Limits of Comedy in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction: A Study of Three Works

by

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Abstract
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This thesis explores the nature of Comedy, concentrating on the work of three eighteenth-century writers, Fielding, Sterne, and Swift. It is concerned with what might be called the centrifugal movement of comedy (there is also centripetal comedy), with heavy emphasis on the endings of three works. The first section, on Joseph Andrews, investigates that moral comedy which removes the masks from the self-deceived in society, the second section, on A Sentimental Journey, investigates comedy through the self-deception of the narrator, and the third, on Gulliver's Travels, the comedy of "the discrepancy between man's true nature and his pridefully self-deceived affectations of grandeur." The purpose of this examination is to test the limits of comedy, that is, to see at what points given comic works tend to go over into mere purposeless laughter or, in another direction, into non-humorous criticism. These are the lower limits of farce and invective. As an upper limit to comedy, there is joy or ecstasy. In another scale, or continuum, the limits are the breakdown of communication with the reader and the movement into tragedy. It is hoped that through the empirical analysis of three quite different comic works, one may arrive at a clearer conception of the
nature of comedy itself. If one can mark the points at which the comic becomes clearly something else, one may hope to delimit the mode, to set up the geometrical points (as it were) that establish its boundaries, its configuration.
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No one has ever formulated a definition of comedy that has adequately accommodated all of its artistic manifestations. Comedy is a generic art form and, by nature, one that is not easily systematized. The comic spirit may embrace a multitude of facets, many of which are at variance with each other. Although some of the facets of comedy may be incompatible together, alone they can represent important dimensions of the comic expression in art. In exercising his faculties of selection, the comic artist must confine himself and his art to certain limits, which, at the expense of one direction of exploration, will open new vistas in another direction.

This thesis is an exploratory one. Its concern is to investigate the limits of artistic expressions of the comic spirit. Consider a fan-like structure as a conceptual metaphor for comedy. Like a fan, comedy consists of a flexible framework enclosing a variable surface area. It may be contracted or fanned out, depending on its use. At extreme concision, all that remains are its essential characteristics. At its greatest expansion that essence begins to break down. Like a fan, comedy may be extended only so far before it collapses. When internal artistic pressure is applied to the flexible comic form, it accommodates that pressure only up to a point. Extended as far as it can go, comedy may reach a limit in accomplishing
its aims or in conveying its meanings. Advanced in one direction, comedy may become invective; in another, it may become farce. At its upper limits, comedy may merge into something more directly affirmative than itself. At other points, it may display a rupture of communication or affinities to tragedy. At each of these points, comedy has reached a limit. In fact, one may well define an art form by the very nature of the limitations which it involves. That is the method of this thesis.

For three writers of prose fiction in the eighteenth century, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and Jonathan Swift, comedy was an attitude toward life as well as an expression of it. Each utilized the comic vision in a vastly different manner. Each explored different directions of comedy, but each pushed comedy to its limit in at least one of these directions. In his Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding proposes a theory of comedy or, as he terms it, the "Ridiculous." This is a convenient point with which to begin. *Joseph Andrews* represents the artistic embodiment of Fielding's comic doctrine, and an investigation will be made of any inconsistencies which may appear between his theory and his practice. Neither Sterne nor Swift formulated a comic theory of his own, but by the time Fielding's comic limits have been explored, a partial theory of comedy will have evolved, which, when tangentially applied
to Sterne, will illuminate his art. New dimensions will be added to the comic fan and this cumulative process will be carried over into the comic art of Swift in order to investigate its boundaries.

The three sections which comprise this thesis provide a running commentary on the works at hand—*Joseph Andrews*, *A Sentimental Journey*, and *Gulliver's Travels*. The application of comic theory to each of these works has, not unexpectedly, proved to be not only the critical testing of a theory but also an approach that has shed some light on the central concerns of the works themselves. Briefly, the first section, on *Joseph Andrews*, explores that moral comedy which removes the masks from the self-deceived in society, the second section, on *A Sentimental Journey*, explores comedy through the self-deception of the narrator, and the third, on *Gulliver's Travels*, the comedy of "the discrepancy between man's true nature and his pridefully self-deceived affectations of grandeur." It is hoped that through the empirical analysis of three quite different comic works, one may arrive at a clearer conception of the nature of comedy itself. If one can mark the points at which the comic becomes clearly something else, one may hope to delimit the mode, to set up the geometrical points (as it were) that establish its boundaries, its configuration.
I

**Joseph Andrews**

Comedy is a way of looking at life. But it is more than this; it is a formal way of looking at life. It implies certain formal techniques and a special point of view. Wylie Sypher says that "the comic perception comes only when we take a double view, that is, a human view of ourselves, a perspective by incongruity."¹ In *Joseph Andrews* Henry Fielding puts this comic double view of life to work to reveal "the only source of the true Ridiculous which (as it appears to me) is affectation. But though it arises from one spring only, when we consider the infinite streams into which this one branches, we shall presently cease to admire at the copious field it affords to an observer. Now, affectation proceeds from one of these two causes, vanity or hypocrisy: for as vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause; so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavor to avoid censure, by concealing our vices under an appearance of their virtues."² Fielding's comic double vision is an intellectual perception of the discrepancy between what human beings affect to be and what they actually are. George Meredith affirms the intellectual aspect of comedy when he remarks, "the laughter of comedy is impersonal and of unrivaled politeness, nearer a smile—often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humour of the mind."³
The technique of comic perception implies a certain point of view from which to regard human beings or the human derivatives of fictional comedy. According to Maynard Mack,

for this kind of vision we must be not inside the character but outside him, in a position that compels us to observe discrepancies between the persuasive surfaces of personalities as they see themselves and these personalities as they are. Thus the point of view that ours must be continuous with in comedy is not the character's but the author's. Laughter, Bergson says, implies a complicity with other laughers. This is only another way of saying that the comic artist subordinates the presentation of life as experience, where the relationship between ourselves and the characters experiencing it is the primary one, to the presentation of life as spectacle, where the primary relationship is between himself and us as onlookers. 4

Fielding himself suggests this relationship between author and reader when he asserts in Tom Jones that "every book ought to be read with the same spirit and in the same manner as it is writ." 5 The observer of comedy views life "as spectacle." The result is laughter. But what lies behind comedy that motivates a comic author to employ artistically his unique vision of life?

In a letter to George Lyttelton, Esquire, which appears as a preface to Tom Jones, Fielding remarks, "I have endeavored to laugh mankind out of their favourite follies and vices." Such a remark suggests that there is a serious purpose underlying his comedy. It implies that his exposure of "the true source of the ridiculous" is based on a
corrective theory of art. G. K. Chesterton says that "if the comic writer has not at the back of his mind, either his own theory of life which he thinks right, or somebody else's theory of life which he thinks wrong or at least some negative notion that somebody is wrong in thinking it wrong, he has really nothing to write about." Fielding provides us with further insight into his artistic endeavors when he discusses in *Joseph Andrews* his use of type or humor characters, whose "appearance in the world is calculated for much more general and noble purposes; not to expose one pitiful wretch to the small and contemptible circle of his acquaintances; but to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavor to reduce it, and thus by suffering private mortification may avoid public shame" (p. 219).

Fielding's comedy, as he suggests, is serious and purposeful. He evokes laughter to correct mankind. In other words, his comedy is moral. This morality is deeply integrated into social groups in *Joseph Andrews*. The resolution of values evolving from the interaction which occurs among these groups involves a movement from one kind of society to another, a movement from the affected characters centering around Lady Booby to the good-natured, unaffected, and benevolent characters centering around Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, and Mr. Wilson. Northrop
Frye discusses the precise nature of the morality of comedy that is resolved in this manner and that involves the kind of humor character which Fielding speaks of above.

This new social integration may be called, first, a kind of moral norm and, second, the pattern of a free society. We can see this more clearly if we look at the sort of characters who impede the progress of the comedy toward the hero's victory. These are always people who are in some kind of mental bondage, who are helplessly driven by ruling passions, neurotic compulsions, social rituals, and selfishness. . . . What we call the moral norm is, then, not morality but deliverance from moral bondage. Comedy is designed not to condemn evil but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge. 7

Fielding implies that men should know themselves by exposing the mental bondage of those who do not. He unmasks his characters by revealing the incongruity between their true natures and their assumed ones. The vision of the discrepancy between reality and illusion obtained by the author and his audience in complicity is exactly that vision which the characters ridiculed fail to possess. In the sense that self-deception is unmasked in order to correct mankind, then, Fielding's comic mode is moral.

Unmasking in *Joseph Andrews* is on one hand a moral gesture and on the other a rich source of laughter and amusement. Indeed, as Fielding utilizes the comic mode, laughter is an indication that an unmasking is taking place. Two elements, then, moral content (criticism of life) and laughter, are the hallmarks of Fielding's comedy.
Together they establish a rationale for the technique of purposeful unmasking. This technique Fielding applied not only to the characters in *Joseph Andrews* but to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, which he had also parodied earlier in *Shamela*. Parody is an application of the techniques of comedy to unmask another art form. That is, it criticizes another work of art by directing laughter toward it. Just as Fielding unmasks the vain and hypocritical characters in his own novel, so, too, he unmasks the false morality and piety which he must have felt was presented in *Pamela*.

Even if one were to concur with Martin Battestin that *Joseph Andrews* is in no sense a parody of *Pamela*, one would at least have to concede, as he does, that there are undeniable attempts to mimic Richardson's novel in devices such as Joseph's letters to his sister. It is Battestin's contention that parody is strictly "destructive mimicry" and that its negative nature had been thoroughly exploited once and for all in *Shamela*. Battestin is perhaps correct in undermining some of the stress which has at times been put on the fact that *Joseph Andrews* is yet another parody of *Pamela*. But he errs in taking too narrow a view of parody, which like comedy can take a double view of things. It is true that in *Shamela* Fielding concentrates on the attacking aspect of parody to undermine the object of
imitation, but parody can also build, and this constructive aspect may take precedence over simple destruction.

In the most complex form of parody, in fact, the author may indulge and yet, at the same time, control the experience in which he indulges. He may translate the process of punishment into that of knowing and recognizing. This might be defined as the heuristic aspect of parody and is closely allied to the dimension of parody that allows the author to construct an image of the real world in which he lives. It is not to the point here to overemphasize the parody in *Joseph Andrews* but rather to suggest that those elements which Battestin takes pains to explain away as "facetious resemblances to Richardson's novel—Lady Booby's attempts on her footman's virtue, Joseph's letters to his sister, the eventual introduction of Pamela and her squire," can really be much more logically and easily explained as elements of a kind of complex parody that permits Fielding to indulge and control heuristically and to create, at the same time, an image of his world.

With its double aim of attack and creation either of which may take precedence over the other at a given moment, parody is an ideal framework for Fielding's dual aim of negatively revealing affectation and positively affirming good nature. It is interesting to note that where, in the highly dramatic London scenes of Book I,
the parody of Pamela is most obtrusive, the negative aspects of Fielding's thematic concerns take precedence over the positive. The chief reason for this is the character of Joseph, who, although he later becomes the embodiment of Fielding's positive vision, is little more than a vehicle for the satire of Pamela in the opening scenes of the novel. In these chapters we are confronted by the "Joey" who sings sweetly in church, who goes to London and puts his hair up in "papers," and whose virtue seemingly has no other object (Fanny has not yet been introduced) than that of prudish imitation of his sister, Pamela. In these scenes the attacking aspect of parody and the exposure of affectation in the characters are emphasized. In the central sections of the novel, the dramatic blends into the picaresque. Like Cervantes, who was the master of the picaresque, Fielding is able to cut across a larger segment of society, and the direct mockery of the parody diminishes noticeably as he proceeds to construct a positive view of reality to complement the destructive and negative side. It is in these sections that Parson Adams, Fanny, and Mr. Wilson are introduced as embodiments of Fielding's positive vision, and Joseph begins to take on more becoming masculine attributes. Having presented these touchstones of value, Fielding allows the more destructive elements of parody to make
a mild resurgence in Book IV with the introduction of Pamela. The point is that parody provides an ideal framework for the thematic concerns of Joseph Andrews as they involve the unmasking of deceit and the presentation of positive values. Just as the author can focus its attacking powers to unmask Pamela or utilize its more creative powers to construct a view of reality, so he can either unmask some of the characters in his novel or focus on the positive attributes of others.

When affectation is unmasked in Joseph Andrews, the implication is to be the opposite. Wylie Sypher quotes Freud as defining comedy as a mode of "representation through the opposite." And, in fact, Fielding's comic rendering of life involves a negative approach to reality at least as much as it involves the direct presentation of positive values. The tone, style, and action of the novel are entirely functional in controlling and articulating thematically the technique of "representation through the opposite." The idea of a reversal or twist in the action to effect a comic resolution was an old convention of drama which Fielding employed in Joseph Andrews. To do Richardson one better, perhaps, Fielding used two reversals in his novel. Besides effecting a resolution of characters into two social groups, the action and plot also comment
on the meaning of that resolution. Pamela's false airs regarding her elevation in rank above Fanny are first inflated and then released by the double action involving the discovery of Fanny's true lineage. Similarly, Lady Booby's reactions to the plot reveal her own selfishness and lack of charity. The comic tone and the mock-heroic style of *Joseph Andrews* call attention to themselves and suggest a warning to the reader not to take anything too seriously that is related in mock-epic idiom. With an air of grandeur, Slipslop reverses the meaning of her own remarks when she speaks in an affected manner. She says to Lady Booby, "'I should be sorry to think your ladyship had any reason to respect me of fondness for a fellow; and if it be your pleasure, I shall fulfill it with as much reluctance as possible!'" (p. 25, my underlining). From Slipslop's malapropisms, which are often psychologically revealing, to the mock-heroic descriptions of battles, which contrast the actions of the novel to epic actions at the expense of the former, the principle of "representation through the opposite" is completely functional.

The comic point of view, as it has been defined, imposes certain limitations on character and event which have been touched upon above. The idea of detachment, viewing life as spectacle from the author's standpoint,
is an important characteristic of comedy. It allows the reader to view the "comic curve of self-exposure" as it is imposed from without in contrast to the "tragic curve of self-discovery" from within, in which the reader's point of view is closer to that of the tragic character. Maynard Mack says that, "in comedy, plot is likely to be felt as something imposed; it is the author's net whose function is to arrest character and display it." Humor characters especially seem to be concomitant with the comic point of view, which delights in observing "the permanence and typicality of human experience, as projected in persistent social species whose sufficient destiny is simply to go on revealing themselves to us."

The triumph over obstacles by the hero forms a conventional action of comedy. The blocking characters are most often the humor or type figures. According to Northrop Frye, "the humor's dramatic function is to express a state of what might be called ritual bondage. He is obsessed by his humor, and his function... is primarily to repeat his obsession." Repetition can lead to tragedy, but overdone it is comic. The deliverance from moral bondage that Frye speaks of in a passage quoted earlier is the deliverance from just such humor characters. Thus it is that Joseph Andrews and his
entourage triumph over Lady Booby and hers. At the end of the novel, the feeling of deliverance is achieved, and it is an important characteristic of Fielding's comic resolution.

According to Frye, the ideals of the hero's society which emerge at the end of comedy are seldom clearly defined. The real life of the hero and heroine often do not really begin until after the tale, and this explains in part why they are often undeveloped. This is certainly true of Joseph and Fanny, who go off to live in a kind of pastoral paradise wherein the ideals are good nature and benevolence. Formulas and systems for living are exactly what Fielding wishes to avoid. Throughout the novel, uncompromising, inflexible codes of behavior are brought to the test of reality and are found wanting. The comedy of Parson Adams' unsuccessful attempts to make life conform to an ethical system should convince us of that.

Mr. Wilson, who stands as the emblem of the ideal world which emerges at the end, is not really a character in the novel because he functions as an imposed touchstone of Latitudinarian wisdom by which to measure other attitudes toward life. Like Sophia in Tom Jones, he is in part symbolic of the hero's pilgrimage toward truth and wisdom. Yet, the "green world" which forms around him
at the end of the novel is not simply a pastoral ideal. Wilson is firmly grounded in reality; he has been educated by the world. He supports a wife and children and in no sense lives a hermit-like existence. Frye says that a conventional movement of comedy is from disorder to "a reversal of social standards which reflects a golden age in the past before the main action of the play begins." It is significant, therefore, that Adams declares that Mr. Wilson's world is reminiscent of the "golden Age" (p. 269). There is no doubt that Mr. Wilson's world is ideal in a sense, but it is a real world for all that. Neither wisdom nor benevolence is ever above reality for Fielding. In *Tom Jones*, Sophia falls from her horse and is rescued by Tom. Neither Fanny, nor Adams, nor Joseph is above ridicule either as their burlesque actions testify at various points. Even as fine a display of understanding as Joseph reveals in his speech on charity (p. 275) is mildly undercut by his mispronunciation of several names. Nothing is sacred—that is, above comedy—for Fielding.

With this much understanding of the basic nature and techniques of Fielding's comedy in mind, we may proceed to an investigation of its limits. The two essential criteria for comedy have already been noted: laughter and moral content. Laughter, even if it is restricted
to Meredith's laughter of the mind, is so important an aspect of comedy that it has been mistakenly identified as the very essence of comedy by several eminent thinkers. Notably, Freud and Hobbes among others have expounded definitions of comedy based almost exclusively on the psychology of laughter. Such men have erred in overlooking the moral and critical aspects of comedy, which are inherent in all of Fielding's art and which are thought by countless critics to be essential to comedy per se. As we will discover later, morality is implicit, if not explicit, in the comedy of both Sterne and Swift. Northrop Frye's affirmation of moral comedy has been discussed. G. K. Chesterton asserts that all art but especially the comic is moral. "The old aesthetes used to explain that Art is unmoral, rather than immoral. It would be rather truer to say that Art can be immoral, but cannot be unmoral. Unmoral comedy is rapidly ceasing to be comic."¹⁹ Bonamy Dobrée refers to unmoral or amoral comedy as "free" comedy and says that "it is possible only in a world where nothing matters, either because one has everything, or because one has nothing."²⁰ In a world where nothing matters, it might be added, comedy does not matter either; in fact, it ceases to be comedy.

The partial theory of comedy that has been proposed so far invites comparison with many conventional definitions
of satire. For this reason and also because the distinction between the two forms is relevant to some parts of the discussion that follows, it is necessary at this point to take up the problem of comedy versus satire. In a recent work, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*, Sheldon Sacks defines satire as follows: "A satire is a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it." Distinct from satire is "action," of which comedy is one form, and which Sacks defines as a "work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability." In organized comic actions, like *Joseph Andrews*, "all the techniques of representation from beginning to end lead us to expect that all the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys' will receive their ethical deserts." In other words, as suggested above, there is a moral norm implicit in comic works of prose fiction by which the characters are judged. Furthermore, as distinct from other more "serious" forms of action, comedy is centered on how the hero will overcome obstacles, not whether he will indeed succeed in overcoming them in the first place. Since we know that eventually everything will end favorably for the
"good guys," we can laugh comfortably at the actions of all the comic characters. That we do laugh, in fact, helps clearly to distinguish comedy from other forms such as "serious" and "tragic" actions. Therefore, from this point of view, once again, moral content (whether implicit or explicit) and laughter are essential to the comic form.

Traditionally, of course, moral content and laughter have been part and parcel of satire no less than of comedy. Is, then, the distinction between comedy and satire simply that satire points outward and comedy inward according to the above definitions recorded in Sacks' study? The answer is that, although comedy and satire share the criteria of laughter and morality in a general sense, the terms themselves do not imply precisely the same meanings in each case.25 First, the laughter of satire is generally harsher (Meredith says that "the laughter of satire is a blow on the back or the face."26), lacking the quality of comic mirthfulness, primarily because satire is written most often out of the need for reform, whereas comedy is more often written out of the impulse to celebrate. Second, though both comedy and satire at least imply a moral norm of some sort, in satire the moral content is almost always conveyed by criticism, whereas in comedy the ethical content
imbedded in the form need not be overtly critical at all and indeed may be considerably more difficult to isolate and define, since it frequently consists only in a general sense of euphoria which spills over to establish an attitude of benevolence towards all the characters, whether or not in the final analysis they are judged "good" or "bad." Such a spirit of accommodation and tolerance is one which is rarely exhibited by satire.

Thus comedy is "critical" in a much looser sense than is satire, and the use of the term applied to comedy in the following pages is to be understood in this light. To put the distinction another way, comedy may be ultimately corrective to mankind only in the sense that, though implicit moral judgments are levied for and against characters in the work, the general impression that is left by comedy is a spirit of good will. Satire, on the other hand, is more didactically corrective and, though we may laugh at what is being satirized, rarely do we feel emotionally uplifted by it. The constant aim of a satire is to induce men to take action and the satirist well understands that this is not to be accomplished if we are allowed to laugh too comfortably at what is criticized. In less serious types of comedy, laughter may simply be an end in itself (though this need not preclude ethical intent), but laughter must always remain a means to an end in true satire.
Nevertheless, the present essay makes no pretensions about attempting satisfactorily to define all forms of comedy or satire, much less both. In fact, for my own purposes, an exhaustive formulation of either is not necessary. I am content simply to suggest theories that are relevant to the works at hand, theories that can be tested by the works, and that will in turn help to illuminate them. Therefore, though the laughter and moral content essential to both comedy and satire may differ in their respective particulars, such fine distinctions are not always relevant to the discussion contained herein. What is relevant and significant, however, is that whether one is dealing with a work that is more comic than satiric, such as Joseph Andrews, more satiric than comic, such as Gulliver's Travels, or perhaps somewhere in between, such as A Sentimental Journey, limits are exceeded when either laughter or morality (i.e., either explicit criticism or implicit ethical presuppositions) fall by the wayside. In fact, the distinctions between satire and comedy tend to become obscured as they approach such limits. But more will be said on this subject in the Third Chapter.

At a middle point of comedy laughter and criticism
just balance each other. From this point laughter and criticism may take divergent paths. In one direction, laughter begins to overbalance criticism until it has eviscerated it entirely and reached the limit of farce or mere gratuitous laughter. In another direction criticism deepens in tone and narrows in focus at the expense of laughter until a comic limit of pure scorn or invective is reached. These two limits of farce and scorn may be considered as lower limits of comedy, at which points less than the full potential of the comic spirit is realized.

In the direction of an upper limit, once again we find the breakdown of laughter and criticism, but this time together and in a different sense from the above. James Feibleman discusses a scale of comic values and tones as follows:

At the head of the series, we have divine comedy. So excellent an example of this rare type of comedy is Dante's poem, that he has given his name to the generic term. Divine comedy criticizes almost with love, and at a very high level. Forgotten or rendered unimportant are its personal and contemporary references, and with them its bitterness has largely departed. Divine comedy consists in pushing comedy almost as far as it will go. It has judgment without criticism; laughter but above the battle; and an affirmation which is almost direct... Finally at the head of the list, as the mark of an upper limit to comedy, there is joy, from which criticism,
and thus in a sense comedy itself, is almost totally absent. Joy lacking even a minimal criticism is pure delight. It consists in the recognition of the essential well-being of the universe: that this is the best of all possible worlds. It accounts for laughter without malice, for the happy state of childhood, and ranges to the near state of ecstasy.

To extrapolate Feibleman's thought somewhat, at comedy's upper limit, whether one calls it divine comedy, or joy, or ecstasy, laughter and criticism cease to exist together in the usual sense. Criticism and laughter blend into affirmation of life. Criticism becomes acceptance. Laughter, in the more orthodox comic sense of laughter at, or from, or with someone or something, becomes the laughter of life's vitality with no direct object or target. This kind of laughter is pure exuberance. I think it is akin to the sense of vitality, of overcoming obstacles, which Susanne Langer asserts is the most deeply imbedded quality of comedy. "The pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy, developed in countless different ways. . . . The sense of life is always new, infinitely complex, therefore infinitely variable in its possible expressions. This sense, or 'enjoyment'. . . is the realization in direct feeling of what sets organic nature apart from inorganic: self-preservation, self-restoration, functional tendency, purpose." 28 This kind of rhythm or vitality is almost
a direct affirmation of life. When laughter and criticism cease to exist in a recognizable state, when they merge in something nearer to pure celebration, they cease to exhibit those characteristics which make them the hallmarks of comedy.

As we focus our vision on Joseph Andrews, we notice various kinds and degrees of comedy, some of which pass beyond the limits that have been established. As Fielding says in his Preface, "I shall leave to my good-natured reader to apply my piece to my observations. . . ." What we will look for is a movement from something very near the middle point of comedy to something near invective in one direction and farce in another. The middle point at its best may be observed in the much discussed but never exhausted bedroom scene involving Lady Booby confronting Joseph and carefully contriving to probe the real nature of his feelings for her.

"Come hither, Joseph: another mistress might discard you for these offences; but I have a compassion for your youth, and if I could be certain you would be no more guilty--Consider, child (laying her hand carelessly upon his), you are a handsome young fellow, and might do better; you might make your fortune"--"Madame," said Joseph, "I do assure your ladyship, I don't know whether any maid in the house is man or woman" "O fiel! Joseph," answered the lady, "don't commit another crime in denying the truth. I could pardon the first; but I hate a liar." (pp. 29-30)
The scene is set up by Fielding's prefacing remarks on Lady Booby's strong passion for Joseph. Her gesture suggests the discretion and subtlety with which she presses her suit, but she is unmasked by Joseph's naïve answer. On the one hand, Joseph is revealed as being somewhat prudish, and Lady Booby, on the other, is exposed as being vain and affected. Her denouncement of Joseph as a liar is really implicit self-condemnation. The climax of this scene occurs when Joseph protests that he would hope to control his inclinations toward his mistress "without suffering them to get the better of my virtue" (my underlining). This frustration of expectation sends Lady Booby into a rage, suddenly revealing her true designs. Joseph, too, comes in for some ridicule by way of mocking Pamela, for, at this point, the motive for his virtue (Fanny) has not been revealed. To heighten the comedy, Slipslop all the while has been eavesdropping at the door.

Slipslop and her impostures are one of Fielding's most comic touches. She is indeed a creature who wears many masks and is often abruptly relieved of them to everyone's amusement. Before Lady Booby in London she wears the mask of virtue and obedience, before Joseph she is more nearly her passionate self, and before Fanny she puts on the mask of a "Mrs. Graveairs." Her affectations
are continually unmasked, and she provides a rich source of comedy in a minor character. In much of the handling of Slipslop, although not all of it, and in such scenes as discussed above, Fielding's comedy reaches an almost perfect balance between laughter and criticism. This is Fielding's comedy at its harmonious best.

Often the balance of criticism and laughter is overlooked in reading many parts of *Joseph Andrews*. The riotous scenes in Book IV at Lady Booby's country estate, which are based on mistaken identities and wrong turns in the dark, may be objected to on the grounds that they involve no criticism. But this is simply not the case. The scenes are functional in displaying the positive embodiments of virtue and good nature and in continuing the process of purposeful unmasking. The three characters of Fanny, Adams, and Joseph are brought together in the bedroom scene where Joseph is given an opportunity to reveal his judgment and understanding. His leading out of Adams at the end of this scene is representative of Joseph's triumph of good sense over the quixotic parson.

These scenes also represent a culmination of the unmasking procedures which occur throughout the novel. When characters appear naked in *Joseph Andrews*, their nakedness is often emblematic of their true inner natures. When Lady Booby appears naked
in bed to tempt Joseph (Book I) and Slipslop embraces Beau Didapper (Book IV), nakedness is naked passion. On the other hand, Joseph, Fanny, and Parson Adams, all appear naked or partly undressed at one point or another and accordingly represent pure and simple good nature and benevolence stripped of affectation.

An interesting contrast may be made between Parson Adams and Lady Booby in regard to their initial reactions to the cry of alarm emitted by Slipslop, as she embraces the helpless Beau Didapper tightly in her arms. Adams, without regard to decorum or the niceties of good taste, thinks only of assisting the victim and runs to the bedroom without his clothes. Whenever Adams acts on impulse, all affectation is thrown aside. Lady Booby, on the other hand, thinking first of propriety, puts on her nightgown, procures a candle, and walks down the hall. The clothes she puts on, of course, represent the affectations which she, like most of the members of her society, puts on almost instinctively in dealing with other persons. In direct contrast to this, however, naked virtue and naked benevolence lie side by side in complete innocence as Fanny and Parson Adams spend the rest of that extraordinary night together unknowingly in the same bed. At the end of the novel Parson Adams delivers a short speech on the clothes of office, explaining his complete worthlessness without his vestments and his great and imposing
stature when wearing them. The answer that the reader is expected to supply is that Adams is mistaken. He is the same paragon of benevolence with or without his vestments. In fact, in the sense that his clothes of office are symbolic of his theological systematizing and logic chopping, they represent his false airs. Joseph inevitably rejects the clothes of a nobleman to return to his father's farm. Clothes (or masks) do not really make the man.

Regarding style, the mock-heroic idiom which Fielding employs is not simply gratuitous humor, and its usefulness as a means of criticism provides a justification for its appearance in the novel. "In the diction, I think, burlesque itself may be sometimes admitted," remarks Fielding in the Preface. Mock-epic, by contrasting the heroic with the ordinary at the expense of the latter, prevents the everyday world of Joseph Andrews from assuming undue importance. The actions of men are not the actions of gods. The mock-epic simile comparing Slipslop to "a hungry tigress" and "a voracious pike" heightens the affectations of that comic woman, one of whose false airs is virtue and meekness (p. 22). Even the word play, such as Slipslop's psychological slips, mentioned earlier, are risible but critical because they help to unmask her true nature.
In all of the scenes discussed above, the detached comic point of view is sustained by frequent interruptions, mock-heroic idiom, and generally urbane and polished wit. But at times, when the author or reader becomes emotionally involved with a character, his comic objectivity slips. Meredith maintains that Parson Adams is a creation of humor (not in the sense previously discussed) because he engages the reader's emotions. He goes on to say that "the humorist of high [order] has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet." Meredith is right to describe the interplay of intellect and feeling which are involved in the conception and perception of Parson Adams, but he is wrong in excluding it from the scope of the comic vision. Fielding's sympathy for Adams tempers his ridicule of him, but both he and the reader still observe Adams' blunders with much laughter and pleasure. This kind of warm comedy is not alien to the comic vision. Too much emotion can indeed destroy the comic point of view, but as long as criticism and laughter are evoked, the limits of comedy are not exceeded. Bonamy Dobrée says that "comedy gives us courage to face life without any standpoint; we need not regard it as a magnificent struggle nor as a puppet play. . . . We need only to feel humanly, for comedy shows us life, not at such a distance that we cannot but regard it
coldly, but only so far as we may bring to it a ready sympathy freed from terror or too overwhelming a measure of pity."

Whenever emotion enters our comic vision, it lessens our detachment, but the results are often variable. The play of emotion is largely responsible for advances that Fielding's comic mode makes at times in the direction of invective. On the other hand, emotional play in Sterne, as will be seen, sometimes results in seeing only pathos or bathos rather than invective. Invective has been defined as the point where moral judgment eviscerates laughter. At this point both comedy and satire cease. An instance in which detached laughter is overbalanced by criticism resulting from an increase in emotional involvement is the "Good Samaritan" episode (chapter xii, Book II). The rejection of Joseph, naked, robbed, and beaten, from the passing coach unleashes the cruelty which can be a part of the comic vision. Laughter does arise at the unmasking of the false sensitivity of the passengers through their own discussion of the situation, but pity for Joseph and knowledge of the potential seriousness of the action vent an overbalance of spleen in our apprehension of the episode. The comic feeling that does limit the gravity of the scene arises from the assurance comedy gives us that Joseph will endure.
The unhappy discourse between Parson Trulliber and Parson Adams is a very satiric passage on false piety and charity. As Fielding suggests in his Preface, "great vices are the proper objects of our detestation, smaller faults, of our pity; but affectation appears to me the only true source of the Ridiculous." In a clergyman, false piety and charity are more than affectations; they are serious vices. The gentleman who converses with Parson Adams in the inn (in chapter xvi) surely speaks for the author when he remarks that "if...temporal pride is ridiculous, surely the spiritual is odious and detestable" (p. 199). (Of course, this comment becomes highly ironic as the speaker's own character begins to unfold in the next chapter.) Fielding was right to be wary of ridiculing "great vices," for they are objects of scorn rather than comedy. Scorn, indeed, is the pervading feeling of the scene. Fielding's comic mode is at such points fast approaching the limit of invective. In chapter ix, Book IV, the description of Beau Didapper, although comical, shows the same signs of criticism without laughter when Fielding ends the portrait with "the little person, or rather thing, that hopped after Lady Booby into Mr. Adams's kitchen." The description is too reminiscent of passages in Pope's bitter Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot not to suggest that Fielding's objectivity
has slipped a great deal. The ridicule of Beau Didapper seems almost to be the denunciation of physical deformity that Fielding objects to again in his Preface. "Surely he hath a very ill-framed mind who can look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves. . . ." Except for such hints as these, however, Fielding's comedy never exceeds a limit in the direction of invective. It is fair to say that his comedy never entirely lacks a degree of laughter.

In the direction of laughter without criticism, however, Fielding frequently does go beyond a limit of comedy. In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding defines the comic in terms of what it is not, distinguishing it from romance on one hand and burlesque on the other. In eliminating burlesque from his writing except in style because the aim of burlesque "is to exhibit monsters, not men," we might surmise that Fielding rejects it as a comic mode because it fails to reveal anything morally edifying to humanity. There is neither value nor pleasure in viewing monsters. In other words, the burlesque in writing does not criticize life because it does not deal with anything that pertains to real life, nor does it evoke laughter simply because it is more grotesque than funny. All art distorts to some extent in order to clarify reality, but burlesque is all distortion. Art
selects to exaggerate; sheer exaggeration, on the other hand, reveals no artistic selection. Fielding was careful to reject it from his theory, but not from his practice of comedy.

Chapter v of Book II unfolds a scene at the inn of a surly host whose inhumanity to Joseph arouses Adams' ire. A battle soon ensues. Parson Adams receives a pan full of hog's blood directly in the face, and Mrs. Slipslop indulges in some violent treatment of the landlady. The scene undoubtedly derives from Cervantes and the rogue tradition. No doubt there is a great deal of laughter at such a sight, but it is burlesque or gratuitous laughter. Laughter is evoked for its own sake and thus passes beyond the limit of comedy. In true comedy, a foreign substance is introduced to precipitate out a constituent. In farce obstacles are inserted for enjoyment only. When this happens, comedy partakes of visceral pleasures for their own sake. According to Yeats, "eliminate character from comedy and you get farce. Farce is bound together by incident alone." It might be added that without character there is no unmasking and hence no criticism. It is amoral and thus, strictly speaking, not comic.

Fielding is aware, in his epigraph to chapter viii of the last book, that Mr. Adams' behavior might be called "very low, absurd, and unnatural." Adams has been preaching
stoic resignation to Divine Providence, "at which words
one came hastily in, and acquainted Mr. Adams, that his
youngest son was drowned. He stood silent a moment, and
soon began to stamp about the room and deplore his loss
with the bitterest agony." To be sure, Adams' vain sto-
icism has been unmasked, but we hesitate for a moment
with the good parson at the sudden reversal in this scene.
An instant's reflection calls to mind the comic assurance
that Adams' youngest son cannot really be drowned, and
we proceed to laugh. But for a moment the sudden shock
has forced us to take a point of view coexistent with
the character, which we have defined as basically be-
longing to the vision of tragedy. As Coleridge suggests,
"surprise accompanied with circumstances of danger be-
comes tragic. Hence Farce may often border on Tragedy.
Indeed Farce is nearer Tragedy in its Essence than Comedy
is."36 Parson Adams is unmasked but without a real
balance of laughter and criticism. Fielding seems to
have been using him in a very cruel manner, since the
element of gratuitous laughter obtained at his expense
seems to outweigh the fact that the discrepancy between
his humanness and his inflexible code of behavior has
been revealed yet another time. The episode illustrates
both how Fielding's art at times becomes farce or bur-
lesque and how, beyond the limits of comedy, farce may
take on a dimension of tragedy. How comedy and tragedy approach each other at certain points will be dealt with at length in Chapter III.

That Fielding's theory of comedy does not coincide with the actual application of it in the fiction should surprise no one. As A. D. McKillop suggests, "it is perhaps inevitable that the practice of a great humorist should outrun his theory." Specifically, Fielding's theory of comedy seems to deal almost exclusively with the punitive element, as indeed *Joseph Andrews* does not. And therefore, it is important to point out that the preceding analysis of forms in the novel is not meant as censure in any sense. (I, for one, would not wish Fielding to have written a different book.) And, in fact, even from the standpoint of comedy, the "hog's blood" scene and others, though they are farce (or whatever), are useful in helping to create and define the comic universe of the narrative. (I have based an entire thesis on the supposition that it is useful to approach a novel with certain kinds of relevant measuring sticks and analyze it according to the breakdown of its parts, but one must consider also the function of scenes like the above in the totality of the work.) Such scenes may indeed be beyond the limits of true comedy, and yet one must consider that they are related to comedy and are
not, therefore, actually incongruous in the kind of total configuration of art that is characteristically Fielding's. In fact, there is a sense in which Fielding's comic art is vital and alive today precisely because he pushes it to its limits in at least two directions. He defines his form, not by his remarks in the Preface (though they undoubtedly give us useful hints), but by exhausting, stretching, and at times breaking it. That is the measure of his artistic achievement.

To reiterate briefly, it has been shown that comedy to be authentic must be critical of life (or at least loosely moral), and its primary response must be laughter (either intellectual or visceral). When either of these two hallmarks of comedy ceases to exist, comedy has reached a limit. Divine comedy or joy is pure ecstasy, implying no criticism and evoking no laughter in the ordinary sense. Invective or scorn is another limit of comedy because it reveals a breakdown of laughter. Coleridge asserts that "when serious satire commences, or satire that is felt as serious, however comically drest, free and genuine laughter ceases; it becomes sardonic." Regardless of the terms one applies, when laughter ceases, the critical side of comedy has reached a limit. Fielding's main excesses, however, are not in this direction. His most patent trespasses are in the
direction of an overbalance of laughter without criticism, which is the signal for farce or burlesque. "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed. This is the reason a comedy is far more like real life than the drama [tragedy] is. . . . It is only in its lower aspects, in light comedy and farce, that comedy is in striking contrast to reality; the higher it rises, the more it approximates to life. . . ." 

This quotation from Henri Bergson implies that farce is unreal because it has no intention to correct. This is only another way of expressing what has already been proposed. Farce is not truly comic because it lacks a moral purpose.

Comedy is not only the mode of Joseph Andrews; it is an attitude toward life as well. Good nature, which Fielding upholds as the totality of his positive values, implies good humor, a comic vision of life. Put another way, in Joseph Andrews, "satire is subordinated to celebration." At the end of the novel, this way of viewing life dissolves everything in good humor. Just before the arrival of Gaffer and Gammer Andrews and the resolution of the plot, Joseph and Fanny have reached a nadir in their lives. Fielding intrudes to add that "they felt perhaps little less anxiety in this interval than
Oedipus himself, whilst his fate was revealing" (p. 411). But as Mark Spilka notes, the hectic events involving mistaken identities and wrong turns in the dark of the previous night (discussed earlier) have established a kind of comic purgation for the ending. In this regard, it is interesting to note Fielding's allusion to the tragic Oedipus. The tragic catharsis raises pity and terror but transcends both. Frye says "the same is true of the comic catharsis, which raises sympathy and ridicule on a moral basis, but passes beyond both." The laughter which dissolves all and establishes the tone for the resolution of a potentially serious reversal in the plot involving the fate of the hero and heroine is akin to the comic catharsis. It is not laughter directed at anyone or any object. It is a culmination of the underlying rhythm of vitality, of the continual triumph over obstacles by the characters, and of their constant accommodation to misfortunes which the novel reveals. It is a feeling of the pure sense of life that Susanne Langer describes and which we have proposed is something akin to the upper comic limit of joy. In Joseph Andrews this kind of comic joy is sensed, but we must look to A Sentimental Journey by Laurence Sterne to see it unmistakably embodied in a positive vision.
Footnotes:


9 Battestin, p. xix.

10 Sypher, p. 223.


12 Mack, pp. 56-57.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.


17 Thompson, (February 19, 1963).

19 Chesterton, p. 453.


22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 21.

24 Ibid., p. 22.


26 Meredith, p. 47.


31 Meredith, p. 44.

32 Dobrée, p. 456.


II

A Sentimental Journey

One of the most frequent accusations which has been brought to bear against Laurence Sterne is that of licentiousness. According to Ernest A. Baker, this charge was especially severe in the Victorian period. As a typical example, he cites H. D. Traill.

He laments that Sterne—and he takes it for granted that no one will contest the statement—"is of all writers the most permeated and penetrated with impurity of thought and suggestion." A serious satiric purpose may sometimes justify even "offences against cleanliness," but Sterne had no such object, and, further, if weighed in the balance with Rabelais or Swift, "he must be condemned on a quantitative comparison of indecency," whatever may be the "quality of the respective transgressions." 1

If such an accusation is indeed true, it will be very difficult to deal with Sterne within the comic frame of reference which has been established in this paper because that frame of reference is a moral one. According to our definition, Sterne's comedy may be amoral or immoral not because of Traill's first allegation that he is indecent, but rather because of his second charge that there is no serious moral attitude or point of view underlying his writing. Whether or not this is the case will be the concern of an important aspect of the following discussion.

There is one point about Sterne's comedy, however, that seems to be quite clear. No one to my knowledge has ever made the charge that he sacrifices laughter to criticism. But apparently a number of critics have made the claim
that his bawdy humor is purposeless, and we will have to reckon with this charge. Regarding the third limit of comedy, which has been called joy, it can be discussed cogently only after a full consideration of the meaning of Sterne's work.

A Sentimental Journey is one of the most subtle works of art in the English language, although a number of critics have not seen it that way. The charges often made against Sterne and his work suggest that A Sentimental Journey may be so subtle that, in fact, it is often misinterpreted. As an example, Virginia Woolf, in an introduction to A Sentimental Journey, is guilty of two errors which are common to much criticism of the book. First, she identifies Sterne with Yorick, and secondly, she claims he is not intellectual. "Little or nothing of A Sentimental Journey would be left if all that we call Sterne himself were extracted from it. He has no valuable information to give, no reasoned philosophy to impart." Even George Meredith, a keen perceiver of intellectual laughter, overlooked a great deal of it in Sterne. "Humorists touching upon history or society are given to be capricious. They are, as in the case of Sterne, given to be sentimental, for with them the feelings are primary, as with singers." That these evaluations of Sterne's comedy widely miss the mark must, of course, be demonstrated in this discussion. As-
assuming for a moment that they do suggests that Sterne's comedy in *A Sentimental Journey* is so subtly contrived that it exceeds the limit of author-reader communication. This is a fourth limit of comedy and one which anyone must encounter who would analyze Sterne's comic mastery.

The best approach to the comedy of *A Sentimental Journey* is through the author himself. Sterne was first of all a clergyman and secondly a writer of fiction; in fact, he did not write his first novel, *Tristram Shandy*, until he was forty-five years old. This suggests that he may have had a didactic purpose in mind in his writing of prose fiction. Traditionally, the clergy has always been concerned with understanding or, at least, correcting human motivation. But this does not always have to imply a technique of overt homily. Wylie Sypher points out that the monks near Lent used to mock themselves and the Mass in order to gain perspective on their official existences. This was done not for the mere sake of laughter but with a constructive purpose in mind. According to Meredith, a capacity for self-awareness is an essential factor in being able to perceive comedy. "You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less; and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of
you proposes. That Sterne the clergyman was aware of the human capacity for self-deception is made clear from his sermons. As Professor Lawrance Thompson suggests, "Sermon IV, Self-knowledge" reveals much about Sterne's view of mankind as well as about his own particular approach to fiction. 7 "We are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors, and we suffer ourselves to see and reason just so far and no farther than they give us leave." 8 Sterne speaks of the art of indirect preaching by public instructors who clothed their lessons in parables and fables. As an example, he cites the prophet Nathan, who disguised his instruction in a parable to enlighten the self-deceived David. But Sterne did not always insist on taking his own sermons seriously, and in Volume II of Tristram Shandy he could turn around and use another of his sermons on self-knowledge as a focal point for revealing the ludicrous reactions of the listeners to it. This kind of two-edged vision, as we have seen, is important in rendering a comic view of life.

Self-knowledge was an important concept for both Sterne and Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury. And, in fact, as Professor Thompson suggests, "Advice to an Author" in Shaftesbury's Characteristicks seems
to have contributed considerably to Sterne's understanding of how to write a veiled sermon on self-knowledge in *A Sentimental Journey*. In "Advice to an Author," Shaftesbury points out that the only way to gain self-knowledge is to divide oneself and view oneself from a new perspective. He calls the application of this concept to literature "mirror writing," and he demands that an author indulge in a great deal of soul searching before attempting to achieve it.

For who can thus multiply himself into two persons, and be his own Subject? Who can properly laugh at himself, or find in his heart to be either merry or severe on such an occasion? Go to the Poets and they will present you with many Instances. Nothing is more common with them, than this sort of soliloquy. A person of profound parts, or perhaps of ordinary capacity, happens on some occasion to commit a fault. He is concerned for it. . . . By virtue of [his] soliloquy he becomes two distinct persons. He is pupil and preceptor. He teaches, and he learns. 9

Turning to the Ancients for authority, Shaftesbury reminds us of "that celebrated Delphic inscription, Recognize yourself; which was as much as to say, divide yourself, or be two. For if the division were rightly made, all within would of course . . . be rightly understood and prudently managed."10 Shaftesbury proposes the technique of permitting a character to tell his own story in this manner. His self-conscious side would be made to mirror his unconscious side. From this kind of character, a reader might
discover himself as in a "looking-glass" or a "pocket mirror, always ready and in use." "In this, there were Two Faces which wou'd naturally present themselves to our view: One of them, like the commanding Genius, the Leader and Chief above mention'd; the other like that rude, undisciplin'd and headstrong Creature, whom we ourselves in our natural Capacity most exactly resembled."11 Such a demonstration would necessarily lead the reader to "understand our doctrine of two persons in one individual." With the weight of this evidence behind us and A Sentimental Journey before, we may proceed to investigate Sterne's comic handling of Yorick.

Yorick's extreme sensibility has been recognized by many critics. Wilbur Cross quotes Sterne himself on sensibility. "Though it has often made me wretched, yet I would not exchange it for all the pleasures the grossest sensualist ever felt."12 This kind of statement leads too easily to an identification of Sterne with Yorick. But Cross quotes another of Sterne's statements which suggests that this is not the case at all. "With the help of another letter from Hannah [an unknown girl] he was able to recall the 'good dear girl' and her sister Fanny, whom the Sentimental Journey . . . would make 'cry as much as ever it made me laugh or I'll give up the business of sentimental writing.'"13 Cross makes nothing of this passage, but it
is too suggestive to overlook, for in it Sterne reveals that he is aware that some readers will see only sentimentality in his novel and nothing at which to laugh. When we understand this attitude toward his work, we can theorize on Sterne's possible relationship with Yorick. There is no question that Sterne himself had a sentimental side to his nature. But in *A Sentimental Journey* he seems to have divided himself as Shaftesbury instructed. Moreover, he seems to have projected his sentimental side, extrapolated to a latitudinarian extreme, and built a fictitious character around it.\(^{14}\) In accord with his own ideas expounded in the sermon on Nathan and David and Shaftesbury's "Advice to an Author," he then clothed a sermon on self-knowledge in the tale of a self-deceived sentimental traveller and let his character unconsciously and unintentionally reveal the underside of his own nature. As Baudelaire has said, "artists create the comic; after collecting and studying its elements, they know that such-and-such a being is comic, and that it is so only on condition of its being unaware of its nature, in the same way that, following an inverse law, an artist is only an artist on condition that he is a double man and that there is not one single phenomenon of his double nature of which he is ignorant."\(^{15}\)
To declare bluntly that Yorick is a single-visioned comic character and Sterne a double-visioned comic author, however essentially correct it may be, is greatly to oversimplify Sterne's veiled sermon on self-knowledge in *A Sentimental Journey*. The precise nature of Yorick's self-deception, unconsciousness, and duplicity is an extremely delicate problem and one that cuts to the very center of Sterne's comic mastery. An important clue to Yorick's character can be found in *Tristram Shandy*. In that work are related Parson Yorick's difficulties attendant on the lending of his horse to villagers in need of a midwife several miles away. Eventually, as one fine horse after another became worn out, Yorick deliberately procured such a pitiful nag that borrowers soon ceased. But Yorick himself looked so ridiculous when riding this broken down beast that he attracted the laughter of his parishioners for miles around. Yet we are told that "--His character was,--he loved a jest in his heart--and as he saw himself in the true point of ridicule, he would say, he could not be angry with others for seeing him in a light, in which he so strongly saw himself."{16} In other words, we are informed that Yorick could and did laugh at himself, as he does in *A Sentimental Journey*, but we must not mistake this self-directed humor for perfect self-understanding or even veracity (though it
may, in fact, tend to reduce the total amount of self-deception). The above passage continues: "So that to his friends, who knew his foible was not the love of money, and who therefore made the less scruple in bantering the extravagance of his humor,—instead of giving the true cause,—he chose rather to join in the laugh against himself." To put it another way, Yorick's self-directed laughter is a somewhat surreptitious device to hide his true motives. The passage goes on to relate that when a midwife was brought to the village, Yorick maintained possession of the nag in hopes of concealing the real reason for purchasing it. Whenever he was questioned about the matter, in fact, he would fabricate some excuse or other. "In short, the parson upon such encounters would assign any cause but the true cause,—and he withheld the true one, only out of a nicety of temper, because he thought it did honour to him" (p. 20). Finally, we are told, other people's opinions about the matter concerned him so much that he stayed awake nights thinking about them (p. 23). Strictly speaking, then, the Yorick of Tristram Shandy may not be self-deceived, but he is very concerned about presenting his best side to the world, and is ever so slightly given to mendacity to accomplish it. And, in fact, one might argue that the man is self-deceived who believes he can continue to show only his best side to the world (but this actually
lies outside the given evidence of the work).

In *Shandy*, Yorick's self-consciousness and his extreme concern for recommending himself to the world leads him to be somewhat deceitful. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne turns around and shows that these same traits can lead a man to deceive himself. As he does in *Tristram Shandy*, Yorick often sits back and laughs softly at himself in the *Journey*, but by the same token we must not be fooled into believing (as some critics have) that he is therefore a paragon of self-awareness. Throughout most of *A Sentimental Journey*, the attentive reader must listen carefully for two voices, Yorick's, and one step removed, Sterne's. Thus, when Yorick in all sincerity declares that he writes "not to apologize for the weaknesses of my heart in this tour,—but to give an account to them," we must not fail to recognize the irony inherent in his profession of good faith, for he will indeed give an account of his weaknesses to a degree that he himself never dreams of.

Shaftesbury's doctrine "of two persons in one individual" applies, in slightly different ways, not only to the author but also to the protagonist of *A Sentimental Journey*. The idea of a divided Yorick or perhaps a two-faced Yorick (though not in the sense of his being a hypocrite) is made explicit in "The
Passport" episode. Speaking to the Count de B****, Yorick remarks, "Good, my lord! . . . but there are two Yoricks. The Yorick your lordship thinks of, has been dead and buried eight hundred years ago; he flourish'd in Horwendillus's court--the other Yorick is myself, who have flourish'd, my lord, in no court" (p. 158). Within a few moments, Yorick follows up this statement with more truth than he realizes. The Count inquires, "But you are Yorick?--Yes!--Et vous Plaisantez?--I answered, Indeed, I did jest--but was not paid for it--'twas entirely at my own expense" (p. 161). One must be certain not to ignore the irony of Yorick's remarks. Indeed he does laugh at himself, as he does in Tristram, but here no more than there does his self-directed humor cut to the very center of what is most truly comic about him. The passage cited above goes on to present Yorick's assurance that there are no jesters in the contemporary English court. "We have no jester at court, Mons. le Count, said I, the last we had was in the licentious reign of Charles the IIId . . . . " The significance of Yorick's identification of court jesters with licentiousness to illustrate the refinement of the English court in his own day may not strike us until we have read the explicitly sexual passage, culminating in the quotation from
Bevoriskius, which immediately follows it, but then it is clear that it is Sterne's tip-off regarding Yorick's principal source of self-deceit—his unconscious prurience. Yorick is unconsciously a two-faced character, and he really fools no one but himself, unless the reader believes everything Yorick tells him. His incomplete self-awareness is one of the essential elements of the comedy in *A Sentimental Journey*. He is never a hypocrite because he is partially self-deceived throughout, but this only heightens the pleasure and amusement of the reader who is able to perceive his dilemma.

Yorick's unconscious duplicity may best be thought of in terms of two closely related but essentially distinct narrative threads. One is spiritual and sentimental and is that which Yorick means to be heard. The other is carnal and licentious and is that which Yorick is not fully conscious of but which nonetheless rises to the surface on another narrative level. Yorick hears one of these narratives; the reader ideally hears both. It is not exactly that Yorick is always unaware of carnal temptation, but that he succeeds in convincing himself and an oversympathetic reader that he always overcomes it. In "The Remise Door" episode, Yorick gives an account of his temptations.
—Now where would be the harm, said I to myself, if I was to beg of this distressed lady to accept of half of my Chaise?—and what mighty mischief could ensue?

Every dirty passion, and bad propensity in my nature, took the alarm, as I stated the proposition—. . . . . . . . . . . . . .

But 'tis a civil thing, said I—and as I generally act from the first impulse, and therefore seldom listen to these cabals, which serve no purpose that I know of, but to encompass the heart with adamant—I turn'd instantly about to the lady—. (pp. 37-38)

In such a passage we are permitted to look right into Yorick's mind and observe his rationalizing processes at work. He is perfectly willing to acknowledge his temptations because he takes great pride in the assurance that he will triumph over them. But the reversal in the last line above indicates, as he "instantly" turns about, that this may not be the case at all.

In spite of Yorick's self-directed laughter, he takes himself quite seriously. At one point we find him declaring, "I beg the world not to smile but pity me" (p. 35). In spite of his confessional tone and his acknowledgment of minor guilt, he is extremely self-assured of his own goodness and high moral standards. The account of his sentimental journey is an account of many occasions of sin (as it were) from which Yorick believes he successfully extricates himself one after another. From the standpoint of surrender to overt sexuality, Yorick does remain unsullied,
but his account is of a kind of "brinkmanship" in sensuality in which he seeks out occasions to enjoy the ebb and flow of his feelings and even to tempt himself with carnality (as in "The Conquest"). His ability ultimately to maneuver in and out of compromising situations tends to make him morally smug. (This accounts in part for the playful stance he adopts toward the reader in such passages as the book's conclusion, in which he reaches out to catch "hold of the fille de chambre's . . ."). More important, perhaps, Yorick's moral primmness arises not only from the fact that he actually does avoid the overt act of carnality but also because he secretly entertains the belief that a man of sentiment (of which he obviously takes himself to be a first-rate example) cannot possibly be an immoral or indecent man. In "The Rose" chapter, Yorick professes his disbelief and abhorrence at hearing about the "ecclesiastick" at the French drama who was made to hold up his hands behind two grissets for a reason that is not immediately apparent to Yorick's "innocent" mind. "--And can it be supposed, said I, that an ecclesiastick would pick the Grisset's pockets? The old French officer smiled, and whispering in my ear, open'd a door of knowledge which I had no idea of--" (p. 114). Yorick's prudery is comic
enough in itself, but it becomes doubly funny when we recall his own adventures (in an episode almost immediately preceding this one) with the grisset in the glove shop in which his hands seem to have carried on a very suggestive conversation of their own beyond the innocent verbal colloquy. But the continuation of "The Rose" passage is even more revealing. "Good God! said I, turning pale with astonishment—is it possible, that a people so smit with sentiment should at the same time be so unclean, and so unlike themselves—Quelle grossiérté! added I." In other words, Yorick is convinced that sentiment and immorality (indecency or impurity) are mutually exclusive, and therein lies the most important source of the moral smugness and self-deception that broods over so much of his speech and behavior. His base passions are forever being filtered through a pious, self-conscious emotionalism that refines away the grossness but always leaves behind a few faint but noticeable traces of his repressed lascivious longings. Coleridge gives a very just summary of Yorick's inner tensions in his excellent appraisal of Sterne's wit.

With regard to Sterne, and the charge of licentiousness which presses so seriously upon his character as a writer, I would remark that there is a sort of knowingness, the wit of which depends... on a certain
oscillation in the individual's own mind
between the remaining good and encroaching
evil of his own nature . . . so that the mind
has in its own white and black angel the same
or similar amusement, as may be supposed to
take place between an old debauchee and a
prude,—she feeling resentment on the one
hand from a prudential anxiety to preserve
appearances and have a character, and, on the
other, an inward sympathy with the enemy.¹⁸

The two loves, carnal and spiritual, are forever
being combined in Yorick's own mind. His confusion is
seen in his attempts to render everything, including
his hidden carnal impulses, into spiritual terms, con¬
cealing them from himself and the world. His love of
God and his love of women are so inextricably conjoined
in his every word and gesture that the problem of per¬
ceiving comic incongruity becomes one of unraveling
these two interrelated threads. Sterne manipulates
Yorick's speech so that he constantly, but unconsciously,
undercuts himself with his ambiguous choice of words
arising from an unfortunate association of ideas. The
Lockean notion of what constitutes a wrong association
of ideas was thoroughly mocked in Tristram Shandy,
where it was made the structural basis of the novel
as well as a vehicle for satire. Sterne seems to have
been amused at the pompous, serious way in which Locke
exalted reason and science over the imagination, wit,
and verbal art. Though Sterne actually had much
admiration for Locke, his ambivalent double vision toward him enabled him to seize on the wrong association of ideas as both a structural principle and a thematic concern. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne once again seems to exploit in a more subtle way the doctrine of Locke. Yorick, through an unfortunate association of ideas, is continually made to express a great deal more than he ever desires or realizes. In a dialogue with the Count in Versailles, Yorick reveals his understanding of an indecent insinuation, his shock, and then immediately proceeds to undercut himself with an unfortunate association of ideas. "Heh bien! Monsieur l'Anglais, said the Count gaily—you are not come to spy the nakedness of the land—I believe you—\textit{ni encore}, I dare say, that of our women . . ." (p. 154). After quoting the Count, Yorick turns to the reader, in an "aside," to say, "I have something within me which can not bear the shock of the least indecent insinuation . . .--I conceive every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself. The thirst of this, continued I, as impatient as that which inflames the breast of the connoisseur, has led me from my own home into France" (p. 156). In his
apotheosis of women with an almost religious fervor, Yorick's choice of terms—"temple," "enter in," "thirst," "inflame"—ironically undercuts his shock at the hint of an indecent insinuation and suggests that his underlying passion for members of the fair sex is much more than a religious passion.

In her preface to A Sentimental Journey, Virginia Woolf quotes a passage which she says permits Sterne "almost the licence of a poet." "I walked up gravely to the window in my dusty black coat and looking through the glass saw all the world in yellow, blue, and green, running at the ring of pleasure.--The old with broken lances, and in helmets which had lost their vizards--the young in armour bright which shone like gold, beplumed with each gay feather of the east--all--all tilting at it like fascinated knights in tournaments of yore for fame and love" (p. xii, my underlining). It is very difficult to tell if Virginia Woolf has detected the real artistry of this passage. A great deal depends on how she meant "licence of a poet" to be taken. Such a passage, in which Sterne's "poetry" soars to an ambiguous height, indicates that a comic limit of communication has been reached. Mrs. Woolf's failure, however, to include Yorick's prefacing remarks to this passage in which he indirectly suggests (though he means something else
by it) that he is about to experience an unfortunate association of ideas—"I own, my first sensations, as soon as I was left solitary and alone in my own chamber in the hotel, were far from being so flattering as I had prefigured them"—seems to indicate that she may not have heard the second voice of licentious Yorick in the background. Such a remark as Yorick's is Sterne's tip-off on how to read the passage and warns the reader to listen for the second voice.

We have discussed the two voices of Yorick audible along the verbal line of communication from author to reader. There is, however, another line of communication also illuminating Yorick's unconscious ambivalence which is transmitted by gestures and movements rather than words. In the episode called "The Translation," Yorick brings to the attention of the reader the meaningfulness of gestures. "There is not a secret so aiding the progress of sociality, as to get master of this short hand, and to be quick in rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words" (p. 105). As Professor McKillop says, "Sterne takes gestures to be the psychophysical crossroads of life."20 In A Sentimental Journey, the hand can have either of two functions. It can reach out to touch in an act of Christian charity, or it can
reach out to touch in an act of physical impulse. Again, the two loves, spiritual and carnal, are operative. As a clergyman, Yorick is, of course, aware of the former and takes pains to prove himself a charitable person. But his dealings with the monk, for instance, are highly questionable in light of the fact that the act of charity which had been denied the monk's solicitations earlier is performed later in the presence of a woman. Concluding the sentimental exchange of snuff boxes, Yorick remarks, "I guard this box, as I would the instrumental parts of my religion, to help my mind on to something better" (p. 34). The presence of a lady has affected Yorick considerably.

Even when Yorick does extend the hand of charity his motives are ambiguous. More often, however, he extends the hand of passion. Whenever Yorick comes into physical contact with a woman (as in "The Gloves" episode mentioned above), his base passions are transmitted through the movements of his hands. "Base ungentle passion! thy hand is against every man . . ." (p. 24). Having made this remark, Yorick goes off with a lady hand in hand.

The "Maria" episode is in many ways the culmination of the significance of hand gestures. Maria, a country
wench who has lost her father, her lover, and her little goat, is found "sitting with her elbow in her lap" and with tears in her eyes.

I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief. — I then steep'd it in my own — and then in hers — and then in mine — and then I wip'd hers again — and as I did it, I felt such undescrivable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion: I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary. (p. 210)

The opening passage of this episode, which need not be quoted here, is one of the most ambiguously suggestive in the book. It establishes a tone which finds its complement in the suggestive rhythmic movements of Yorick and the maid in harmony. As usual, however, from an encounter of this nature, Yorick draws a religious conclusion. (I do not mean by this to play down the positive argument for sentiment in the novel. Yorick's religious conclusion is really important, aside from the irony inherent in it, because it demonstrates that the evidence of the feelings refutes La Mettrie, d'Holbach, and all those who see Man as Machine. Still the comedy of the passage is very rich.)

As we have seen, *A Sentimental Journey* is a tale communicated on two levels. One level it is an attempt on the part of Yorick to demonstrate and
recommend the benevolent impulses of his heart. On the other it is a narration of the workings of Yorick's lecherous imagination and body. This communication is itself transmitted along two lines: Speech and gesture. Yorick unintentionally undermines himself verbally at every turn. His gestures and movements comment on his hidden motives and help to illuminate them. Yorick wears the mask of pious sensibility. Sterne unmask him by allowing him to reveal the discrepancy which exists between the intentions and the results of his words and actions. *A Sentimental Journey* is a continual process of unmasking. "Know yourself," Sterne implies by revealing the self-deceit of a man who thinks he does know himself. Sterne's comedy is thus moral comedy because it applies laughter critically to evaluate human nature. It is moral also because it is concerned with human conscience and consciousness, and thus it is clear that Sterne rarely indulges in mere gratuitous laughter. There is no reason to doubt that he enjoyed his ribaldry immensely, but his laughter is essentially critical because it depends on the perception of discrepancy which persists in spite of Yorick's constant attempts to recommend himself to us.
Sterne's comic resolution is not a deliverance from moral bondage worked out in terms of opposing societies, as in the case of Fielding. His comedy is worked out solely in terms of the opposing selves within every man, as exemplified in Yorick. Fielding saw "the true source of the ridiculous" in hypocrisy and vanity, affectations or masks encrusted upon the natural impulses of man from without by the dictates of accepted social standards. Lady Booby affects virtue as Slipslop affects learning because both are "fashionable" attributes established by their respective societies. Sterne, more subtle and perhaps even more perceptive, penetrated deeper than hypocrisy or vanity, which are outward manifestations of conscious states of mind, into the innermost pre-affected mind of a man who is so much at one with his mask that he cannot truly be called either hypocritical or vain. It is only if Yorick were suddenly to become aware of his duplicity and make a conscious effort to hide his prurient self behind the mask of piety that he could be called hypocritical.

Fielding's characters are unmasked rather easily by reversals in situation and actions of an imposed plot designed solely to reveal their incongruities through social impostures. Yorick, on the other hand, can be exposed only through the dual narrative which
he spins out of his own mind in relation to events that befall him. There is no imposed plot because the plot evolves primarily out of character in contrast to that of Joseph Andrews. Yorick is never incongruous in the sense that Fielding's characters are because all reality is shaped to him and by him as it filters through his mind before the reader perceives it. The difference between Fielding's handling of character and Sterne's may be put this way. Fielding's hypocritical characters attempt to conceal the affectation which society compels them to adopt for the sake of appearances. Character conforms to society. In the case of Yorick, however, character, in an attempt to eliminate or deny discrepancy rather than conceal it, conforms reality to itself. Yorick makes all reality fit his way of thinking. But his environment is not so pliable; neither is his own nature. Reality will not conform entirely, and Yorick is exposed as a mentally incongruous character.

As has been discussed in relation to Fielding, comedy implies a special point of view. For a reader the comic perspective ought to be objective and detached and be at one with the author, who for the most part stands outside his work and manipulates the characters within. The limit of comedy peculiar to Sterne
has been defined as that point where a rupture occurs along the line of communication between author and reader. The cause of that rupture is essentially a breakdown of the comic point of view. This in turn is caused by Sterne's unique handling of character, plot, and focus of narration. Behind everything else is a didactic purpose. Sterne's comic mode is limited by its very nature. The discrepancy between the effect and the intention of Yorick's thoughts and gestures is subtle and refined. The more precise the incongruity within the mind of the character, the more objective need be made the reader's point of view. But by the very personal, private, psychological comedy that occurs as a result of the use of the first person narrator-protagonist, the more the reader is beckoned into the framework of the character's own world, which is essentially a framework of his own thought processes. Consequently the reader tends to empathize with the character and to take his point of view, instead of the author's. This can be dangerous because, if one does take Yorick's point of view in reading *A Sentimental Journey*, the result is that one often sees only pathos, sentiment, and often bathos (as Virginia Woolf does when she identifies character with author and is thus forced to take a
point of view identical with the protagonist's). Such an error has been made by many critics.

Sterne is confronted with maintaining a precise balance between comic objectivity and psychological verisimilitude. He could have increased the comic detachment of the reader by making the character's duplicity patent (as Fielding did); but as it is unconsciously related by the character himself, the more obvious it would have become, the less self-deceived and more hypocritical he would have to have been. An alternative would have been to make the character a complete fool (as Fielding sometimes did), but this kind of character is hardly ideal as a narrator, much less as the focal point of an entire novel. In such a character, there would have been no challenge in creating his duplicity, no pleasure in perceiving it. One of the important reasons Sterne employed the subtle gesture as an indication of Yorick's motives is that it helps the reader to focus on something external, thus tending to increase his objectivity while not destroying the psychological realism of the character necessitated by the focus of narration.

In comedy, an author ought to be distinguishable from his characters. Fielding is a perfect example of this as he moves back and forth, in and out of his
work pointing out characters and calling attention to himself. It is apparently difficult to believe that an author could project one side of his own nature in order to mock it as Sterne did. The reader is easily embraced if he thinks he is at one with Sterne and Yorick simultaneously. Yorick's profession and his obvious humanness, too, are obstacles to a reader's objectivity. In addition, with a first person narrator who shapes his own reality, plot becomes a matter of psychological cause and effect, which is actually nearer to the organic and sequential plot of tragedy than to the imposed, coincidental plot of comedy. Again the effect is a distortion of the kind of detachment most suitable to comedy. Such are the dangers involved in a precise and precarious interaction of character, narrative point of view, and plot in a vertiginous process revolving about Yorick until the reader becomes so dizzy that he submits to be swallowed up in Yorick's consciousness along with everything else.

In part, the precarious balance of Sterne's comedy was dictated by a programmatic intent. He must have realized that the nearer he could bring the reader to the point of complete empathy, while still permitting him to perceive Yorick's dilemma, the more he could
bring home the sermon on self-knowledge. In so bringing the reader to the limit of his comedy, Sterne ran the risk of losing him altogether. Consequently, he had to take precautions to snap the reader out of Yorick's embrace by the end of the novel. How he accomplished this is related to the positive vision which the book extends to us.

Like *Joseph Andrews*, *A Sentimental Journey* is more than a negative vision of reality which implies its opposite, for it too upholds a positive vision. This vision is best illustrated in the episode of "The Grace" near the end of the novel. It is preceded by the difficult ascent of Mount Taurira. The "feast of love" which takes place high upon this mountain has a profound effect on Yorick. "I fancied I could distinguish an elevation of spirit different from that which is the cause or the effect of simple jollity--In a word, I thought I beheld Religion mixing in the dance--but as I had never seen her so engaged" (p. 224). On the one hand, this scene demonstrates Yorick's ability to think of physical delights in spiritual terms so as to make them presentable to his own conscience. On the other hand, Yorick has made a profound remark. In spite of his self-blindness, he has come upon a deep insight. This paradoxical statement is better understood in light
of the opening passage from Sterne's sermon on "The
Prodigal Son."

Luke XV, 13

"And not many days after, the younger son
gathered all he had together, and took his
journey into a far country.--"

I know not whether the remark is to our honour
or otherwise, that lessons of wisdom have never
such power over us, as when they are wrought
into the heart, through the groundwork of a
story which engages the passions: Is it that
we are like iron, and must first be heated
before we can be wrought upon? or, is the
heart so in love with deceit, that where a
true report will not reach it, we must cheat
it with a fable, in order to come at truth?
(Sermons of Mr. Yorick, p. 227, Vol. I)

The idea of cheating one's own heart is a direct
echo of Sterne's Sermon XIX on self-knowledge, quoted
earlier. Yorick has taken a journey into a world apart
from ordinary civilization atop Mount Taurira. He
has unconsciously cheated himself with fables through-
out his journey, and yet he has come upon an important
truth. So, too, Sterne has given the reader a sermon
in the guise of "a sentimental journey of the heart"
in order to attain wisdom. Sterne has taken Yorick
and the reader together to the top of Mount Taurira
to present his positive vision. It seems paradoxical
that, as we have said, despite Yorick's self-deceit,
he has shown his understanding. In fact, in the con-
tinuation of the above passage from "The Grace," Yorick's
mask slips somewhat for an instant, as we hear Sterne's voice more clearly in the background saying, "I should have look's upon it now, as one of the illusions of an imagination that is eternally misleading me, had not the old man . . . said . . . that a cheerful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay—or a learned prelate either, said I" (p. 224). It is almost as if Sterne deliberately permitted Yorick's mask to slip for a moment in order to express the positive vision of the book. The mask does not slip entirely. It is still Yorick that comes upon truth in spite of himself. But Sterne is ever so near in the background.

The ascent and descent of Mount Taurira seems to be emphasized. Sterne appears to be suggesting that the scene on top of the mountain has a special importance. The dance of Grace which occurs there is at once a dance of delight and one of religious fervor. Furthermore, the spirit of joy and gratitude that Yorick witnesses in the "feast of love" (p. 221) suggests the festivities welcoming home the Prodigal Son, which Sterne describes in his sermon and which help to illuminate the whole episode of "The Grace." "Gentle spirits light up the pavilion with a sacred fire; and parental love and filial piety lead in the mask with
riot and wild festivity. Was it not for this that God gave man musick to strike upon the kindly passions; that nature taught the feet to dance to its movements, and as chief governess of the feast, poured forth wine into the goblet, to crown it with gladness?" (Volume I, p. 233). It is important here to notice that Sterne juxtaposes pagan and scriptural allusions, and that this juxtaposition helps to affirm the truth of Yorick's vision of "religion mixing in the dance." As Sterne says in another portion of his sermon on "The Prodigal Son," "When the affections so kindly break loose, Joy is another name for religion" (p. 233, my underlining). This kind of joy, to which Yorick is witness atop Mount Taurira, is the positive, almost divine vision of Sterne's comedy. Mount Taurira is almost a golden world, a prelapsarian Eden. It illustrates the kind of joy which we have established as an upper limit for the comic spirit. Sterne's "divine comedy" implies neither laughter nor criticism in its ecstasy of affirmation and acceptance. Yorick's self-deception is rather trivial in such a world, and therefore he is permitted in spite of it to share in the all encompassing spirit of festivity. As was remarked in the previous chapter, the comic catharsis raises sympathy and ridicule but passes beyond both. If Fielding dissolves all enmity in laughter, Sterne soars higher by dissolving it in joy.
In "The Grace" episode, Sterne suggests a reconciliation of incongruities which he describes as the movement of *Tristram Shandy*. "By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other" (p. 73). Religion and dance, the love of God and the love of women are not necessarily at variance with each other. This is part of the reconciliation made possible by the vision of joy. Yorick's essential error in judgment is that he apparently senses that the two loves are opposed, and he unconsciously tries to conceal it by couching every word and thought in terms of sentimentality. Man cannot, however, completely conceal his natural impulses, as Yorick so aptly demonstrates. He must acknowledge rather than deny them. Man's natural appetites do not always have to be at war with his religious beliefs. What the novel illustrates is that the two loves are ultimately connected and, furthermore, that there is nothing necessarily wrong in their being that way. By means of Yorick, Sterne thus tests the validity of narrow morality with his broader version. It is wrong to oppose head and heart as Yorick does. From this standpoint, balance is a moral principle. Religion can indeed mix
in the dance. The result is pure joy, an affirmation of life, an acceptance of the world. Such is Sterne's comic vision at its highest reach.

As we have seen, the comedy of A Sentimental Journey is more than a mere technique. Once again we must hearken back to the "pure sense of life," the rhythm of vitality, which Susanne Langer says underlies the comic spirit. This vitalistic principle is intrinsic to the form and content of both Fielding's and Sterne's comedy. The multiple vision of comedy implies a mean between extremes, a balance or harmony of incongruities. Against pure sentimentality, Sterne opposes a reconciliation between head and heart. With the journey of the heart, he recommends the journey of the mind. To dismiss Sterne as simply "licentious," "sentimental," or "anti-intellectual" is to put him down unjustly and uncritically. Through his characters Sterne demonstrates that the various tensions in every man may at times be opposed and at other times be in harmony. In this sense, his characters are always more complex than mere humors. Every man has several humors or hobbyhorses on which to ride, and, as Yorick says in A Sentimental Journey, "there is no regular reasoning upon the ebbs and flows of our humors" (p. 5). Walter and Uncle Toby in Tristram Shandy may fight bitterly over a point of
logic or warfare at one moment and be at peace the next. Similarly, within every man, humors may be at variance with each other or in harmony. Yorick's impulses may indeed conflict with his intentions, but he also may really behold "religion mixing in the dance."

"The Grace" episode has been discussed. But as we might expect, Sterne's playfulness leads him to add one more episode as a kind of anticlimax to the action, which at the same time reveals something further about his artistic achievement in the novel. In this last scene Yorick's mask seems to be entirely removed for a moment. Forced to share a bedroom with a lady in an inn, Yorick devises a treaty to uphold propriety. Then he adds: "There was but one point forgot in this treaty, and that was the manner in which the lady and myself should be obliged to undress and get into bed—there was one way of doing it, and that I leave to the reader to devise; protesting as I do it, that if it is not the most delicate in nature, 'tis the fault of his own imagination—against which this is not my first complaint" (p. 232).

At first glance, this apparent removal of the mask seems like a flaw in the argument for Yorick's self-deception. On the contrary, however, it is actually
the final evidence of Sterne's achievement with Yorick. It has been noted that the mask slips somewhat in the episode of "The Grace." This seems in accordance with the fact that it is at that point that the author's positive vision is best expressed. Similarly Sterne allows us a final insight into his comic technique with the removal of Yorick's mask at the very end.

Sterne's final artistry is best expressed perhaps in terms of the theory of comic archetypes. As with Joseph Andrews, an enlightening comparison can be made between A Sentimental Journey and certain archetypal characters. In the ancient rites which gave rise to comedy, the impostor who viewed the sacred rites was called an alazon. Frye defines the alazon as follows: "a deceiving or self-deceived character in fiction, normally an object of ridicule in comedy and satire." The description is too applicable to Yorick for us to overlook. In ancient comic rites, the alazon was defeated by an eiron, or ironical man. According to Wylie Sypher, "irony defeats the enemy on his own grounds for in the course of comic debate, the supposed wisdom of the alazon is reduced to absurdity, and the alazon himself becomes a clown." This is the essence of the comic unmasking that occurs to Yorick the parson-clown. We have seen that Sterne
was aware of the sentimental interpretation that could be applied to Yorick. Sterne was first of all a preacher, and, as we have noted, his novel is fundamentally a veiled sermon on self-knowledge. In a sermon, form may finally be sacrificed to theme. The morality embodied in the fiction must somehow be put beyond doubt. Furthermore, a clergyman is often given to summary at the end of his sermon. Sterne, aware of misinterpretations, must have desired to make Yorick's aberrations more explicit by removing his mask for a moment in the last episode. By assuming a playful attitude toward the reader, he implicitly warns him not to be overly sympathetic with his protagonist.

As we have seen, Yorick was conceived as a projection of one side of Sterne's own nature. As Sypher remarks, "the alazon is the alter ego of the eiron." In *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne plays the role of behind-the-scenes eiron who allows the antagonistic alazon to defeat himself on his own grounds. Yorick, the impostor, has viewed the sacred rites atop Mount Taurira. As we have noted, there is an air of playfulness about this whole scene which is an integral part of the comic spirit. At the end, the eiron is justified to step in and reveal himself as conqueror.
Sterne appears and removes Yorick's mask for a moment in a kind of exorcism of his own negative self.

And the eiron, who can put on the features of the buffoon and scapegoat, is in his other self a mocker, blasphemer, and offender. He embodies again, the side of the god that must be rebelled against before the god can be worshipped. God must be hated before he can be loved, denied before he is believed. The comedian plays the role of doubting Thomas, he is at once a stone rejected by the builder and the cornerstone of the temple. Comedy is destructive and creative.

Before attaining the vision of joy, Yorick must be allowed to make a fool of himself. Sterne can then rise to the surface of his art to present a positive vision and reveal what he has done. "The Impostor, Profaner, or Devil is a 'darkness that is part of light.' Evil is inherent in Good, and to reach salvation, man must pass through a 'negation of negation.'" 26 By approaching dangerously near the breakdown of communication between author and reader, Sterne transcends comic mockery to a state of ecstasy. By approaching one limit of comedy, he elevates his art to another limit. He carries us as high as comedy can go. He brings us vis-à-vis the apprehension of joy.
Footnotes:


2 Because I diverge from most of the criticism that has been written on *A Sentimental Journey*, I have little occasion to cite it. Nevertheless, no study of the novel can overlook Rufus Putney's two important contributions: "The Evolution of *A Sentimental Journey*, Philological Quarterly, XIX (October, 1940), 349-369, and "Laurence Sterne, Apostle of Laughter," in *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncy Brewster Tinker* (New Haven, 1949), pp. 159-170.


6 Meredith, p. 42.

7 Lawrance Thompson, English 306, Princeton University (February 28, 1963). It may be noted here that a recent article by Gardner D. Stout, Jr. entitled "Yorick's Sentimental Journey: A Comic 'Pilgrim's Progress' for the Man of Feeling," *ELH*, XXX (December, 1963), 395-412, also makes use of some of Professor Thompson's views—but to reach an opposite conclusion.


10 Ibid., I, III, I, II, 113.

11 Ibid., I, III, I, III, 121.


13 Ibid., p. 145.
14 Thompson, (February 28, 1963).


19 Thompson, (February 26, 1963).


21 Thompson, (March 6, 1963).


23 Sypher, p. 229.

24 Ibid., p. 228.

25 Ibid., p. 231.

26 Ibid.
III

Gulliver's Travels

In the first two chapters of this thesis, four distinct limits of comedy were discussed: farce and invective as lower limits, joy as an upper limit, and, in another continuum, the comic limit of author-reader communication. The reason for including a third chapter on *Gulliver's Travels* is that Swift's comic-satiric masterpiece very aptly illustrates a fifth (and for our purposes, final) limit of comedy, and that is tragedy. The *Travels* might have been approached from the standpoint of any of the previously discussed limits, with the exception of joy, but, of course, the comic limit of tragedy helps round out our argument. Aside from this, however, tragedy is perhaps the most logical choice as a boundary for Swift's comic art because the work is so serious, penetrating, and pessimistic (regardless of one's interpretation) that it approaches tragedy in tone. And, in fact, if an "incorrect" interpretation (to be discussed at length) is given to it, then the work does pass beyond the limits of comedy into tragedy. Furthermore, unlike the other limits examined above, tragedy provides not just a single point but a range of points at which it touches comedy. Accordingly, it adds a very significant dimension to our comic theory. Finally, the
extent to which the work is fundamentally comic or tragic is central to the storm of criticism which has raged over the Fourth Book of the *Travels*, and may, in fact, shed some light on that remarkable controversy. (If a glimmering of light can be cast on it, the approach ought to be justified entirely.)

One reason that the limit of tragedy is important to an understanding of the Fourth Voyage is that it directly involves the charge of misanthropy which has been made frequently of Swift's parting vision in the *Travels*. The accusation itself goes at least as far back as Thackeray and Coleridge. Thackeray's assault on Swift in *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century* is well known, and Coleridge has this to say about the gloomy Dean:

In Swift's writings there is a false misanthropy grounded upon an exclusive contemplation of the vices and follies of mankind, and this misanthropic tone is also disfigured or brutalized by his obtrusion of physical dirt and coarseness. I think *Gulliver's Travels* the great work of Swift. In the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag he displays the littleness and moral contemptibility of human nature; in that to the Houyhnhnms he represents the disgusting spectacle of man with the understanding only, without the reason or the moral feeling, and in his horse he gives the misanthropic ideal of man—that is, a being virtuous from rule and duty, but untouched by the principle of love. 1

I have included Coleridge's remarks because they reveal
two errors (characteristically Romantic) regarding *Gulliver's Travels* which persist in some criticism of the work today. First, Coleridge accuses Swift of displaying "a false misanthropy." Second, he seems to assume that Gulliver's vision at the end is identical with Swift's; thus the Houyhnhnms are "the misanthropic ideal of man." In more recent years, a few critics, such as H. L. Mencken, have agreed with Coleridge's estimation, but have tended to hail rather than denounce Swift's misanthropy. And within the last decade, several well known scholars have at least supported the view that Swift's final vision in the *Travels* is truly misanthropic. One of them, George Sherburn, states, simply as a matter of fact, that in *Gulliver's Travels* Swift was obviously "driving to a misanthropic conclusion." "As a character in a static narrative, Gulliver was the victim of a misanthropic author, . . . certainly . . . one aspect of the despair in Swift's mind grew from his ardent perception of highest values and his further perception that such values were far, far out of man's reach." Sherburn's analysis of Swift's despair implies a tragic vision at least as much as it does a purely misanthropic one. Certainly the idea of despairing of man's ability to attain "highest values" has in it
something more of the tragic acceptance of defeat than of the misanthropic hatred of mankind. Taken in this light, Swift's comic masterpiece becomes a tragedy of unfulfilled aims or unattainable ideals. And indeed, not only Sherburn, but all those critics who argue for Swift's misanthropy in the Travels tend explicitly or implicitly to regard the Fourth Book as Swift's (and Gulliver's) "tragic vision" of man's inadequacies. Consequently, whether or not the book strikes a concluding note of tragedy is central to much criticism of the final Voyage. (Here and elsewhere, I am using the term "tragedy" loosely, not in the classical sense. Precisely how Gulliver is tragic is dealt with at length later on.)

One other important issue must be raised at the outset: the extent to which Gulliver's Travels can be regarded as a specifically comic rather than satiric work. That the Travels is a comic masterpiece with tragic overtones has just been suggested. Traditionally, however, it is referred to as one of the great works of satire. Professor Sacks, whose definitions of comedy and satire were used in the first chapter, assumes that because the Travels is a satiric book, it has to be a pure satire, and, therefore, he rejects comedy from the work. But even by Sacks' own definitions, the Travels is exclusively neither a comedy
nor a satire. Sacks to the contrary, it is only in part "a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it," inasmuch as it also points inward at times and "introduces characters [at least one] about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability," and so it partakes also of comic action. Clearly there are parts of the work, especially the Fourth Voyage, in which no one can deny that the narrative approaches novelistish fiction, and, like it or not, (Swift's intentions here are, of course, irrelevant also) we become caught up in Gulliver's adventures and concerned for his ultimate well being. Perhaps the Third Book is a close approximation of a thorough satire, but taken as a whole, the work partakes of both satire and comedy. As Edward Rosenheim, Jr. remarks,

In the Travels, Swift is able to pursue a clear diversity of literary ends, ranging from those of almost pure comedy, through pointed satiric assaults upon highly particular people and institutions, to that broadest type of unsettling inquiry which, quite as much as it is satiric, is a kind of destructive but genuine philosophic myth. To impose upon the entire work a single satiric purpose is no more adequate an approach than that which views the whole of the Travels
as a grand comedy. The work affects us both as comedy and as satire, sometimes concurrently, more often in separate parts which need no closer link than the kind of structural commitment we have attributed to its author. 8

Nevertheless, if the "reciprocal involvement between Gulliver and his hosts" in three of the four books, "which endows them, at the level of plot alone, with a kind of artistic sophistication which is notably absent from the Third Voyage," is not enough to justify an approach to Books I, II, and IV as comic actions, there is another reason for doing so. In Chapter I above, it was suggested that as satire and comedy approach limits, their important distinctions tend to become refined away. For instance, when either laughter or criticism begins to break down, its specifically satiric versus comic characteristics are no longer of much importance or relevance. This is equally true for the range of points where comedy and satire border on tragedy, and therefore it seems quite justifiable to proceed with a discussion of the Fourth Book as a continuation of our specifically comic theory.

As with A Sentimental Journey, it is very helpful to approach the comedy of Gulliver's Travels through its author. Certain fundamental facts about Swift
are generally unassailable from a critical standpoint. For instance, there is little doubt from his many essays, political tracts, and pamphlets that Swift, the clergyman-author, was a firm moralist in almost everything he wrote. The precise nature of the ethos that is presented for public consumption in the *Travels*, however, has had the critics uncovering personal letters of Swift for years. Still, no one seriously doubts that Swift was an Anglican clergyman in the mainstream of Christian tradition. Consequently, he resolutely opposed the then current Pelagianism which denied the evil inherent in man by asserting his natural goodness and lack of Original Sin. On the other hand, as Professor Landa points out, Swift did not affirm the Augustinian and Calvinistic doctrine of man's total depravity either, for "he felt too keenly man's moral responsibility."10 A conservative in all points of view, he upheld the Ancients in the battle against the Moderns, as exhibited in *Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*. Accordingly, he opposed the overly optimistic progressive theories of history expounded by the Moderns and their faith in an ever expanding future led by science.

One important tradition which Swift, as an orthodox Christian divine, would have taken for granted was that
of the Great Chain of Being. Everything in creation, including man, had a fixed position in the chain which descended from the Creator to the angels, to man, to the beasts, to plants, and finally to inanimate objects. The sin of Pride, which was the basis for all sins, was the result of an attempt to reach beyond that for which man was created, as defined by his position in the Chain. Furthermore, philosophers in the eighteenth century divided man into three components: reason, will, and passion. Reason was exemplified by the angels, who were above man in the hierarchial scale. Passion, in turn, was embodied in animals, who were beneath man. In accordance with his central place in the universe, man possessed a measure of both reason and passion, and, uniquely, the will to choose to what extent he was to be governed by each. Torn between opposing tensions, man's paradoxical middle state in the universe became a vital, almost tragic ambivalence.11

With this much background in mind, we may proceed to an investigation of the book. One mistake that is frequently made in Swift criticism is to devalue Gulliver's role in the narrative. Gulliver functions in two patently distinct ways. He is a rhetorical device to establish certain major guidelines for Swift,
and yet he also functions as a fictional character with a development of his own. In making this remark, I am fully cognizant of the line of reasoning that censures the twentieth-century reader who views everything in terms of the modern novel. (I generally agree with such criticism, am aware of the trap, and have every hope of escaping it.) One need only read Lucian (Swift's master), Aristophanes, and Apuleius to get a proper sense of the character as indeed a fictional character in a narrative, but not in the twentieth-century novel. Lucian's characters exist to establish a nexus with the reader (of course this is why the satirist uses fiction in the first place), but they are properly at the service of the author because he is writing satire, not a psychological novel. Neither Lucian nor Swift is interested in the psychology of his characters for its own sake.

Keeping all this in mind, it nevertheless seems obvious to me that Gulliver, especially in Book IV, but also in Books I and II, is too thoroughly imbedded in the fictional narrative to escape entirely from a role that is at least quasi-novelistic. Nor does this preclude his role as a rhetorical device at numerous points throughout the narrative. From the standpoint of character development, as Rosenheim
points out, Gulliver is only minimally consistent. And yet, even Rosenheim admits that Gulliver is more or less consistently "educable," and, more important, "myopic in his insensitivity to nuances, ironies, and the more subtle aspects of the ridiculous." In other words, Gulliver is consistently naïve. But there is another important "character trait" of Gulliver that is uniform throughout: his self-consciousness. Both Gulliver's naïveté and self-consciousness are revealed from the very beginning. In Lilliput, for instance, he apologizes to the reader for having had to "disburthen" himself in such an unclean manner. Yet "he gains favour by his mild disposition," and becomes useful and acceptable to the Lilliputian government. The reason is that Gulliver's naïveté and lack of objectivity allow him to adapt completely to the Lilliputian social and governmental systems. His kneeling before the tiny king each day to plead for liberty is an amusing spectacle for the reader, but is taken quite seriously by Gulliver. He accepts the honor of the Nardac and becomes involved with Flimnap's wife in a court intrigue which he takes as seriously as do the Lilliputians themselves. As a character trait, Gulliver's naïveté becomes more important as the work progresses, but, as a device to indicate the
book's most important theme, it is almost immediately apparent. His naïve acceptance of the Lilliputian's social and governmental systems exposes their great pride and vanity. An example is the treaty which they draw up to restrain Gulliver. The "man mountain's" good-natured willingness to abide by the "almighty" decrees of the pretentious six-inch potentate of Lilliput is designed to make the reader laugh as he perceives the discrepancy between the power and the pride of these little people. For the most part, of course, the Lilliputians, whose original institutions were sound but had fallen into "scandalous corruption" (p 48), represent England specifically and all degenerate mankind in general. And so mild, good-natured Gulliver acts as a rhetorical foil to expose corruption, degeneracy, and pride.

What Swift is driving at in Book I is further elucidated when seen in contrast to Book II. In Lilliput, the diminutive size of the inhabitants is emblematic of their pettiness. In Brobdingnag, it is Gulliver who is diminutive and who exposes his own pettiness before the magnanimous emperor. In Book I, the Lilliputians stand for degenerate man; in Book II, Gulliver is that emblem. Unlike Gulliver in Lilliput, he is neither omniscient nor superior
in Brobdingnag, where his naïveté is used as a weapon to undercut himself at least as often as those around him. For instance, Gulliver notes that the queen dines with the facility of a large hog. The silent comparison that is immediately invoked is that of Gulliver's own eating habits in Lilliput. In like manner the whole of Book I stands behind Book II as a silent comment upon it. At the termination of a discussion between Gulliver and the king, the latter summarizes the impact which Gulliver's naïve, trifling panegyric upon his country has had upon him (and supposedly the reader too): "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth" (p 107). Representing degenerate mankind, Gulliver in Brobdingnag is the target of most of the satire and ridicule. His false pride is mocked as thoroughly as is that of the Lilliputians in Book I.

In perspective, Gulliver is placed in a middle state between the peoples of Books I and II. Both books really have the same theme, for both expose man's grossly exaggerated pride in the face of his failure to use the rationality bestowed upon him. Man is almighty from his own provincial perspective,
but from a higher and a wiser point of view, he is trivial and ridiculous.

Book II unfolds an important development in Gulliver's character. For the first time, he begins to reflect and to meditate upon his adventures as he becomes more deeply involved in them. Furthermore, as James Wilson remarks, Gulliver reveals himself as something of a philosopher and a Modern in his reflections upon the Brobdingnagian books of morality. Commenting indirectly on the proposition "that nature was degenerated in these latter declining ages of the world, and could now produce only small abortive births in comparison of those in ancient times," Gulliver declares, "For my own part, I could not avoid reflecting how universally this Talent was spread of drawing Lectures on Morality, or indeed rather Matter of Discontent and repining, from the Quarrels we raise with Nature. And, I believe upon a strict Enquiry, those Quarrels might be shown as ill-grounded among us, as they are among that people" (p.111). In other words, Gulliver here implies his opposition to the Brobdingnagian theory of historical decline which Swift, as an Ancient, upheld, and to which point of view he was to bring Gulliver by the end of Book IV. In fact, on board ship returning home from Brobdingnag, Gulliver reveals the
first signs of pessimism in his remarks (echoing the famous speech of the Brobdingnagian King) concerning the sailors: "I thought they were the most little contemptible creatures I had ever beheld" (p.119).

It has been suggested that Gulliver becomes more and more involved in each adventure. It is interesting to note also that the tone of each of Gulliver's voyages is established by the nature of the sea adventure which precedes it. The First Voyage, caused by a careless lookout, is amusing and light-hearted. The Second Voyage, in which the satire becomes more bitter, is the result of the abandonment of Gulliver by his cowardly shipmates. Before Book III, he is captured and set adrift by pirates, and before Book IV, he is the victim of a malicious mutiny. Accordingly, the Third Voyage shows a deepening in tone from its two precursors and prepares for the bitter, intense Fourth Book. The satire in Book III is less universal and more directed against topical matters which Swift desired to eviscerate. Nevertheless, the satire is thematically at one with the rest of the work in its affirmation of permanent and enduring values over fleeting and progressive ones. One important transition, though, in Gulliver is that he again (as in Lilliput) becomes a naïve foil to expose the false values of
others. The best example of this is the review of historical figures presented for Gulliver's inspection in Glubbdubdrib, during the course of which, through conversation with these personages, his optimistic view of humanity is considerably darkened. Pride in this book is illustrated as setting one's sights too high, as do the "speculators" and "projectors," whose visionary schemes to improve mankind are superb in theory but ridiculous in practice. Mockery is directed at all those who negate the human affairs of life in favor of something unattainable.

According to Wilson, it is the sustained characterization of Gulliver in Book III which makes it particularly interesting. Wilson probably overstates the case, but there is at least one important development in Gulliver's character. Disappointed with the speculators of Laputa, he becomes even more pessimistically oriented in Glubbdubdrib by the Ancients' theory of historical decline. By the time he makes his voyage to the land of the Houyhnhnms, he is mentally prepared for the pessimistic acceptance of their values and the misanthropic rejection of mankind.

It is mainly according to how Book IV has been read that the work as a whole has been interpreted. To be sure, the tone of the last Voyage is particularly
pessimistic and satirical no matter how it is read, but in the final analysis it is only Gulliver who is falsely misanthropic and not his creator. Gulliver's naïveté is the most important single aspect of his character that is maintained throughout the narrative. With the seeds of pessimism placed in his mind from the Third Voyage and the disastrous mutiny which befalls him, Gulliver does not surprise us when he heartily embraces the rationalistic code of the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver's propensity to reflect, which has also developed somewhat since his First Voyage, is given free play in Book IV, but it falls victim to his shallow understanding, his naïveté, and his consistent ability to adapt himself (often very uncritically) to a foreign system of values. The shifting pattern of Gulliver's naïveté, as an implement to expose others in one book and himself in the next, is completed in the Fourth Book as he becomes, especially at the end, as in Book II, a satiric butt as well as a satiric vehicle. Why, then, should so many critics have consistently identified his point of view at the end with that of his author?

This brings us face to face with the critical controversy that has raged over the Fourth Voyage. Now, it is not my intention to resolve the seemingly imponderable problem of Swift's Houyhnhnms. Just exactly
what Swift meant by them has produced the Gordian Knot of eighteenth-century criticism. The "defensive" line of reasoning, as it has been called, has consistently denied that Swift means the Houyhnhnms to represent his ideal, though they undoubtedly do for Gulliver. According to R. S. Crane,

All this has been more or less common doctrine among critics of the Voyage since Ernest Bernbaum in 1920; there has been rather less agreement on the identity of the contemporary movements of ideas which Swift had in view as objects of attack. It was usual in the earlier phases of the discussion to say simply, as Bernbaum does, that he was thinking, at the one extreme, of the "sentimental optimism" of writers like Shaftesbury and, at the other, of the pessimism or cynicism of writers like Hobbes and Mandeville. Since then, though, other identifications have been added to the list, as relevant especially to his conception of the Houyhnhnms; we have been told, thus, that he obviously intended to embody in the principles and mode of life of these creatures, along with certain admittedly admirable qualities, the rationalistic errors of the neo-Stoics, the Cartesians, and the Deists—some or all of these, depending on the critic. 19

Crane tends to oppose the "defensive" line; thus, his summary, though accurate in point of fact, is not overly sympathetic. He especially does not begin to suggest the cogency and ingenuity with which many of the arguments have been put forth. Swift's personal letters, including the two famous letters about the Travels written to Pope in 1725, are frequently cited. But many of the letters are ambiguous, including the two
famous ones, and have been used, in fact, to support both sides of the controversy.

The opposition has been led in recent years by Sherburn, who argues that Swift was truly misanthropic and that indeed the Houyhnhnms were meant to represent Swift's, Gulliver's, and Man's ideal. I personally do not know if the Houyhnhnm controversy will ever be resolved, but my own view is that regardless of whether Swift meant the Houyhnhnms to be taken as ideals or as satiric butts, one can only conclude that Gulliver's view of them is not Swift's (this at least frees us from Romantic misrepresentations), and furthermore that Gulliver is, in fact, satirized by his author. The "defensive" line is, of course, most amenable to this point of view; in fact, it rather depends on it. If the Houyhnhnms represent neo-Stoics, Deists, or Cartesianists, it is a simple matter to conclude that Gulliver's final apotheosis of them must be satirically undercut by Swift.

Many critics seem to feel, however, that the view which defines the Houyhnhnms as obvious satiric targets of one sort or another is too easy to be worthy of critical acceptance. On the other hand, if the horses are taken to be ideals, there are certain obvious deficiencies which Swift attributes to them with which one
must come to grips. For instance, "they have no fondness for their colts or foals; but the care they take in educating them proceeds entirely from the dictates of reason" (p. 216). They love only in the abstract sense of loving the species, and accordingly they display no love for individuals. Thus they display an attitude clearly contrary to that of Swift himself as testified by the famous letter to Pope of September 29, 1725.

I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is toward individuals; for instance, I hate the tribe of lawyers, but I love Counsellor Such-a-one, and Judge Such-a-one: so with physicians—I will not speak of my own trade—soldiers, English, Scotch, French, and the rest. But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years, but do not tell, and so I shall go on till I have done with them. I have got materials toward a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition animal rationale, and to show it would be only rationis capax. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy, though not in Timon's manner, the whole building of my Travels is erected and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion. 21

As Samuel Monk points out, three aspects of this passage relate directly to Gulliver's Travels.22 To begin with, the letter indicates that Swift did love individuals and that his hatred was directed only against abstract or professional man when he acts
according to conventions at the expense of humanity. Furthermore, Swift contrasts his misanthropy to that of Timon, who, like the "Man of the Hill" in *Tom Jones*, withdrew from society in order to malign it. Such sterile disillusionment is the origin of sheer scorn or criticism without laughter. Swift asserts that he is opposed to such false misanthropy, and thus he implies that his view of life, if pessimistic, is firmly grounded in purposeful and moral criticism. Finally, the reason for including the Houyhnhnms in the *Travels* is to demonstrate the sharp contrast between a purely rational animal and an animal capable of reason who repeatedly refuses to make use of it.

Although to Gulliver the Yahoos reveal the perfect figure of men, they do not represent humanity as it actually is. They stand instead for the bestial element in man's nature. To be sure, humanity for Swift is nearer the Yahoo state of being than the Houyhnhnm, but man is still not a mere beast. Just as Gulliver is placed in a middle state between the inhabitants of Brobdingnag and Lilliput, so, too, he is clearly placed in a middle state between the Yahoos and the horses. He [Gulliver's "master"] observed in me all the qualities of a Yahoo, only a little more civilized by some tincture of reason, which however was
in a degree as far inferior to the Houyhnhnm race as the Yahoos of their country were to me" (p. 220). Gulliver's heightened propensity to reflect and philosophize, however, leads him astray from this observation to a false belief in the Houyhnhnm extreme as the goal for all mankind.

If, even in the face of this evidence, the ideality of the Houyhnhnms is insisted upon, however, it seems to me that one must still distinguish between Swift's and Gulliver's views at the end, as Professor Irvin Ehrenpreis admits. Ehrenpreis cogently argues that Swift's intention in the Fourth Voyage is to demonstrate the absurdity of the accepted definition of mankind as a rational animal. "The comical satirist differs from other moralists in that he does not argue in favour of the common definition." Still, "Swift makes no attempt, in the satire, to deny the validity of the conventional idea of a normal (and therefore good) man. Rather he invokes it by implication." "Through the satire of the last part of Gulliver's Travels, on the other hand, Swift takes some fantastic examples of real or apparent humanity and has us test accepted definitions by them." Regarding specifically the Houyhnhnms, Ehrenpreis argues that "they are ideal patterns where Swift is setting them off
against man's irrationality, and as comic figures where he is smiling at the whole project of bestowing concrete life upon unattainable abstractions . . . . He is perhaps warning the sophisticated reader that this author, unlike Gulliver, appreciates the comical aspect of his own didacticism."\textsuperscript{28}

Ehrenpreis goes on to point out that in spite of the Houyhnhnm ideal of rationality, it is more than obvious that Swift does not wish us to imitate or admire Gulliver, to reject our families, and to live with horses. Obviously, there are two ideals in the work, the human and attainable, such as represented by the King of Brobdingnag, Lord Munodi, and Pedro de Mendez, and the non-human and unattainable Houyhnhnm ideal. "Swift's reproach is not alone that our conduct falls short of the mark within our reach, but as well that we regard the ultimate mark as attainable. We fail to approach the Brobdingnagians, and we suppose we can be Houyhnhnms."\textsuperscript{29}

No matter how one finally views the Houyhnhnms, however, one point above all is clear. Upon his return to England, Gulliver's aberrations drive him to near lunacy, and it seems impossible to ignore the irony inherent in his consequent disgust for all humanity, including his wife, and in his ridiculous
affection for two newly purchased horses. Throughout the narrative, the theme of Pride is operative. In Book III especially, it is seen as a visionary scheme beyond the realm of human potential. There is no reason to believe that this theme is not fully operative right up to the end. Gulliver, like Timon but unlike Swift, having withdrawn from humanity, sits back and maligns the world. Having asserted his strict adherence to truth throughout the voyages and his "perfect blamelessness" in writing for the noblest of ends, he pronounces a bitter and ironical diatribe against the pride of his fellow men.

I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a lawyer, a pickpocket, a colonel, a fool, a lord, a gamester, a politician, a whore-monger, a physician, an evidence, a suborner, an attorney, a traitor, or the like [we remember Swift was provoked by such people]; this is all according to the due course of things: but when I behold a lump of deformity and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with pride, it immediately breaks all measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together . . . . I dwell the longer upon this subject from the desire I have to make the society of an English yahoo by any means not insupportable, and therefore I here entreat those who have any tincture of this absurd vice, that they will not presume to appear in my sight. (pp. 238-239)

If the irony of this even needs to be spelled out, it is, of course, that Gulliver has become more prideful
in his self-righteous scorn than those whom he denounces. Nor does this measurably soften the censure of Pride itself. In other words, the satire cuts two ways, as it often does, but both ways are really the same. Gulliver is perfectly right; man is too proud, and Gulliver himself is the final proof. As Wilson remarks, Gulliver has progressed from a naïve optimist to a naïve pessimist. He does not even understand that he is not really a Yahoo. The important point is that he is still naïve, and we are not to be taken in by him. Like A Sentimental Journey, Gulliver's Travels is a kind of sermon on self-knowledge, comically defined in terms of self-deception. For Swift, self-knowledge is an awareness of one's true place in the cosmic hierarchy. It is an understanding of man's proper goals and ambitions. To know and live with this knowledge is to escape the pitfalls of the sin of Pride.

Gulliver's Travels is fundamentally a work of comedy, although of sombre tone and not without a great amount of satire, to the extent that it employs the double vision of comedy in an amusing and purposeful way to expose the discrepancy between man's true nature and his pridefully self-deceived affectations of grandeur. The ending, which is the main point of contention among critics, tallies harmoniously with
the basic mixed nature of the work by achieving a comic-satiric resolution based on perceiving the discrepancy between Gulliver's prideful scorn of humanity and his condemnation of human pride.

* * *

The importance of the comic point of view has been discussed in relation to both Fielding and Sterne. The assertion was made that the limit of comedy peculiar to Sterne was caused essentially by a breakdown of the objective, detached comic perspective, so clearly exemplified by Fielding. In *Gulliver's Travels*, the limit of comedy that concerns us is tragedy. The tensions inherent in the work, which force the comedy in that direction are, as in Sterne, a result of the breakdown of the comic point of view. The fallacy of taking Gulliver's vantage point at the end of the work and identifying it with that of Swift has been demonstrated. To do this, as indeed many critics have done, is to take the single vision of the naïvely self-deceived character instead of the comic double vision of the author. No matter which point of view one takes in reading the ending of *Gulliver's Travels*, however, one treads a very thin line between comedy and tragedy. As suggested earlier, it is the nature of the subject matter which, in part, accounts for this fact. In
dealing with the serious consequences of Pride, Swift chose to treat an aspect of human nature that frequently served the purposes of tragedy. The sombre tone of the work, as well, establishes an almost tragic keynote. Behind everything else, in turn, as with Sterne, lies a particular homiletic purpose based on a personal vision of actuality.

The importance of perceiving the distinction between the points of view of character and author has been paid a great deal of attention. Although it is a crucial distinction, it is, nevertheless, a very precise one. Gulliver's parting vision is a misanthropic, almost nihilistic one. Swift's, although not a vision of hopeless despair, is a very pessimistic one. This important but fine distinction between the points of view of Gulliver and Swift is indicative of the precise balance which often exists at the boundaries of comedy and tragedy. Gulliver is ridiculously tragic. Swift is grimly comic. To take Swift's point of view, dependent on a double vision, is to approach very near the tragic limits of comedy. To take Gulliver's, dependent on perceiving no comic irony, is to exceed them. Therefore, to follow the divergent paths of Swift's and Gulliver's final visions, while holding them in juxtaposition, will enable us to demonstrate and discuss
several points of tangency between comedy and tragedy.

Behind tragedy and comedy is a prehistoric death—and—resurrection ceremonial, the rite of killing the old year (the aged king) and bringing in the new season (the resurrection or initiation of the adolescent king). Associated with killing the old king and devouring his sacrificial body was the ancient rite of purging the tribe by expelling a scapegoat on whose head were heaped the sins of the past year . . . . At this public catharsis the scapegoat was often the divine man or animal, in the guise of victim, to whom were transferred the sins and misfortunes of the worshippers . . . . The God who is savior must be hated and slain. He has a double nature: he who is venerated, he who is reviled. Before the resurrection there is the crowning with thorns. Comedy desecrates what it seeks to consecrate. 31

As the above passage suggests, elements of pessimism and even tragedy are inherent in comedy. Sypher explains elsewhere that the ancient tragic cycle consisted of birth, struggle, and death, and that to this the comic cycle added resurrection. 32 In this sense, tragedy is unfulfilled comedy. The tragical elements of the ritual that must be passed through to achieve the comic cycle inject a note of despair and defeat into comedy. On the other hand, the anticipation or prefiguration of resurrection in the tragic cycle injects into it a feeling of mirth and optimism. As Santayana has remarked, "the blackest tragedy is festive; the most pessimistic philosophy is an enthusiastic triumph of thought." 33 In Gulliver's conclusion (first published in 1735), although it is despairing to the point
of tragedy, we may detect a glimmering of hope in his admission that certain human characteristics are once again beginning to reappear in him (p. 6). If this is so, we may anticipate a kind of rebirth or resurrection for Gulliver, but because it is only a possible prefiguration, it must be assigned to the kind of vision that belongs to tragedy. Swift's final vision, although pessimistic, must be assigned to the vision of comedy, for by virtue of its doubleness, it balances Gulliver's ironical view of man's decay against the few but significant individuals who stand forth as embodiments of the attainable human ideal and thus passes beyond Gulliver's despair. Swift demonstrates in the Yahoos the lowest threshold of humanity, and we feel some assurance in having been taken as low as we can go and still been brought back to civilization at the end. For Gulliver, the end brings only despair, and this distinction, though precise, is enough to assign his vision to tragedy and Swift's to comedy.

The double vision of comedy is able to encompass and often reconcile extremes within its view. The comedy of Joseph Andrews encompasses extremes of "good" and "bad" nature but dissolves everything in laughter at the end. Swift's comic vision is able to encompass
both Houyhnhnm and Yahoo extremes and reconcile them in man, who stands somewhere in between them. Sypher declares that "the tragic hero meets either/or dilemmas but must pay some penalty for not being able to conciliate incompatibles. His only refuge from despair is a stoic endurance between those incompatibles; he must somehow prove himself adequate to the disasters he suffers." Gulliver too makes for himself and "either/or" choice between irreconcilables. He must either become what he thinks to be man's ideal or cease to act like a man at all. His failure to endure these incompatibles with much stoicism is marked by his recourse to despair. This is not to say that Gulliver is the tragic hero of the book, for after all he is a fool, but he does create for himself an essentially tragic situation. He is unable to envision the mean between extremes that is affirmed by the work.

Another point where comedy and tragedy touch that is nicely illustrated in Gulliver's Travels concerns the similarity between comic fortune and tragic fate. According to J. A. K. Thomson, "we watch the hero challenge Destiny and fall, and we feel that this is tragic. We observe the fool running his head against the force of circumstances, and that (if the consequences are not serious) we feel to be comic." As we have said,
Gulliver is not a tragic hero. Rather he is an anomaly: the fool running his head against the force of circumstances with serious consequences. This, in part, accounts for the curious mixture of comic and tragic elements juxtaposed at the end of the book. From Gulliver's narrow point of view, of course, he is hardly a fool. And indeed if we do sympathize with him (as the spectator of tragedy sympathizes with the tragic hero), we do see tragedy and despair. But if we adopt the comic point of view of the author, as we are meant to, we see an ironical element of comedy interposed in Gulliver's final "soliloquy."

Another tangential point of comedy and tragedy involves masks. Two comments made by Santayana regarding them are rich in implication.

When we are children we love putting on masks to astonish our elders; there is a lordly pleasure in puzzling those harmless giants who are not in the secret. We ourselves, of course, know that it is only a disguise; and when presently we pull it off, their surprise at recognizing us is something deliciously comic. 36

Everyone who is sure of his mind, or proud of his office, or anxious about his duty assumes a tragic mask. He deputes it to be himself and transfers to it almost all his vanity. 37

A particularly important implication of Santayana's remarks, as I interpret them, is that one of the essential differences between comedy and tragedy is that, at the
end of the "game," the comic mask is removed, whereas the tragic mask remains. In fact, the tragic mask begins to grow into the very flesh of the character until it becomes an integral part of his being. This concept can be applied to Gulliver with enlightening results.

According to Professor Wilson, Gulliver puts on the mask of the _alazon_ or impostor and wears it throughout. The impostor in comedy is not ordinarily a sympathetic character, and Wilson is apparently disturbed by Gulliver's tendency to evoke the sympathy of the reader. Consequently, he calls Gulliver a "not unsympathetic _alazon._" In so doing Wilson oversimplifies Gulliver's complex role in the narrative. In the sense that Gulliver is an intruder and an impostor, he does wear the mask of the _alazon_ throughout. But the _alazon_ is traditionally an object of ridicule in satire and comedy; his supposed wisdom "is reduced to absurdity, and the _alazon_ himself becomes a clown." This is a fairly accurate description of Gulliver in Books II and IV where he himself becomes a chief object of ridicule and at times a clown (as, for instance, in his encomium on gunpowder in Book II and in his ignominious exposure by the inflamed female Yahoo in Book IV). In Books I and III, however, the description of Gulliver as _alazon_ simply does not match his actual role. In these sections,
Gulliver himself is not often exposed, but his naïveté and humility are frequently employed by Swift to undermine false ideologies, values, and institutions. This role is more nearly that of the eiron, the alter ego of the alazon, the humble buffoon who unmasks the false wisdom of those around him (though it must be admitted that the humility of the eiron is usually shrewd humility, and this does not accurately describe Gulliver).

Nevertheless, the distinction between Gulliver's role as eiron in Books I and III, and alazon in Books II and IV is at least less of an oversimplification than Wilson's. Gulliver wears not one but two masks in the Travels, and there is a change of masks following each voyage except the last. After each of the first three adventures, as Gulliver returns home and resumes the life of an average Englishman for a very brief time, Swift allows us to catch our breaths for a moment and to reorient ourselves within a familiar framework. Then Gulliver's role is adjusted to his new adventure (that is, his mask is changed), our point of view is again shifted, and we are off to view existence in a new light. But, as we have said, the tone of each voyage becomes increasingly sombre, and Gulliver's personal involvement in each becomes more intense. At the beginning, Gulliver is almost as
unsophisticated as a child—a child to whom, as Santayana suggests, the wearing of a mask is always comic. But with his increasing inclination to reflect, Gulliver, though still naïve, begins to take himself more seriously. The culmination of this tendency occurs in Book IV. Gulliver, as a rhetorical device, is made to play the role of the impostor-intruder-alazon. But his rhetorical role actually becomes a part of his psychological makeup as a character in a fictional narrative. Gulliver's reaction to the Houyhnhnms is so strong that he is firmly convinced that he really is an impostor-intruder-Yahoo, whose supposed wisdom as a man is reduced to absurdity by the horses. Then, there is no removing the mask. It grows into Gulliver's flesh because he believes it to be a truth about his identity. Gulliver has lost his comic viability. To recall Santayana, "everyone who is sure of his mind . . . or anxious about his duty assumes a tragic mask." Gulliver is, indeed, sure of his mind, and he leaves Houyhnhnmland hopeful of reforming humanity, which he now believes to be his duty.

At the end, Gulliver's comic mask has thus become a tragic one; the comic alazon has become a tragic alazon. Frye says that, while the alazon is "normally an object of ridicule in comedy or satire," he is "often
the hero of a tragedy." If we fail to see the comedy inherent in the change, we do indeed see Gulliver as a tragic hero. He is initially a comic figure who terminally puts on a self-imposed tragic mask—thus his seemingly ambiguous nature. Once again, we must maintain our comic double vision to perceive the ironical transformation. The scapegoat ritual of expulsion from Houyhnhnmeland, which should be seen as essentially comic, becomes terrifyingly tragic for Gulliver, who finds himself suddenly at one with his mask. If we do not understand that this is all a great mistake on the part of Gulliver, we see no comedy. Swift, in permitting Gulliver to develop in this manner, brings his readers to the very edge of comedy. Gulliver, if we let him, carries us over into tragedy.

To repeat a point made earlier, Gulliver functions both as a character and as a rhetorical device. The interplay between these roles is meant to draw the reader in and out of the work, developing sympathy for Gulliver and then, suddenly, breaking the rapport to drive a point deep into the reader himself. In Book I, the reader tends to empathize with naïve, good-natured Gulliver, who plays with the Lilliputians in a toyland world. Having established this rapport between the sympathetic character and the reader, Swift
manipulates him as one would an instrument, changes his mask, sends him to Brobdingnag, and makes a fool of him in a debate with the king. The reader, having complacently adopted Gulliver's point of view in Book I, suddenly finds himself the victim of attack in Book II. Time after time Swift follows this basic procedure, encouraging the reader to adopt his character's point of view, only to reveal the fallacy of it. In Book III for instance, Gulliver and the reader alike rejoice at the idea of the immortal Struldbruugs, only to be shown the disgusting implications of eternal life on earth. And in Book IV, when Gulliver embraces the rationalistic code of the Houyhnhnms, the reader must be careful to avoid the same mistake of adopting uncritically the character's point of view.

Swift's careful artistic control pervades Gulliver's Travels as he attempts to penetrate the secure, self-righteous masks of the readers themselves to drive home the moral exemplum on self-knowledge and Pride. But the author drives his points so hard at times that, in fact, the result is often one in which the reader loses contact with the proper standard of reference and finds himself on the wrong side of an argument. Swift deliberately contrived a system of shifting frames of reference because he wanted to establish a network of
multiple perspectives to force his readers to look at themselves and the world around them with objectivity, for a change. In a continuously oscillating framework of values, the only salvation for the reader is to remain detached. Swift must have realized the peril of losing the reader in order to drive home his theme, but the more risk he took, the deeper he could drive it. Like Sterne, his limitations were inherent, perhaps even calculated, in the didactic purpose behind his work. The seeds of tragedy, inherent in the pessimistic tone of the book and the gravity of the subject matter, provide assurance that any misinterpretations that do occur will involve a tragic vision of the work. A reader who has lost his objectivity is easily lost altogether; Gulliver is suddenly seized upon as a tragic hero and the Houyhnhnms become the "misanthropic ideal of man." In *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick is played with at the risk of losing the reader. In *Gulliver's Travels*, the reader himself is manipulated through Gulliver at the expense of losing his allegiance. When a reader commits himself to Yorick, he sees only pathos. When he commits himself to Gulliver, he sees only despair and tragedy. Such was the nature of the difference in the two clergymen themselves. Forced to an extreme, Sterne might have lost his comic perspective
and become a Yorick. Similarly forced, Swift might have become a Gulliver.

As we have seen, George Meredith maintained that a comic view of others starts with a comic view of oneself. For Sterne, that capacity was the whole basis of his work. For Fielding, it is safe to say that nothing was sacred. It is my belief that Swift as well could laugh at himself, even if it was only a kind of malign laugh. That Swift could see the comic irony in the Gulliver of Book IV and present him in a ridiculous, if painful, light at the end suggests that he could indeed laugh, sardonically perhaps, at the logical extension of his own pessimistic nature. As Max Eastman remarks, "the comical and painful are not objectively distinct. Every kind of humor can be matched by a kind of pain. Everything that is tragic may be comic if you contrive to take it playfully." Although the critical tone of satire tends to emphasize the superiority of the author above his work even more than do the milder forms of comedy, the satire of Gulliver's Travels is too permeated with the idea that every man is somewhat of a Yahoo to exclude the author himself from the judgment.

Throughout the book, Swift's comic vision rescues the narrative from going over into aspects of tragedy
toward which Gulliver continually pushes near the end. What we see in the final vision of Gulliver is the kind of criticism without laughter, taken to a limit, that we saw only approached in Fielding and not even suggested in Sterne. At the end Gulliver's viability as a comic character ceases; he loses his vitality, his comic capacity to overcome obstacles, his ability to remove his mask. He suggests many tragical phenomena; he carries us over into a few of them; but ultimately his static and sterile ending is neither tragic nor comic. It is simply life-denying. When we begin to understand Swift's final vision, we observe how it saves the book from this sort of sterility. For despite the comic setting, comic conventions, and comic techniques employed in the book, if we identify ourselves with Gulliver, if we apprehend the plot as he spins it instead of as Swift spins it through him, we will miss the comic conclusion to a comic work. If we can maintain our objectivity to the end, for which Swift so earnestly strives, our comic double vision will assure us a victory over inhumanity.

"Tragedy needs a more single vision than comedy, for the comic perception comes only when we take a double view—that is a human view—of ourselves, a perspective
by incongruity. Then we take part in the ancient rite that is a Debate and a Carnival, a Sacrifice and a Feast."}

43
Conclusion

In *Joseph Andrews*, we established a standard of reference that was sensed in the work but perhaps not really attained. That was the comic limit of pure joy. In *A Sentimental Journey*, we discussed how this highest limit of comedy was successfully approached by virtue of Sterne's positive vision and by the risks taken in the direction of author-reader communication. No comedy of any kind denies life. But in *Gulliver's Travels*, we feel nothing at all of this joyful, almost divine, acceptance of life. Swift's work affirms life, but only in a negative way. Man is degenerate because he has failed to utilize his full capacity for reason and because he has grown proud, but he is not beyond the point of corrigibility to a more purposeful existence. Swift's affirmative vision is not readily discernible because it is only implied, but it is the moral framework of his art.

If, on the other hand, Gulliver were a true tragic hero instead of a tragic fool, he would, curiously enough, illustrate something of the tragic vision of life that is akin to comic joy. When Gulliver accepts the Houyhnhnm's denunciation of mankind, he accepts with it a kind of irreconcilable existence between what ought to be (for him) and what can never be. He
despairs, he rails, he sets out to reform mankind; but at the end, he demands only to be left alone to withdraw into himself. This kind of acceptance is not that of the true tragic hero. The tragic hero, faced with an irreconcilable external situation or an internal state of mind, often dependent upon each other, takes the burden upon himself, confronting and defying it in his life and by his death. In his self-recognizing acceptance of destiny, the tragic hero achieves through his triumphant defeat a vision not unlike the highest vision of comedy. Put another way,

Comedy compared with tragedy is after all only another method of becoming reconciled to the inevitably incomplete nature of finite existence. Both comedy and tragedy taken together are exhaustive functions of a certain grade of value-apprehension. Above them, as we shall see, lies their mutual fusing in divine comedy. 44

Divine comedy consists in pushing comedy almost as far as it will go. It has judgment without criticism; laughter but above the battle; and an affirmation which is almost direct. It takes all actuality to be its province and contrasts this with the whole of the logical order. What remains is close to tragedy; something of the tragic acceptance of the logic of events, the steady march of fate or destiny. 45

As comedy moves toward increasingly direct affirmation of life, it begins to lose two of its distinguishing characteristics, laughter and criticism, until it merges with the tragic acceptance of destiny, which
similarly has neither criticism nor laughter. Thus we have come full circle. The number of points of tangency which lie between comedy and tragedy at their fullest expansions suggests a gradual merging of the two art forms which are so often thought to be at variance with one another.

In retrospect, one must conclude that the tentatively defined metaphor of the comic fan in the introduction might now very well benefit from a slight adjustment. Perhaps, for our purposes, the form of comedy might now be more accurately defined as a flexible, five-pointed figure, a kind of comic star, as it were. The lower leg to the left might represent farce, to the right, invective. The highest point might stand for joy, and the left and right arms might represent, in other continuums, the breakdown of communication and tragedy. A truly exhaustive theory of eighteenth-century comedy has not, of course, been evolved, but then an exhaustive theory was not intended nor could it have been in the limited space prescribed herein. Nevertheless, if the discussion has suggested and demonstrated the outlines of a workable comic theory at the same time that it has shed a little light on the three works considered, it has succeeded in all its intentions.
Finally, and above all, it must be remembered that
the achievements of comedy are human achievements and
its limits are human limits, for comedy is a human ex-
pression of life and life's limitations. When men be-
come too critical of one another, they have lost a sense
of human imperfection. When they can only laugh at one
another, men demonstrate a loss of values and the dis-
tortion or destruction of human standards of measurement.
And when men cease to communicate, they have lost the
fundamental expression of their humanity. Joy is an
upper limit for apprehending reality. In tragedy,
men discover another way to view life which may lead
them back through a tragic acceptance of actuality
to something very near comic joy.

Even in its most pessimistic tones, comedy always
presents us with the sense of a higher potential for
humanity. By recognizing and exposing the inadequacies
and failings of mankind, it rises above them. The
achievement of comedy is that it stands as an affir-
mation of life by the very fact of its recognition
of human frailty and through its vindication of the
need for reformation. In a world that is too often
at odds with itself, it offers the possibility of a
resolution of tensions by displaying them before us.
It is something of lasting value in a world where values
are often awry.
Footnotes:


4 Sherburn, p. 94.

5 Ibid., p. 97.


7 Ibid., p. 26.

8 Rosenheim, p. 112.

9 Ibid.


11 See Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1958), pp. 177-209.

12 Rosenheim, p. 111.

13 Ibid.


17 Wilson, p. 159.

18 When I speak of the shifting pattern of Gulliver's naiveté, I do not mean that the ultimate object of the satire necessarily shifts at the same time. Indeed, it often does not—for instance, Swift satirizes Pride through both Gulliver and the people he encounters.


20 Sherburn, p. 97, and also Rosenheim.

21 Swift, Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings, ed. Landa, pp. 493-494.

22 Monk, p. 115.


25 Ibid., p. 20.

26 Ibid., p. 21.

27 Ibid., p. 22.
28 Ibid., p. 35.
29 Ibid., pp. 35-36.
30 Wilson, p. 163.
32 Ibid., p. 220.
34 Sypher, p. 239.
36 Santayana, p. 128.
37 Ibid., p. 133.
38 Wilson, p. 154.
39 Sypher, p. 228. The rest of this paragraph is based on Sypher's discussion, pp. 228-230.
41 See Ehrenpreis, footnote 28, and p. 101 above.
42 Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Laughter (New York, 1936), p. 204.
43 Sypher, p. 255.

Conclusion
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