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Gulliver's Re-Acquirement of Writing:

Confinement and Escape in *Gulliver's Travels*

Masami TAKEUCHI

On Gulliver's way home from Brobdingnag, the captain who saved Gulliver hopes that he will "oblige the world by putting it [Gulliver's travel] in paper, and making it public". Gulliver promises to take the matter into his consideration. One of the reasons he hesitates is that "we were already overstocked with books of travels: ... my story could contain little besides common events, without those ornamental descriptions...with which most writers abound."¹⁾ After leaving the Houyhnhnmland, though he shows abhorrence against its publication, this suggestion is in fact received: that is to say, he writes his travels. The writing is a theme that I will deal with in this paper. An act of writing is non-existent convention among the Houyhnhnms who are loved and respected by Gulliver. That they have no literature or books is also the aspect that a number of critics have pointed out.²⁾ These critics who focus on the lack of writing reveal their explanations about Jonathan Swift's sense of writing and texts. Here I will discuss Gulliver's writing in detail. As to Gulliver's writing, differences of linguistic function between Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos should be focused on because the matter of language is deeply connected with Gulliver's writing. Also by his writing he can escape from the world of the Houyhnhnms who confined Gulliver there. Languages in *Gulliver's Travels*, therefore, may give a hint of the meaning of the fact that he publishes his travels. The purpose of this paper is to discuss Gulliver's confinement and his escape, especially in Part four, in the light of social discourse about confinement in the eighteenth century.

Gulliver and Confinement

Gulliver's Travels has a great deal of description of Gulliver's confinement in a wide sense. He finds himself bound head and foot when he wakes in Lilliput; in Brobdingnag he is often confined in a cage "like tame canary birds" (II, 180); in Laputa, he is confined on the flying island. In the Houyhnhnmland, however, it is the Yahoos who are confined; the Yahoos "were all tied by the neck with strong withes fastened to a beam" (276). Besides, their ordinary lives are under the Houyhnhnms' supervision as warders in prison. They know that the Yahoos feed on meat and love "shining stones" and so on. This relationship, confining and being confined, is applied to a relation with Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms; his secret of wearing clothes and his accident of attack by a female Yahoo who has an amorous desire to him are under their eyes. He is also under the supervision of the Houyhnhnms, as the Yahoos are. This relationship conceded between the three—that Gulliver and the Yahoos are the same species, and the Houyhnhnms can confine and supervise them—comes from their physical resemblance.

Excepting Part three, Gulliver is always seen as an extraordinary figure because of his body that is obviously different from that of the inhabitants in each nation. His body is a wonder and sometimes a menace. The Lilliputians call him "the (Great) Man-Mountain" (I, 69). Great Scholars in Brobdingnag who examine his shape determine that Gulliver cannot "be produced according to the regular Law of Nature" (II, 142). His wonderful body and the discrimination he suffered can be paraphrased into insanity physically: confinement and insanity are connected closely with each other in the light of social discourse in the eighteenth century. Michel Foucault, what is more, observes that confinement of the insane was an institutional creation concerned with various social regulations dating back to the seventeenth century. "A sensibility was born," he says, "which had drawn a line and laid a cornerstone, and which chose—only to banish. . . here reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arran-

ged for it in advance over a frenzied unreason" (64). English history tells us that those who are judged insane are compelled to be placed in a hospital, such as Bedlam, and to suffer confinement in order to cure the illness. Yet confinement in *Gulliver's Travels* does not have a means of attaining such a purpose; Gulliver is confined because of his figure's extraordinariness. Furthermore, we can add melancholy to the two other factors, confinement and insanity. "[T]he illness called 'melancholia'", as Raymond Klibansky explains, "was one mainly characterised by symptoms of mental change, ranging from fear, misanthropy and depression, to madness in its most frightful forms" (14). It is the Yahoos who incarnate clearly the disease of melancholy, an English malady which spread in England in the eighteenth century:

... a fancy would sometimes take a Yahoo to retire into a corner, to lie down and howl, and groan, and spurn away all that came near him, although he were young and fat, and wanted neither food nor water; nor did the servants [Houyhnhnms] imagine what could possibly ail him. (311)

"A fancy", "to retire into a corner" and "to lie down" are symptoms of melancholic patients. It is no doubt that some features of the Yahoos are able to be identified with human beings, especially an English man, such as Gulliver. To add to their physical resemblance this malady is regarded as an English characteristic. As for Gulliver's melancholy, the references to "oat" is worthy of analysis: Robert Burton says, "Bread that is made of baser grain, as pease, beans, oats, rye, or over-hard baked, crusty, and black, is often spoken against, as causing melancholy juice and wind" (222). Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms lives on "a paste or cake" made of "oats" (278-9). Also it foretells his melancholy that his first sight on entrance into the Houyhnhnmland is "several fields of oats" (269). According to the social discourse of melancholy Gulliver physically has a tendency to melancholy. At least we can derive this possibility out of the text. Confinement, melancholy and insanity are associated with each other

in the eighteenth century. It is a factual situation that those who are judged insane have been confined objects as compared with the confining subjects, the sane. In the Houyhnhnmland there is also a structure of binary oppositions: subject and object in terms of confinement and supervision; generally speaking reason and unreason. The structure of the Houyhnhnmland is composed of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos to whom Gulliver belongs. The common factors between Gulliver and the Yahoos are not only their bodies but also the English malady. Gulliver, however, says that the Yahoos are "the only animals in this country subject to any diseases" (309) and he "never had one hour's sickness" (279). Yet the resemblance between them is emphasized by the Houyhnhnms and by Gulliver himself who discusses it. In the end, he cannot "draw a line" between himself and the Yahoos.

Practical confinements occur in Part four. Before arriving at the Houyhnhnmland, for example, Gulliver encounters the resistance of crews on voyage and he is bound head and foot. In the Houyhnhnmland, as I have mentioned, Gulliver sees that the Yahoos are confined as if they take his place. On his way home from there he confines himself to his cabin in a ship and to his stables in his own country. Confinement, after all, is Gulliver's property. These confinements I have exemplified are all physical ones.

Another kind of confinement, contrary to physical one, is mental confinement; Gulliver says in an offending tone that Brobdingnag has "a *confined education*" (II, 174) and that the Laputians' thoughts and mind are "shut up" within music and mathematics (III, 206). Gulliver frowns at their extreme narrow views. Yet Gulliver's adherence to the Houyhnhnms is no less inferior than theirs; after returning home, he imitates the Houyhnhnms' gait and gesture and, according to his friend's words, Gulliver "trot[s] like a horse" (327). Besides, he avoids his family, and in spite of familiarizing with human beings he has friendship with two young stone-horses he obtained with the first money he laid out, and converses with them for four hours a day. Gulliver's condition is the following:

Gulliver, controlled by the exalted conception of virtue he has acquired from living with Houyhnhnms, and by his now fixed belief in the utter worthlessness of all yahoos, with whom he has come to group the human race, is unable to perceive even the most extraordinary goodness [of Pedro de Mendez] when it manifests itself in one of the hated species. (Case 121) ³⁾

This obsession with horses embodied reason and the antipathy to Yahoos remained in his mind even when he left the Houyhnhnmland. As well as Laputians, his thought and mind are "shut up" within the Houyhnhnms. Though Arthur E. Case uses the term "controlled" about Gulliver's condition, Arthur Clayborough remarks more correctly "Gulliver's...conduct is clearly fanatical" (152). It is a "fanatical" or enthusiastic respect for the Houyhnhnms that mental confinement means.

His enthusiasm for horses is, largely in a kind of negative way, caused by his first encounter with the Yahoos; "I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal. Nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy. So that thinking I had seen enough, full of contempt and aversion" (270). Compared with the Yahoos, the Houyhnhnms' cleanliness is their most outstanding feature. Gulliver's extreme abhorrence to the Yahoos, human beings in his country, drives him to keep always his nose well stopped with "rue, lavender, or tobacco leaves" in order to keep away their "intolerable smell" (345). Mental confinement exerts a physical function on himself: he shuts out even the air.

In short Gulliver is confined physically and mentally by the Houyhnhnms. This double confinement makes him not to get freedom from the Houyhnhnms and binds him to them.

In other three travels except the travel to the Houyhnhnmland, an escape from each remote nation is equal to freedom from each confinement. Though some aftereffects, such as a habit of speaking loudly after leaving Brobdingnag, remain, he can regain his daily life before long. Far away from the Houyhnhnmland, however, his physi-

cal escape from there succeeds but his mental escape is not completely accomplished. So he imposes a practical confinement on himself in a stable with horses. W.B.Carnochan says, "Gulliver... [is a] lonely figure in an enclosed or self enclosing landscape... [H]e has a tropism, enforced or self-sustaining, for silence" (19). His "silence" may mean a neigh, horse language which is not language at all. "Silence" is Gulliver's loss of language. Gulliver's mental confinement, an enthusiasm for Houyhnhnms, which is the motivation for his physical confinement, is connected with the matter of language.

Gulliver and Language

Lemuel Gulliver has a practical competence in languages. He could speak many foreign languages before his long travels. Besides he can master any nation's language, especially spoken language by comparing it with the other languages he has learned, and comes to speak fluently in no time. In Laputa, he introduces his original study on the etymology of "Laputa" (III, 203-4). In Part four, verbal communication is possible as a means of communication with the Houyhnhnms and has a feasibility which distinguishes Gulliver above all from the Yahoos. Yet the feasibility is not the critical difference between them so long as we pay attention to the Yahoo's attitude toward him: a Yahoo's "lifted up forepaw" seems to greet him and a female Yahoo has desire for him as a same species. Nevertheless, he manages to deny such a linkage. His effort is fulfilled in some degree. The most conspicuous difference between Gulliver and the Yahoos is on language. Gulliver succeeds in mastering horse language, which has a kind of absolute power and a large influence on the Yahoos; their debate "whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth," (318-9) indicates their power. On the other hand, the Yahoos' way of communication depends on the excrements by which they can converse with one other. Some Yahoos discharge them on Gulliver when they recognize him as an enemy and "a sort of ruling Yahoo", the leader, discharged them on his successor when he discards him. Excrements to the Yahoos are "the vilest expression

of contempt”⁴⁾ and “a magic instrument for self-expression and aggression.”⁵⁾ The Yahoos’ excrements, as it were, play the role of language and it functions as a way of their speaking. Unlike them, Gulliver who can speak the Houyhnhnms’ language seems to be close to them as their company. On the contrary, the Houyhnhnms try to note Gulliver’s trivial physical differences from the Yahoos’:

Your [Gulliver’s] mouth lying flat with your faces, you can hardly bite each other to any purpose, unless by consent. Then as to the claws upon your feet before and behind, they are so short and tender, that one of our Yahoos would drive a dozen of yours before him. (294)

They repeat these differences again and again as if they should regard him as a Yahoo unless they manage to testify Gulliver is not so. The Houyhnhnms’ monotonous remarks, however, show the proof that some parts of Gulliver’s body except their pointed ones are equal with the Yahoos. Their statement ascertains ironically his visible figure, his body as flesh, similar to the Yahoos and makes Gulliver incorporate with their institution, the subject and the object concerning confinement or supervision. The Houyhnhnms’ speech, specifically in their assembly, is absolutely influential on them. Therefore at the end of Part four the Houyhnhnms define Gulliver as the Yahoo’s species and oblige him to be banished from their land. Gulliver fails to divide himself from the Yahoos. Also his obtaining horse language, in order to classify himself from the Yahoos, comes to be in vain.

Secondly, I will focus on writing in *Gulliver’s Travels*. Gulliver sufficiently explains the events concerning written language in each nation, such as Lilliput’s writing manner which is “aslant from one corner of the paper to the other” (I, 93), his reading manner in Brobdingnag with ladder for him caused by the largeness and Academy’s “project for improving speculative knowledge by practical and mechanical operations” with bits of wood written all the word of their language (III, 227). As above, his sense of language, whether in

speech or writing, is very sensitive. Yet the Houyhnhnms have no letters:

I pointed to every thing, and enquired the name of it, which I wrote down in my journalbook when I was alone, I formed all I learned into the English alphabet, and writ the words down with the translations.... It cost me much trouble to explain to him [his master, a Houyhnhnm] what I was doing; for the inhabitants have not the least idea of books or literature. (280-1)

On the other hand, Gulliver says, "the words [the Houyhnhnms' speech] might with little pains be resolved into an alphabet more easily than the Chinese" (273). The reports of officers in Lilliput tell us that his journalbook is one of his commodities. Though writing has been his ordinary action, for the Houyhnhnms this habit is completely absent because writing is one of the "new ones which Nature had not given us [the Houyhnhnms]" (306).

There are some common characterizations between the Houyhnhnms and the Brobdingnagians, such as the emphasis on cleanliness; Glumdalclitch whom Gulliver loves always cleans and makes his clothes herself afresh. The notion of writing in Brobdingnag where it is less important is true of the Houyhnhnms:

No law of that country must exceed in words the number of letters in their alphabet, which consists only of two and twenty.... They are expressed in the most plain and simple terms, wherein those people are not mercurial enough to discover above one interpretation. And to write a comment upon any law is a capital crime. ... [T] heir precedents are so few, (II, 176-7)

In Part four Gulliver also says that "under the name of *precedents*, they [lawyers] produce as authorities to justify the most iniquitous opinions", and "all their laws written, which they take special care to multiply" (296-7). His attack on writing stems from the possibility of extended explanation.⁶⁾ Essentially Gulliver seems to feel the fear of writing. His absolute respect to the Houyhnhnms intensifies it

and comes to exclude written language itself.

In addition to the lack of writing, the Houyhnhnms have no words taken into English, such as "lie", "death" and "vice". They have no notions corresponding to those words. Therefore, Gulliver often has some trouble when he talks about his country. For the Houyhnhnms his signifier does not always correspond correctly to the proper signified. According to Gulliver's explanation of the content of the story in Chapter nine in Part four, the Houyhnhnms have "defectiveness" in their language. Gulliver concedes that their language is "defective", a fault. In fact for him, language, which must be the unique communicating medium between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms, is very unreliable. It is not perfect enough to accomplish his hope to classify Gulliver into the Houyhnhnms. It is significant that the first utterance Gulliver pronounces correctly is the word "Yahoo". Contrary to that, to pronounce "Houyhnhnms" is difficult for him and he does not succeed in pronouncing the latter word so well as the former one. The Houyhnhnms' language, which seems to be common between them, does not become "a line" between Gulliver and the Yahoos.

In the Houyhnhnmland, language itself, whether speech or writing, is less important. For they have no words "lie" and "vice" because these words can be substitutable for the word "Yahoos." The Houyhnhnms depend on what they can see and experience rather than on language itself. They say of Gulliver as the following:

[my master said that] I far exceed in shape, colour, and cleanliness, all the Yahoos of his nation, although I seemed to fail in strength and agility, which must be imputed to my different way of living from those other brutes, and besides, I was not only endowed with a faculty of speech, but like wise with some rudiments of Reason(303)

First of all, their speech begins with the physical difference between them and "a faculty of speech" is enumerated at the end. This order has a significant feature of the Houyhnhnms. They insist that Gul-

liver's body is their first consideration. The reason the Houyhnhnms hate the Yahoos derive first from their deformity and dirtiness, and next from their lives. Gulliver's expulsion that the Houyhnhnms determine through their assembly is also caused by his body similar to the Yahoos. For the Houyhnhnms' language is inferior to what they see, which is the first thing under consideration. However, Gulliver follows their manner and comes to consider physical images rather than languages. After returning home, Gulliver's life has no change compared with that in the Houyhnhnm-land. He avoids the Yahoos because of their smell and lives with horses whose way of communication is not speech itself but a mere neigh, "silence" in terms of human beings. As for language, he shut himself up in the manner of the Houyhnhnms. Here we can conclude that language between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms is limited and not always available, so he "exterminates" his own language and becomes obsessed with what he can see and smell by his own physical senses.

Yet Gulliver writes in his language and publishes his own travel story by written language when five years have passed since he returned.

Gulliver's Escape

As for Gulliver's escape from each nation, he spontaneously leaves Lilliput and a few nations in Part three. On the other hand, an eagle happens to lead him away from Brobdingnag and the Houyhnhnms' assembly determines to banish him from the Houyhnhnm-land: that is to say, he compulsively leaves the latter nations. His main aftereffect, that is, the confusion of his changing environments, is stronger in the latter parts than the former ones. His escape from the Houyhnhnm-land, furthermore, is rather special.

In Chapter twelve of Part four, in an address to the "gentle reader", his dialogue with himself is added to his travel story. He says here, "my sole intention [of writing up my travels] was the *public good*" (341). Also this statement continues, with a transformation from a form of dialogue, to "A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to his

Cousin Sympson" in which Gulliver censures Sympson, his travels' publisher, bitterly. In these chapters, even after five years from leaving the Houyhnhnmland, his enthusiasm for Houyhnhnms and his aversion for the Yahoos are deeply rooted.

Simultaneously his deliberate use of language is seen here and there in the "Letter", such as "Brobdingrag (...not erroneously 'Brobdingnag')" (40), his using the phrase, instead of "lie", "*say the thing that was not*" which Houyhnhnms use, and the sea-Yahoos' languages:

I hear some of our sea-Yahoos find fault with my sea-language, as not proper in many parts, nor now in use... insomuch, as I remember upon each return to mine own country, their old dialect was so altered, that I could hardly understand the new.... We neither of us are able to deliver our conceptions in a manner intelligible to the other. (39-40)

Here, Gulliver emphasizes the linguistic difference between him and the Yahoos. He is still insistent on language in order to distinguish himself from the Yahoos. Gulliver claims that their language causes the situation that he and the Yahoos never comprehend each other. In fact we see the fact that the word "Brobdingrag" remains a wrong word "Brobdingnag" without any revision for which he asked Sympson. His language hardly manages to convey the meaning correctly to him, a Yahoo.

However, there is a paradox. It is a valid idea that if Gulliver respected the Houyhnhnms absolutely, as Koji Watanabe suggests, he would not have published Gulliver's travels, because writing is against the Houyhnhnms' ideal life (197). Yet he writes. Gulliver, perhaps unconsciously, produces the contradiction. This action seems to make an escape from the Houyhnhnms possible. The publication of his travels drives him to abandon the Houyhnhnms' manners.

The writing, furthermore, subverts their situation, too: the subject and the object concerning confinement and supervision. In his turn, he confines the Houyhnhnms' lives within his text in order to

introduce them to the readers as an ideal model. His writing undermines their relationship of power. The act of writing itself is a revolution against the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver can unconsciously escape from his fanatical obsession with the Houyhnhnms within his writing even though it is just only a performance not based on his will. His purpose that "my sole intention [of writing travels] was the *public good*" functions as an explosive powder, which can separate his intention and his action completely.

Some critics, focusing on the aspect that the Houyhnhnms have no letters, interpret it as Swift's satire. Terry Castle, considering Claude Levi-Strauss' anecdote or Jacques Derrida's philosophy, says:

The operation of this myth of writing [speech is primary and writing is secondary] in Levi-Strauss is patent; a pure (oral) society is disrupted by intervention of a writing, moreover that points up, pathetically its own radical shoddiness, its inauthenticity as signifier.... Part four of *Gulliver's Travels* is, in one reading, a complex meditation on the problematic nature of writing and the possible corruption implied by the Text. (32)

This myth is available to the Houyhnhnms' society because they have no notion of lies and vices stemming from writing, and of "Precedents" against which Swift and Gulliver make an attack. Castle sees writing as "a Fall" linked to Genesis and as the inevitable for human kind. Here, the relationship among Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos is determined by a medium of writing. Writing belongs neither to the Houyhnhnms nor to the Yahoos. Gulliver who intends to disseminate "*public good*" imitating the Houyhnhnms' lives detached from the Houyhnhnms' conventions further and further. From the Houyhnhnms' point of view, Gulliver commits "a Fall", writing, but the action is not ascribed to the Yahoos. Gulliver makes a complete escape from the Houyhnhnm-land where the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos live.

Gulliver's confinement is expressed in various forms in *Gulli-*

ver's Travels, which can be explained by social discourses in the eighteenth century, which are behind a large part of the text. Discrimination caused by these discourses is reflected in the relationship among Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. Discourses of insanity infiltrate into the text and bring Gulliver into mental confinement and bring the Yahoos, namely the embodiment of melancholy, into physical confinement by the Houyhnhnms; Gulliver is fanatical to the Houyhnhnms, and the Yahoos as Gulliver's agent are controlled under the Houyhnhnms. Even when Gulliver is apart from the Houyhnhnm-land he cannot escape from the Houyhnhnms' virtue and cleanliness: his mental confinement continues. Yet it is by his writing that Gulliver can be released from this confinement. For Gulliver who is sensitive to language itself, the matter of language has occupied a very significant position. The inhabitants in his ideal countries, Brobdingnag and the Houyhnhnm-land, are unconcerned with language, especially writing. As to more radical Houyhnhnms, they do not even have notion of writing. As a result of his following them, Gulliver's silence in a stable straightforwardly expresses his denial of language as writing. Yet against the Houyhnhnms that have no letters and little interest in language, Gulliver reobtains his language as writing, which works as the device of escaping completely from a spell by his ideal creatures, the Houyhnhnms. His re-acquirement of his language as writing, is the end of his travels. Though the result his writing brings is ironically incompatible with the worship of the Houyhnhnms he repeats, it is by his writing per se that Gulliver declares the close of his travels and succeeds in escaping from the Houyhnhnms.

Notes

- 1) See Castle, Watanabe and Wood.
- 2) Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), Part II, 189. All the subsequent quotations from the text are referred to this edition and are followed by a part number except part four and a page number.

- 3) Critics are divided into two groups; some see Houyhnhnms as an ideal and the other as a kind of grotesque. Case belongs to the latter.
- 4) Jae Num Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 109.
- 5) Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision," in *Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays*. ed. Ernest Tuveson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 42.
- 6) Swift uses "precedents" as a manner of satire in his *Drapier's Letters*; "There is nothing hath perplexed me more than this Doctrine of *Precedents*" (*Drapier's Letters*, 40). See more "Some Observations upon a Paper, called, The Report of the Committee of the Most Honourable the Privy Council in England, relating to Wood's half-pence" in *Drapier's Letters*. Besides, this satire of extended explanation is seen in his *The Tale of Tub*, in which three sons added various explanations to their father's (written) will, which is described as the Old Testament. According to Castle, the breakdown of meaning in *The Tale of Tub* brings about a hermeneutic catastrophe or hermeneutic nightmare. (35)

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