, the tendency to place

1 For further discussion of the reputation of the Khoi during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Nicholas Hudson, "'Hottentots' and the Evolution of European Racism," *Journal of European Studies* 34 (2004): 308-332 and "'Hottentots,' Venus and the Changing Aesthetics of Race," *Mosaic* 41 (2008): 19-41.

his subjects in well-defined categories and to dismiss all qualifications or palliations as irrelevant. This stark delineation of groups is indeed an even deliberately infuriating feature of part four of *Gulliver's Travels*. Following his point-by-point enumeration of apparent similarities between Yahoos and humans—their wars, pandering, drunkenness, avarice and so forth—the Houyhnhnm Master concludes that "As to learning, government, arts, manufactures, and the like [...] he could find little or no resemblance between the *Yahoos* of that country and those in ours." Such dissimilarities were, however, of no importance, "for he only meant to observe what parity there was in our natures" (Swift 244). To those readers who might object that the Master has omitted exactly what are the most important distinctions between humans and Yahoos, Swift provides no answer. The tendency of part four is to justify the definition of humans as "Yahoos" even with the effect of stirring objections and qualifications in the reader's mind.

Swift's portrait of the beastly Yahoos also draws from folkloric ideas of humanoids that were disappearing in the face of expanding knowledge and recent exploration. These included, prominently, the "Wild man," or the mute, hairy being who had populated the European imagination since ancient times. This remarkably consistent figure of the savage man of the forest—covered in hair, mute, rude—served even as a defining opposite to the idea of the civilized man of the town. As Roger Bartra writes in *El mito del salvaje*, "la identidad del civilizado ha estado siempre flanqueada por la imagen del Otro" (the identity of the civilized has always been flanked by the image of the Other) (17). In many ways, European depictions of foreign indigenous peoples merely extended what Europeans had long imagined in their own forests. Sir John Mandeville's fourteenth century *Travels* includes versions of the wild man (181). More recently, Louis le Comte's *Nouveau mémoire sur l'état présent de la Chine* (1696), quickly translated into English, contained a version of the "wild, or Savage-man" which resembles the Yahoo in some respects. Described to Le Comte by a traveler to Borneo, this wild man is "a sort of beast [...] whose shape, stature, countenance, arms, legs, and other members of the body are so like ours, that, excepting the voice only, one should have much ado not to reckon them equally men with certain Barbarians in Africa, who do not much differ from beasts" (Louis le Comte). This mute creature is "all hairy, his eyes sunk in his head, his countenance stern and tanned" (Louis le Comte 508-509). The hairiness of the wild man, it is worth noting, distinguished this figure from American indigenous people who were almost always depicted as lacking most bodily hair. Swift's Yahoos are indeed not very like conventional representations of "Indians" who were imagined not only as hairless but also as sexually passive. The hirsute Yahoos

more closely resemble the wild man or "Pygmie" described in *Ourang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris* (1699) by Edward Tyson, who repeats Le Comte's story. Tyson described yet another kind of hairy, mute creature resembling humans in some physical features. Nonetheless, Tyson denied that his "Pygmies" were "really a *Race* of *little Men*" (32) mainly because they lacked speech, which he regarded as an essential feature of human kind.

What actually distinguishes human kind from beasts, indeed, became the major issue generated by expanded exploration and increased contact with non-European people. With so many variations of humanity, how should we define the "human"? Combining traits drawn from long-standing myths with more recent observations, the Yahoos are perhaps best understood as an abstract construction that tests the problem what qualifies as "human." In this respect, Swift was intervening in a very recent philosophical debate that would lead eventually to the creation of racial science.

II. Defining the "Human"

At the fountainhead of Enlightenment thought was John Locke, who raised the issues and outlined the methodology that would dominate philosophy and the human sciences throughout the century. Locke challenged ideas that had previously seemed uncontroversial, such as how to define "Man," opening a new field of debate. The long-standing assumption was that rationality defined what was "essential" to the identity of a human being. Yet Locke asked the reader of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) to consider the case of a rational equine:

> For however some Men seem to prize their Definition of *Animal Rationale*, yet should there a Creature be found, that had Language and Reason, but partaked not of the usual shape of a Man, I believe it would hardly pass for a *Man*, how much soever it were *Animal Rationale*. And if *Balaam*'s ass had all his Life discoursed as rationally as he did once with his Master, I doubt yet, whether any one would have thought him worthy the name *Man*, or allow'd him to be of the same *Species* with himself. (456)

Similarly, priests had wondered if they should baptize a "*Changling*" or mute and irrational child in human shape. If we agree that such a child does count as a "human," then why should we exclude an ape or drill that also resembles a human in shape despite lacking reason? As Locke remarks, "Shall the difference of Hair only on the Skin, be a mark of a different internal specifick Constitution between a Changeling and a Drill, when they agree in Shape, and want of Reason and

Speech?" (451) For Locke, the fundamental issue here concerned how we name and define different "species." Regardless of what was believed by Aristotle or scholastic philosophers, we name species according to agreements that have nothing to do with some "real essence" of different beings, which indeed we cannot know. For this reason, "these Boundaries of *Species*, are as Men, and not as Nature makes them" (Locke 457). Our naming of "Man" is based a number of visible traits that may or may not include rationality depending on our normal use. In normal use, indeed, reason seems less essential to what counts as a "human" than does physical shape. It is for this reason that we are likely to call a mute and irrational changling "a man" while refusing the same title to a talking horse.

For Locke's critics, his challenge to assumptions about what counted as "human" undermined religious orthodoxy and the agreed postulates of philosophical tradition. According to Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester, common sense dictated that reason was the defining attribute of human beings: "My Man *Peter* and I can sit and chop Logick together, about our Country Affair, and he can Write and Read, and is a very sharp Fellow at a Bargain; but my *Horse Peter* can do none of these things, and I never could find anything like *Reason* in him" (162). As there were no talking or rational horses, we should agree that reason was the exclusive and defining attribute of humans. To deny this defining attribute was indeed, according to Stillingfleet, to undermine belief in the existence of the soul, letting atheistical materialism in at the door. A more skilled philosopher, W. G. Leibniz, maintained that reason certainly defined human beings far more than shape or lack of hair: "what disqualified a baboon is not its fur." Certainly, "if there were rational animals whose outward shape differed slightly from ours, we would be perplexed" (Leibniz, *New Essays on the Human Understanding*, 313). But these perplexing situations rarely occurred and could be explained by other means. Locke had created a problem where none existed, for the natural order was consistent in identifying human-shaped creatures as rational.

Hence, part four of *Gulliver's Travels* emerged during an era when the definition of "man" was being widely debated using the examples of horses, drills and baboons. Stillingfleet's pamphlets against Locke were, in particular, well-known in Anglican circles. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere, *Gulliver's Travels* is filled with problems of words and definition which Swift used as devices to provoke or bewilder the reader.[1] By calling Gulliver's hands "fore Feet," for example, the Houyhnhnm Master uses a possibly inappropriate analogy to suggest

1 See Nicholas Hudson, "*Gulliver's Travels* and Locke's Radical Nominalism," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries into the Early Modern Era* Vol. 1, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1994, 247-267.

that humans are even more physically deficient than Yahoos (Swift 225). Similarly, Houyhnhnms do not understand the concept of an "*Opinion*" but somehow have differing views on whether Yahoos should be exterminated (Swift 249). What generally characterizes both Gulliver and the Master is that they rely implicitly on outward appearances to define "species." In discovering "a perfect human Figure" in the visage of a Yahoo, differing only in the ways "common to all savage Nations," Gulliver is immediately convinced that he *too* is a Yahoo (Swift 214-215). Similarly, the Master reacts with "noble Resentment" to Gulliver's description of how humans enslave and castrate "*Houyhnhnms*" (Swift 224), ignoring the fact our horse-shaped creatures are speechless and irrational. The question of whether human beings are truly "rational" is indeed up for debate, for Gulliver's descriptions convince the Master that we are all as violent, lustful, avaricious and depraved as the Yahoos. As mentioned before, however, the Master dismisses a great deal of human activity as irrelevant, such as that we speak and make things. Everything turns on the question of whether humans are beasts like Yahoos or a species above beasts. The extermination or castration of the Yahoos should not be a serious moral issue if they are merely beasts. The English were, for example, in the process of exterminating wolves. But the insistence by both Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms that Yahoos are humans and humans are Yahoos is contagious. The reader is likely to feel threatened rather than just amused because Gulliver and the Master keep affirming that we *are* Yahoos, which is essentially, as Locke said, a problem of definition.

As we have considered, moreover, Swift further perplexes this issue by alluding to ethnographic or quasi-ethnographic accounts of peoples around the world. Although Yahoos most resemble the "wild man" of ancient myth, this figure was disappearing from the European imagination with the discovery of various kinds of "savage" people. As these encounters accumulated, it became increasingly clear that all humans have language, including the Khoi, and that all cultures process arts, manufactures and ways of governing, though in varying degrees. The unity of the human species was *affirmed* rather than undermined, a point stressed by Leibniz in his rebuttal to Locke's challenge to the definition of "animal rationale." Referring possibly to the seventeenth century polygenist Isaac La Peyrère, Leibniz observed that,

> there was an explorer who believed that Negroes, Chinese, and American Indians had no ancestry in common with one another or with peoples resembling ourselves. But as we know the inner essence of man, namely reason, which resides in the individual man and is present in all men, and we

> find among us that there is no fixed inner feature which generates subdivision, we have no grounds for thinking that the truth about their inner natures implies that there is any essential specific difference among men. Whereas such differences do obtain among man and beast. (*New Essays on the Human Understanding*, 326)

Significantly, Leibniz had in mind continental groups like "Negroes, Chinese, and American Indians" rather than the "nations" which preoccupied early modern accounts. This may reflect the advent of "racial" categories in the work of Bernier and a few others in the late seventeenth century. Bernier distinguished between "cinq Especes ou Races" (five Species or Races) corresponding to continental divisions—Europeans, Africans, Chinese, Americans and "Laps" (148). Indeed, he thought that Laps were so degraded that they counted as a kind of "villains animaux" ("wicked animals") rather than humans (Bernier 151). "Espèces" and "races" were thus sliding categories for Bernier, for extreme departures from civility justified the exclusion of some groups from the human species. Leibniz, on the contrary, insisted on the unity of the whole human species, denying any "fixed essential difference between among men."

In this respect Leibniz espoused a pre-racial understanding of humanity as opposed to an emergent ideology that made "race" into a word for a "fixed essential difference" *within* the human "species." Later in the century, there continued to be writers such as Voltaire and Lord Kames who perpetuated La Peyrère's polygenetic hypotheses. Moreover, the relationship between "race" and "species" continued to be variable. For example, although Buffon used "race" in a modern sense to denote a subdivision within human kind, he too considered some "races" like the Laps to be so degraded they "constitute a different species" (3: 58). The Laps or Sami were another group whom travelers had defended as rational and organized but who nonetheless retained their degraded status in popular culture. Nonetheless, the more common doctrine maintained that all "varieties" of humans belonged to the same species, "man," but were distinguished by "race," In its new meaning, "race" denoted five to six large groups characterized by fixed and essential differences within the human species. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, for example, recounted that he had first set out on his anthropological studies in order to disprove the idea that orangutans belonged to the human species, a theory maintained even in the late century by Lord Monboddo (94-95). According to Blumenbach on the contrary the human species was unified and clearly demarcated from brutes by the faculty of reason. Nonetheless, Blumenbach's study of skull

shapes proved to him that the human species was also subdivided into five different races—Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Non-white races, moreover, all represented a "degeneration" from the Caucasian race. Blumenbach adopted the term "degeneration" from Buffon, retaining the old notion that harsh climates exerted a damaging influence on human appearance, including dark skin (Blumenbach 188-189; Buffon 3: 206-207). In the later version of this doctrine, however, climate generated fixed and heritable characteristics rather than temporary and variable "national" traits. Moreover, "degeneration" affected intelligence and character rather than just physical appearance. Outward appearance was thus a trustworthy indication of a fixed inner nature.

In some respects, part four of *Gulliver's Travels* seems to point ahead towards these doctrines of racial science. These similarities, including the belief in fixed and inherent characteristics resulting from "degeneration," have caused some recent scholars to believe that Swift espoused a "racist" outlook. We need to consider, however, whether this impression has arisen from Swift's provocative satirical technique rather than his actual embrace of racial doctrines that still lay slightly in the future.

III. Swift and Race Science

Swift's anticipation of race science is plausible in so far as authors of particular insight were already beginning to prefigure this ideological template in the early eighteenth century. By undermining the time-honoured division between "man" and other species in nature, Locke had opened the way for reclassifications that led to the system of racial categorization. Though disapproving, Leibniz glimpsed these future racial divisions of humanity in *Otium Hanoveranum sive Miscellenea* (1718), noting that some recent authors had "partagé les hommes en certains tribus, races, ou classes" (divided men into certain tribes, races, or classes) (37). Blumenbach believed that Carl Linnaeus had inaugurated the new science of humanity in *Systema Naturae*, first published in 1735, by including human beings in his grand reclassification of the entire natural order (150). Regarding humans as having varieties like any other species of animals or plants, Linnaeus distinguished between "Homo sapiens," "Homo monstrosus" and "Homo troglodytea," the later category including the "Homo sylvestris" or "Orang Ourang" (14). Hence, Linnaeus still took the forest man or wild man seriously, for he imagined a sliding scale from homo sapiens to the animal kingdom. Moreover, his definition of "Homo sapiens" conspicuously lacked the attribute of "rationale," for our species was only "animal flens, ridens, melodum, loquens, docile, judicans, admirans, sapientissimum" (a

crying, laughing, musical, speaking, teachable, judging, wondering, and most wise animal) (Linnaeus 21).

Even according to the Houyhnhnm Master, Gulliver differs from the Yahoos by virtue of his "Teachableness, Civility, and Cleanliness" (Swift 218). He allows the possibility that Gulliver possesses a "Tincture of Reason" (Swift 224), which ironically makes humans even more inventively cruel than Yahoos. Nonetheless, it is clear that humans are divided from the bestial Yahoos by degree rather than any clear demarcation. Swift's omission of all religious notions such as the soul is significant. Although he may have considered theological issues as simply inappropriate to his satire, his presentation of human nature resembles that of Linnaeus and later Enlightenment authors in being strictly secular and materialist. Claude Rawson rightly objects to modern perceptions of the Yahoos as a "race" because they are really a "different species," not a "race" in the updated sense (152). As we have considered, however, "race" and "species" had sliding definitions in the language of race science, often overlapping. For a polygenist like Voltaire or Lord Kames, "race" really became a "species" with a different origin, as it did in much racist ideology of the nineteenth century. Even the monogenist Buffon thought that the race of Laplanders were a different "species" because they were particularly degraded. In *Gulliver's Travels*, "race" is used 25 times while "species" is used 31 times. It strikes me that there is a pounding insistence about these terms (not common in contemporary travel literature), which are used sometimes with the same meaning and sometimes in slightly different senses. When the King of Brobdingnag says that "the Bulk of your Natives" are a "pernicious Race of little odious Vermin" he is evidently using "race" in an old, loose sense to mean any group. But when Gulliver refers to "that Cursed Race of *Yahoos*" (Swift 220) he means a natural kind, even a sub-group of the human species. As we have seen, "race" was already beginning to take on its modern meaning in the works of writers like Bernier and Leibniz.

The Yahoos represent, furthermore, a "degeneration" of the human species. Here is that key term in the race science of Buffon, Blumenbach and other theorists of race such as Goldsmith (2: 239). The Master tells the Houyhnhnm council that the Yahoos are not aboriginal to the island but had arrived from somewhere else, "degenerating by Degrees" (Swift 254) into the present savage race. In a passage deleted from the 1735 edition, Gulliver speculates that these foreign visitors were "*English*, which indeed I was apt to suspect from the Lineaments of their Posterity's Countenances" (361, n. 276). Notably, the Yahoos became less "white" (Swift 254) than Gulliver, which foreshadows the later doctrine that all non-white races degenerated from the Caucasian original. This fact is not itself particularly

interesting: it had long been considered that climate caused a darkened complexion even in white people who lived in the tropics for any time. Cristina Malcolmson correctly notes that Swift casts doubt on the true whiteness of skin, which actually looks discolored and patchy when magnified, as in Brobdingnag (173). Nonetheless, it is significant that the degeneration of Yahoos is permanent and fixed; there is no suggestion that they could improve or change. It seems appropriate to say that Yahoos are a degenerated sub-class or "odious Race" of the Species to which Gulliver belongs. Swift's formulation differs from that of later racial scientists principally in the fact that he omits the flattering idea of some originally beautiful and supremely intelligent Caucasian from which all other races are the degraded descendants.

Hence, drawing from the same intellectual and cultural background as other writers at this historical moment, Swift fashioned a dystopian vision that resembles in important ways the vision of racial science at a stage not too far in the future. This racial ideology includes the belief that degeneration has resulted in the fixed and innate traits of inferior groups that cannot be removed or changed, characteristics revealed by outward appearance such as darker skin and other phenotypes. Swift's vision, like that of racial science, blurs the distinction between the human species and animals, enfolding human beings into a general natural order. Swift's satire also depends on rigid categorization and naming that aggressively repels nuance, complexity or qualification. The notion that even a "good Yahoo" like Pedro de Mendez is, after all, still a Yahoo looks ahead in interesting ways to the depiction of a "worthy negro" in Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799), a work strongly influenced by racial science (as Park was himself a scientist):

> [...] observing the improved state of our manufactures and our manifest superiority in the arts of civilized life, he would sometimes appear pensive, and exclaim, with an involuntary sigh, *Fato fing inta feng*, "black men are nothing!" At other times, he would ask me, with great seriousness, what could possibly have induced me, who was no trader, to think of exploring so miserable a country as Africa. He meant by this to signify that, after what I must have witnessed in my own country, nothing in Africa could in his opinion deserve a moment's attention. I have preserved these little traits of character in this worthy Negro, not only from regard to the man, but also because they appear to me to demonstrate that he possessed a mind *above his condition*: and to such of my readers as love to contemplate human nature in all its varieties, and to trace its progress from rudeness to refinement, I hope the account I have

given of this poor African will not be unacceptable. (359-360)

A crucial difference between Park's "worthy Negro" and Pedro de Mendez is that Swift does not allow for any kind of hierarchy in the human species—or at least a natural hierarchy inscribed in nature. Gulliver is only ridiculous in thinking of himself as different from or better than Pedro. Swift may even be mocking bigoted impulses such as those of white Europeans who regarded themselves as better than the Khoi or Jewish people. Nor does Swift evidently regard the arts so admired by Park's worthy African as signs of European superiority. This is a factor that makes Swift different from David Hume, who famously stated in his essay "Of National Characters" (1748) that "the negroes" must be "naturally inferior to the whites" because they had, he assumed, always lacked arts and learning (208, n.10). Notwithstanding, Swift is comparable to later writers like Hume or Park because he is interested in the same problem of how we define groups such as the Yahoos who, though degraded, are very similar to civilized Europeans in appearance and some behavior. Swift leaves this as a problem rather than providing a solution, for he was a satirist not a naturalist. Nonetheless, the intellectual framework of part four of *Gulliver's Travels* is taxonomic. This taxonomic impulse also characterized Linnaeus and authors who followed him but had not preoccupied early modern writers, for all their frequent hatred of foreign groups.

In *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*, Rawson describes Swift's "extraordinarily sensitive insight into what the 'modern' world might throw up" (290). With great insight and eloquence, Rawson has shown how Swift remains profoundly relevant to our times, a writer of piercing insight into the abiding realities of human psychology, especially the darker regions of that psychology. In this essay, I have attempted to explain Swift's remarkable prescience in a somewhat different way by situating him at a crossroads when a premodern vision of humanity was transforming into a modern vision. Though drawing from past models in literary and intellectual history, Swift evidently saw where recent developments in epistemology and the human sciences were going. The language and ideas of part four of *Gulliver's Travels* are resonant and unsettling (not to mention easily misconstrued) because they belong to a modern system of thought that was just then coming into existence. In thus agreeing that Swift continues to shine a bright and unsettling light on humanity in our present world, I remain the student and admirer of Claude Rawson.

Works Cited

Acosta, José de. *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies* 2 vols, translated by Edward Grunston,

edited by Clements R. Markham. London: Hakluyt Society, 1880.

Africanus, Leo. *The History and Description of Africa* 3 vols, translated by John Pory, edited by Robert Brown. London: Hakluyt Society, 1896.

Bartra, Roger. *El Mito del Salvaje*. Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2022.

Bernier, François. "Nouvelle Division de la Terre, par les Differentes Especes ou Races d'Homme qui l'Habitent." *Journal des Sçavans* 12 (1684): 148-155.

Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich. *The Anthropological Treatises*, translated and edited by Thomas Bendysche. London: Longman, 1865.

Britton, Dennis. "Definitions and Representations of Race: Word Usage, Meaning and Concept." *A Cultural History of Race in the Reformation and Enlightenment*, edited by Nicholas Hudson. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. 19-31.

Brown, Laura. *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

—. "Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift." *Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift*, edited by Frank Palmeri. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1993.

Browne, Thomas. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* 6 vols, edited by Geoffrey Keynes. London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928.

Budgell, Eustace. *Spectator* No. 389. *Spectator*, vol. 5. London, 1713.

Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc. *Natural History, General and Particular* (third edition) 9 vols. London, 1791.

Goldsmith, Oliver. *A History of the Earth, and Animated Nature* 8 vols. London, 1774.

Hawes, Clement. "Three Times Round the Globe: Gulliver and Colonial Discourse." *Cultural Critique* 18 (1991): 187-214.

Hudson, Nicholas. "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3 (1996): 247-264.

—. "*Gulliver's Travels* and Locke's Radical Nominalism." *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries into the Early Modern Era* Vol. 1. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1994. 247-267.

—. "'Hottentots' and the Evolution of European Racism." *Journal of European Studies* 34 (2004): 308-332.

—. "'Hottentots,' Venus and the Changing Aesthetics of Race." *Mosaic* 41 (2008): 19-41.

Hume, David. "Of National Characters." *Hume: Essays Moral, Literary, Political, and Literary*, edited by E. F. Miller. Springville: Liberty Press, 1987. 197-215.

Lahontan, Louis-Armand de Lom Acre, Baron de. *Nouveaux Voyages*. La Haye, 1703.

Le Comte, Louis. *Memoirs and Remarks Geographical and Historical*. London, 1737.

Leibniz, Johann Gottfried. *New Essays on the Human Understanding*, translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennet. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.

—. *Otium Hanoveranum sive Miscellanea*. Leipzig, 1718.

Linnaeus, Carl. *Systema Naturae* (tenth edition). Stockholm, 1758.

Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Malcolmson, Cristina. *Studies of Skin Colour in the Early Eighteenth Century*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Mandeville, John. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, translated by C. W. R. D. Mosley. London: Penguin, 1983.

Michie, Allen. "Gulliver the Houyhoo [sic]: Swift, Locke, and the Ethics of Excessive and Individualism." *Humans and other Animals in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, edited by Frank Palmeri. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. 67-81.

Raven-Hart, R, ed. and trans. *Cape of Good Hope 1652-1702. The First Fifty Years of Dutch Colonization* 2 vols. Amsterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1971.

Rawson, Claude. *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Wilding, Michael. "The Politics of Gulliver's Travels." *Studies in the Eighteenth Century: II. Papers presented at the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar*, edited by R. F. Brissenden. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973. 302-322.

Seth, Suman. "Race and Science." *A Cultural History of Race in the Reformation and Enlightenment*, edited by Nicholas Hudson. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. 71-86.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice. The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greeblatt. New York: W. W. Norton, 2016.

Stewart, Michael. "Yahoos and the Discourse of Racialism in Gulliver's Travels." *Lumen* 12 (1993): 35-41.

Stillingfleet, Edward. *The Bishop of Worcester's Answer to Mr. Locke's Second Letter*. London, 1697.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*, edited by Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Tyson, Edward. *Ourang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris*. London, 1699.

Wesley, John. Sermon 69, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge." *Works* Vol. 6. London, 1829.