

## Indecent Particulars

### Cover Letter to the Second Draft

Your comments from the first draft were very helpful. I started my revisions simply by reading over my discussion of *Gulliver's Travels* and trying to make sense of it (kind of like a reverse outline). What I realized was that I needed to narrow down some ideas so that I could work with them, so I created the distinction between two describable physical features— *defining physical characteristics* and *universal bodily actions*— and emphasized that the subject of this essay concerns the latter more than the former (for the different outcomes are argued to be greatly influenced by the differences of the level of focus in the vulgar bodily actions), and that the former is suppressed in both texts (also meaningful).

Specifically, I tried to pick apart the two apologies more, shifted around the idea of appearance in the essay to fit more closely in the conversation about bodily actions, and edited the claim in the introduction to match.

I did less work on the section on Cavendish. Unfortunately it is still quite separate from the Swift analysis, but I did try to improve the connection between the non-physical (i.e., the spirits and the worlds of their creation) and the physical characteristics.

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“... I was able to turn upon my Right, and to easy myself with making Water; which I very plentifully did, to the great astonishment of the People, who conjecturing by my Motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that side to avoid the Torrent which fell with such noise and violence from me” (Swift 27).

Jonathan Swift doesn't hold back from providing a wealth of crude imagery in *Gulliver's Travels* of the more indelicate aspects of human existence that often are overlooked in fantastical plotlines. In an adventure encompassing humans and other intelligent beings of all sizes and philosophical capacities, this detail is marginal at most, but that is far from the case in Swift's writing. In the similarly imaginative work *The Blazing World* by Margaret Cavendish, there is a separation between spiritual adventure and human unpleasantness. Both protagonists live with inhabitants of unfamiliar nations and discover imperfections in human society, but with opposite outcomes: Gulliver discovers a hatred for mankind and himself, while the Empress notices the flaws in human society but is content with her new knowledge. The difference is largely a result of the discrepancy between the two protagonists in the focus on ordinary bodily functions, even very normal activities like excretion; putting an emphasis on these inherently undesirable actions that unify human existence causes such the violent rejection of humankind that Gulliver experiences, and the Empress's blissful ignorance of the same actions allows her to appreciate her new knowledge.

The discussion of the nature of “human” bodies in fantasy worlds of intelligent beings with human bodies, unintelligent beings with human bodies, intelligent humanoid beings, and other life with a human-or-greater intellectual capacity warrants a brief discussion on what should be considered human. It

would be underwhelming to treat only the Europeans (and other real-worldly citizens) of the two novels as human, and therefore “human” will refer loosely to the bipedal animal species of the Blazing World, the tiny Lilliputians and the large Brobdingnagians, and both the Houyhnhnms and their slaves the Yahoos. It would be unfair to exclude any of these when the subject texts are weakly based on literal meaning; any of these foreign beings with mental or physical likeness to humans are good sources of comparison to humans in the unlike sense.

Instead of describing defining characteristics of his body, Gulliver spends considerable effort to describe the *astonishment of the People* and the *violence* of the *Torrent* of his urine. Repeatedly. He apologizes after the second urine scene, explaining that he “would not have dwelt so long upon a Circumstance, that perhaps at first sight may appear not very momentous, if I had not thought it necessary to justify my Character” (Swift 30). The *momentous* aspect of peeing is not explicitly given, but the experience is described to be one of great urgency and shame. These emotions must be quite influential to him, since he takes a takes further opportunities to describe his urine. Gulliver decides to urinate on the palace to put out a fire without apology to the reader for its impact on the plot is apparent; but when a fourth passage regarding Gulliver’s bodily discharge is mentioned, this time in Brobdingnag, another apology is affixed. The apology is a note on the usefulness of the discussion of “the like Particulars, which however insignificant they may appear to grovelling vulgar Minds, yet will certainly help a Philosopher” (Swift 89).

At first glance, this second apology may appear to be in same the flavor of the frequent promises Gulliver makes on his earnestness directly to the reader— in which only a credence trust is imbued— except that it makes a different kind of promise. Rather than asking for trust, this apology asks for a less literal (“vulgar”) interpretation and more of an interpretive view (that which will “help a Philosopher”) of his physical actions and the associated consequences. It’s a conspicuous *LOOK HERE* billboard. Swift simultaneously almost completely neglects to address non-universally-human aspects of Gulliver, such as physical characteristics. The best you can do is infer his exact skin tone, eye color, height, body build,

voice, and other personal features; the only physical descriptions are offhand results of storytelling, such as the comparison with the Yahoos (which only confirm several features being more human than ape) and the description of his new clothing obtained from each location. These too are universal characteristics of humankind. Unlike urination, however, these are *defining* characteristics of a person, which classify people in descriptions; urination and other basic human actions cannot define an individual. Either category contributes to the whole person, but Swift chooses to focus completely on the latter.

If the basic (external) human actions had to be listed, the list is short. Eating, Sleeping. Urinating and defecating. Gulliver is on an adventure! Food is diverse based on the societies and their resources, much like his clothes; it is a part of an adventure. But the other basic needs are universal to his adventures. Sleep is periodically discussed, and specifics are not discussed here; and the latter need can be *momentous* as Gulliver states in the first apology.

Momentous because it gives the Lilliputians a natural human action to blame (in the case of the royal palace fire), momentous because it is the most vulgar and nonconventional detail in other novels, and momentous because it shows that Gulliver feels a lasting shame when he can't urinate without a conventional bathroom. The feeling of shame is mirrored into a feeling of hatred for the Yahoos, who also have the same natural urges to discharge waste, and excrete on Gulliver when provoked. These actions by Gulliver and the Yahoos leave a negative impression of the human race— more exactly, the human body.

Cavendish takes a different approach and leaves the physical human elements, both in the defining physical description (which Swift ignores) but also in universal bodily action, to the imagination of the reader. Before becoming the Empress, the young lady protagonist is described to be astoundingly beautiful, surviving “only, by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods” (Cavendish 126). Her acquaintance the Duchess of Newcastle is likewise not described except for her honesty; neither are the bear-men or other men-like beings described other than by name of their associated animal, and by their bipedal-ness.

No further account of the inhabitants of the Blazing World nor the ordinary humans are given. The only other visual clue is that Cavendish is the flesh-and-blood Duchess of Newcastle, but even that doesn't provide much insight into how her disembodied soul might appear to the Empress.

The Empress spends a great deal of time talking with the most wise *immaterial spirits*, with which she discusses the materiality of things. Naturally, because they lack a body, it is the ultimate experiment in separation of body and mind. The spirits use some form of "corporeal bodies" to move, but the exact nature of these bodies is not emphasized. The spirits repeat to the Empress that they themselves are not made of matter; that "spirits, being incorporeal, have no motion but from our corporeal vehicles, so that [they] move by the help of [their] bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us; for pure spirits are immovable" (Cavendish 168); and therefore they can have only a "supernatural knowledge" (Cavendish 169). Neither can they speak without a body, so the nature of the conversation between the two is also vague.

The distinction between *spirits* (like the immaterial spirits) and *souls* (of people) is unclear, for they seem to have the same ability to inhabit bodies and exist body-less, but differ in that immaterial spirits do not originate from a person nor have gender; for the sake of this claim, the difference isn't very important, because they are similar enough in their body-less-ness. Later, when the souls of the Empress and the Duchess leave to visit the Duchess's land, a spirit is left in charge of the Empress's body.

The curious Empress then asks the Duchess how the latter's body was kept when her soul was away attending the Empress, to which the Duchess replied that it was governed by "her sensitive and rational corporeal motions" (Cavendish 190). By this absurd state of existence— a body existing without a soul— Cavendish implies that the body is, as it is to the immaterial spirits, only a convenient *vehicle* that a person is free to take leave from. It also implies that the natural actions of the body— eating, sleeping, and excretion— can be carried out autonomously, or at least without the mind's supervision.

Not only can the souls leave to places off to places in the real world, as the Empress does with the Duchess, but a person can also live in a world of their own creation, free of bodily wants. So proceeds the

Duchess, who creates various worlds in an attempt to be the ruler of one, and the Empress in a similar manner (Cavendish 188). The spirits recommend this over attempting to conquer any of the real realms, which nature makes infinitely numerous and various, for “by creating a world within yourself, you may enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition, and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you” (Cavendish 186). The world the Empress makes may be considered a metaphor for the world Cavendish makes, for it is an imaginary world, *without control or opposition*, with whatever power to *alter* it, and for the purpose of offering *pleasure and delight*. And a notable piece of that bliss is the lack of attention paid to ordinary bodily actions, and instead to hypothetical discourse. To be specific, there is only one mention of food for the Empress, and no mention of sleep or bodily excretion at all except through the vague term, *corporeal motions*.

Take into consideration two more case studies: the Laputians and the animal-men. The animal-men are the professionals: scientists, mathematicians, and orators, but not once are they spoken to outside of the knowledge of their field, except for the brief moment after the Empress was rescued. On the contrary, the Laputians are a civilization of mathematical and astronomical geniuses (analogues to Cavendish’s spider-men and bird-men), but Swift disrupts their image twice. First, the greatest thinkers are lost in thought and require loud “bladders” used to draw attention away from speculation and to the real world. As these bladders are used on walks when a Laputian “is so wrapped up in Cogitation, that he is in manifest danger of falling down every Precipice” (Swift 148), it is safe to say that even the basic human functions cannot be carried out independently. (The image of a grown, wise Laputian requiring attending to in the bathroom like an untrained baby is a disturbing one.) Secondly, the imagery of the experiment with recycling excrement in food (168), or the episode of the dog dying of explosive diarrhea (170), are likewise unappealing and continue the motif of human excrement. Had these geniuses not displayed to Gulliver so openly these experiments, he may have held as high an esteem for them as the Empress did her respective experts.

It seems a little far-fetched to take two nontrivial texts, Swift's and Cavendish's, and claim that this single factor plays such a large role. However, the two texts are remarkably similar, and few details contrast so oppositely. Both tales include the magical passage to unexplored worlds of intelligent creatures never seen by man; both the Empress and Gulliver are clever and likeable enough to learn the language of and earn a high rank among the foreign society; and both endeavor to learn more about their world by assimilating the perspectives and knowledge of the beings they encounter. Both texts also trivialize (in the form of neglect) the value of physical appearance, and Cavendish even imagines two body-dissociated forms, where appearance and natural urges no longer exist. The difference is that the Empress neglects to mention any rude moments, which are inevitable for the human body, while Gulliver isn't afraid to mention them. While it may seem like insignificant, the universality of these indecent particulars for human beings and the frequency at which they occur in *Gulliver's Travels* make it a crucial factor in his disdain towards human beings.

Works Cited

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Cavendish, Margaret. *The Blazing World and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, 2004.



## Inner Worlds and Isolated Humans

In their respective adventures, the Empress of Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* and Gulliver of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* encounter a great number of intelligent species, with which they converse. The nature of both societies either encourage the protagonist to seek internal adventures within their soulless body, or cause him to

Bodies are infinitely various and numerous, good for studying  
 Bodies are immutable, we cannot change who we are  
 Bodies can be studied and operated independently of souls  
 Experience adventures without using your body

## INTRODUCTION

The discussion of the nature of “human” bodies in fantasy worlds of intelligent humans, unintelligent humans, intelligent humanoid beings, and other life with a human-or-greater intelligence warrants an agreement on what should be considered a human. The answer, given the context of these allegorical, fable-like adventures, is that any of these beings can be interpreted to be human, and to view their (sometimes outrightly ridiculous) physical features symbolically. (It is not Cavendish's goal to convince the reader that the *Blazing World* exists, nor is it Swift's goal to relate true stories from the islands of Lilliput, nor are the authors asserting that bear-men or horses are, in some simultaneous realm, equally as talented as humans.) Limiting the analysis to the protagonists and the few moments with the other ordinary humans would be underwhelming and failing to capture many important, human moments from both novels.

## THE SOUL, AND THE IMMATERIAL

Before she becomes the Empress, the young lady is described to be astoundingly beautiful, enough so that the light of her beauty is enough to keep her alive. Her acquaintance the Duchess of Newcastle is not described except for her honesty. Neither are the bear-men or other men-like beings described other than by name, and by the fact that they are all bipedal (which strengthens the claim that they are representative of humans).

Before she becomes the Empress, the young lady survives “only, by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods” (Cavendish 126); this is the only description provided of her physical appearance. Nor was any description made of the Emperor, nor her acquaintance Duchess of Newcastle; the latter being both a reference to the Margaret Cavendish, the real-life Duchess of Newcastle, and a disembodied soul, makes the image very confusing. Does she see a person, a holographic ghost, or nothing at all?

The same applies to the immaterial spirits which whom the Empress converses, for they are body-less: they use “bodies” to move, but the nature of these bodies is not clear. The spirits emphasize that they themselves are not made of matter; that “spirits, being incorporeal, have no motion but from our corporeal vehicles, so that [they] move by the help of [their] bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us; for pure spirits are immovable” (Cavendish 168); and therefore they can have only a “supernatural knowledge” (Cavendish 169). Neither can they speak without a body, so the nature of the conversation between the two is also vague.

The spirits then assert that a spirit can control a body “as well ... as man can arm himself with a gauntlet of steel” (Cavendish 180), after which the Empress calls the Duchess to be her scribe. (Whose body the Duchess inhabits, whether the Duchess's or someone else's, is not clear either.) Here, Cavendish fails to distinguish between *spirits* (like the immaterial spirits) and *souls* (of flesh-and-blood people), for they seem to have the same ability to inhabit bodies. Later, when the Empress and the Duchess spiritually (soul-ly, if the difference matters) leave to visit the Duchess's land, a spirit was left in charge of the Empress's body.

The curious Empress then asks the Duchess how the latter's body was kept when her soul was away attending the Empress, to which the Duchess replied that it was governed by “her sensitive and rational corporeal motions” (Cavendish 190). By this absurd state of existence— a body existing without a soul, controlled either by an

external spirit or *corporeal motions*— Cavendish implies that the body is, as it is to the immaterial spirits, only a convenient *vehicle*, and something that a person is free to take leave from.

And not only can the souls leave to places off to places in the real world, as the Empress does with the Duchess, but a person can also live in a world of their own creation, free of bodily wants. So proceeds the Duchess, who creates various worlds of her own in an attempt to be the ruler of one in the theme of Thales, Pythagoras, Epicures, Aristotle, Descartes, and of her own imagination, and the Empress in a similar manner (Cavendish 188). The spirits recommend this against attempting to conquer any of the real realms, of which nature makes infinitely numerous and various, for “by creating a world within yourself, you may enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition, and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you” (Cavendish 186).

This point is hugely impactful, because it can encompass all artistic enterprises. To take a literal example, Cavendish places herself, the Duchess of Newcastle, into *The Blazing World*, as a powerful and respected advisor; and her character then recurses the behavior by creating philosophical worlds within herself. Or, the Empress’s entry into the Blazing World may be some worldbuilding practice of her own; in both of their cases, they do as the spirits predict: *enjoy* their creation, find a blissful lack of *control or opposition*, and have the ability of *altering* it in whatever manner they please. This worldbuilding gives the same kind of *disembodied* freedom that makes Cavendish’s stories so appealing, much as it does with other fantasies, or even in the modern equivalent of worldbuilding games like Minecraft. The pure fantastical element of Cavendish’s writing, from the Utopian harmony of all anthropod species to the elements contrary to current scientific knowledge (and no more than speculative in contemporary science), as well as the fact that most of the Empress’s adventures are carried out through discourse with other intellectuals rather than physical endeavors, gives the impression that the world’s greatest, most unrestricted adventures are spiritual. The weaker implication is that the human body can still function without a mind by simple *rational, corporeal motions*, so it is possible for a person to truly drift away in their thoughts and let their body run in autopilot mode.

#### A GREATER PHYSICAL

Swift introduces a different view through Gulliver’s travels. While a great part of Gulliver’s interactions with the other species involve dialogue, the adventures are significantly more physically-oriented. In Lilliput alone, he gets tied up and poked with tiny non-poisoned arrows, urinates on the royal palace to save it from fiery destruction, and drags along an entire miniature fleet by hand.

The second disagreement with the immaterial spirits’ prediction of inner worlds is that, while Gulliver is saved and is put into high regard by the people of honor in all four adventures by his wit and good-nature, there is a turning point in every adventure that evicts him from the island and back to England. This is unsurprising because of the contemporary gender stereotypes: Cavendish was an early (seventeenth-century) female novelist to take advantage of literature as a means of adventure, being restricted physically; but Swift was a male of a similar time and was more at leisure to engage in these physical activities.

Like the Empress, there is no mention of Gulliver’s appearance: the only clues given are in his comparisons with the Yahoos, which have longer nails and darker skin than he does. However, there is detail about changes in his clothing, but only as it relates to weathering, passage of time, and the materials at hand: a little logistical plot detail.

A fair description of the members of each society Gulliver encounters is given, but there isn’t much to comment on these literal descriptions, because they mimic well-known images (albeit perhaps scaled). The Lilliputians are small humans; the Brobdingnagians are large humans; the Houyhnhnms are horses; the Yahoos are (more primitive) humans. There is nothing really surprising to any of this: these societies all formed and act similarly to humankind, and various important people were able to have intelligent conversations with Gulliver. Actually, Gulliver having understood for a large part the motives of the ruling classes, even those that wished to evict him, these societies are all politically-aligned to those of Europe. The only thing setting Gulliver apart from the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians is size, for otherwise they are perfectly compatible.

The Houyhnhnms are similar to Cavendish’s animal-men (bear-men, fish-men, bird-men, etc.). The animal-men have the ability to observe the world and debate just as humans do, the only difference being in their

physical capabilities (e.g., the bird-men with flight, and the worm-men of underground travel). The Houyhnhnms possess the ability to tame Yahoos and even do surprisingly nimble tasks like thread a needle.

While the animal-men from the Blazing World were part of Cavendish's inner adventure, the fear caused by difference in physical bodies cause Gulliver to be thrown out of Lilliput and Houyhnhnm land.

## CONCLUSION

Brainstorm about the body

Quotes from Blazing World

“No, answered they; but, on the contrary, natural material bodies give spirits motion; for we spirits, being incorporeal, have no motion but from our corporeal vehicles, so that we move by the help of our bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us; for pure spirits are immovable” (168)

“No, said they; nor could we have any bodily sense, but only knowledge” (168)

“Not a natural, answered they, but a supernatural knowledge, which is a far better knowledge than a natural.” (169)

Men and abnormal cruelty 176

“We wonder, proceeded the spirits, that you desire to be Empress of a terrestrial world., whenas you can create your self a celestial world if you please. What, said the Empress, can any mortal be a creator? Ys, answered the spirits; for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or skull” 185

Quotes from Gulliver’s travels

Physical bodies: the small men, the large men, the philosophical men, the truthful men  
Bodies are a way to lead ppl to realize stuff when it is out of line with their knowledge

Bodies are just a medium for which transportation can be carried out

Limitations in the physical world create more creative other worlds

The immaterial spirits seem to be the most wise, and then the fish-men, and the other men, and then the hoo-mans

- Ghosts also tend to be wise

In gulliver’s travels, all of the different species act humanoid and are somewhat alike in their intelligences and governments, but the horses (being less dextrous) are of the best minds

Bodies are the works of nature, and therefore infinitely various, wondrous, and immutable. People can study spirits

“She had never heard of a medicine that could renew old age, and render it beautiful, vigorous and strong: nor would she have so easily believed it, had it been a medicine prepared by art; for she knew that art, being nature’s changeling, was not able to produce such a powerful effect, but being that the gum did grow naturally, she did not so much scruple at it; for she knew that nature’s works are so various and wonderful, that no particular creature is able to trace her ways.” (157)

Drugs and altering artificial effects, not altering their inherent, proper and particular natures

Genderbent — not a thing? Women are a thing

The chief method of obtaining knowledge was by the means of studying other bodies — i.e., the physical attributes of other things (i.e., sensible things)

Correlation between level of observation, intelligence, and dexterity? What about agility? What about the circumstances from which they came?

Yahoos and humans are physically the same, so there has to be some explanation of why they are so different — they have the same physical capabilities, for the most part

The world is for studying but our bodies are untouchable

Physical travelling, labor are important

Chaos theory in the creation of these societies

Mind-palace, immaterial spirits and fortune

What does it mean to have opposable thumbs

Importance of language, of speech — physical/symbolic communication and understanding

Is intelligence the only factor that saved these ppl?

Gulliver was saved by his wit and goodness of his heart

Empress was saved by her beauty, wit, religion

These were both the best of people, utopian ppl in a utopian world

THESIS: The human body is a sort of imperfect, but immutable thing that is infinitely various and curious, and highly dependent on the environment from which it was formed.

But Gulliver's and Cavendish's worlds were both worlds created allegorically and not really meant to represent real ppl — but the *separation of societies*, and the *ignorance of these societies wrt each other*, is something very apparent in both novels

The difference in the bodies represent the vast differences in different societies and the resistance and ignorance they have of each other and the change necessary to accommodate another

INTRODUCTION w/ above thesis

BP1: Definition of human beings from the different things