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Little Men:
Literature, Anxiety, and Modern Masculinity, 1726-1788

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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This dissertation examines the unprecedented and previously unanalyzed proliferation of miniature men in male-authored literature of the eighteenth century. Through readings of canonical and lesser-known texts—ranging from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb plays* and Joseph Boruwlaski’s *Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf*—I analyze “little men” literature of the 1700s as representing a network of interrelated male identity crises that emerged in the nascent modern era. I argue that these various examples of diminutive men—typically featured alongside enormous women—encode anxieties about the emasculation of the “Englishman” in the arenas of marriage, science, and sensibility, as redefined by the rise of the middle class and the emergence of women as consumers in the new marketplace. By reading the explosion of little-men literature in the eighteenth century as a response to these defining aspects of the new British culture, I make a case for this strange trend as a key factor in the formation of modern masculinity.
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This dissertation is dedicated, in loving memory, to my grandfather, Asher Sapolsky (1912-2002); and to Steven Sapolsky (1948-2001): uncle, activist, scholar, musician, and sorely-missed friend. This one’s for you, Steven.
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INTRODUCTION

Eighteenth-Century Little Men: A National Genre

"There is nothing too little for so little a creature as man"

—Samuel Johnson to James Boswell

From the publication of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726 to the subscription-only sale of Joseph Boruwlski's *Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf* in 1788, eighteenth-century English literature was filled with examples of miniature men. Henry Fielding's Tom Thumb plays drew packed crowds, while public "freak shows" advertised English-born dwarfs as models of national manhood. Children's chapbooks and pornographic literature each featured diminutive men of their own, and conservative intellectuals of the time characterized the relationship between "the moderns" and "the ancients" as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants. The proliferation of "little men" literature in eighteenth-century England was, in other words, a phenomenon—one that contemporary literary and cultural criticism has surprisingly ignored. And yet, today's critical climate—in which gender theory, body criticism, and masculinity studies are helping to shape and define the growing field of eighteenth-century studies—makes the time ripe for an analysis of this fascinating chapter in the history of modern Western masculinity. In which eighteenth-century England presumptuously—yet also, as it turned out, perceptively—saw itself as playing a pivotal role.
In preparation for the present study, my research of what seemed like countless examples of eighteenth-century little men inevitably presented me with the difficult task of narrowing down my list to a few central texts, some of which I eventually chose to omit for editorial purposes, and others (specifically, *Tristam Shandy* and *History and Adventures of an Atom*), which I was not able to treat as thoroughly as I had hoped because of time constraints. I look forward to revisiting many of those omitted and under-treated texts in the very near future as I revise this dissertation for publication.

In different yet overlapping ways, the texts included in this dissertation address a broader crisis in English masculinity at a time of radical socioeconomic change. Specifically, these portrayals of tiny male bodies—typically featured alongside enormous women—encode anxieties about the emasculated condition of the "Englishman" in the arenas of marriage, science, and sensibility, as redefined by the rise of the middle class and by the emergence of women as consumers in the new marketplace. By reading the explosion of little-men literature in the eighteenth century as a response to certain defining aspects of the new British culture—the emergence of a new consumer culture, the bourgeois cults of sensibility and companionate marriage, and the commodification of scientific instruments—I show that this body of literature on little men is not only a phenomenon, but also a national genre, representing a network of interrelated male identity crises that emerged in the nascent modern era.

*
My first chapter, “Go. Get Your Husband Put into Commission :” Fielding’s Tom Thumb Plays and the Labor of Little Men,” focuses on Fielding’s two Tom Thumb plays. *Tom Thumb* (1730) and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731). Whereas previous critics have illuminated the plays’ satirical references to Walpole, the royal family, and Restoration tragedy. I read the plays as satires of modern man’s role in marriage, as circumscribed by the new bourgeois culture. Abundant with bawdy imagery equating gastronomic and economic consumption with sexual consumption, Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays suggest that the modern English husband—portrayed here as a thumb-sized man—has become just another devourable commodity in the hands of the new consuming woman.

I demonstrate that Fielding’s portrayal of his thumb-sized protagonist’s love affair with a statuesque fiancée draws from a contemporaneous comic pornographic genre that depicts objectified menial-laboring little men as sexual props. Modeling his plays after these anti-capitalist sexual satires. Fielding suggests that in the age of female consumerism. English husbands and male suitors of all classes have become little more than the workers and “playthings” of their wives or wives-to-be.

*

Chapter two. “The Short Club: Alexander Pope, Christopher Smart, and Joseph Boruwlaski.” deals with the sexual and socioeconomic politics of male stature in writings by Alexander Pope and Christopher Smart—two famously and self-consciously diminutive English male writers—alongside the lesser-known published memoir of a former Polish court dwarf named Joseph Boruwlaski. Boruwlaski’s memoir describes the
author’s move from life as a “kept” man among women of the Polish aristocracy to an independent existence in London as an honorary Englishman. While Pope’s “Short Club” pieces for the Guardian and Smart’s poem “The Author Apologizes to a Lady, for His Being a Little Man” mock modern bourgeois standards of masculinity, Boruwlaski tries to embrace English bourgeois values by assimilating into English culture and appropriating the middle-class genre of sentimental fiction—in which the “man of feeling” achieves sympathy for his inferiors by observing them—as a means by which to overcome his objectified status.

However, Boruwlaski’s sentimental narrative becomes complicated by two less cohesive strands: its precarious marriage plot, and its volatile “self-made man” narrative. By the end of the memoirs, Boruwlaski’s failed attempt at companionate marriage to a normal-sized woman, together with his desperate efforts to support himself by performing in public concerts and selling his memoir by subscription, culminate in a cynical portrait of the modern self-made Englishman as an objectified “little machine” who labors for the entertainment of others in a culture in which even the aristocracy values commerce over chivalry.

*

Chapter three, “Of Microscopes and Men: Gulliver’s Travels and the Sexual Politics of Eighteenth-Century Microscopy,” investigates the sexual politics of Enlightenment science as expressed in fiction and nonfiction about diminutive men and
minute bodies" (microscopic specimens). These writings—by Jonathan Swift, Susannah Centlivre, Joseph Addison, and others—combine two disparate anxieties of the time: the apprehensions of scientists who feared that the microscope's recent mass-production and accessibility to amateurs belittled the authority of a scientific elite, and the insecurities of misogynists who feared that the advent of the new female "virtuoso" (amateur scientist and collector) reduced man to the level of the instruments and specimens in her or his collection.

Building on Marjorie Nicolson's argument about microscopy and Gulliver's Travels, I argue that Swift inflects Gulliver more specifically as a pocket-sized instrument in the hands of enormous female consumers, not unlike the fashionable "pocket-microscopes" of his day. I show that Swift's portrayal of an English adventurer turned objectified "little man" dismantles not only Enlightenment ideals in general, but also the emasculating effects of their commodification in the new bourgeois culture.

*

Drawing from the arguments established in the previous three sections, my final chapter, "'A Dwarf in More Articles Than One: Littleness and Masculinity in Smollett and Sterne" begins with a brief analysis of Tobias Smollett's novel History and Adventures of an Atom in light of eighteenth-century writings on the homunculus and the relation between man and atom. It ends with an investigation of the surplus of short and shortened men in Laurence Sterne's Tristam Shandy. I focus primarily on Sterne's portrayal of Tristam's father, the diminutive patriarch Walter Shandy, arguing that
Tristam Shandy's politics of stature and sexual difference satirize the struggle to maintain old forms of patriarchy in the face of radically changing standards of English masculinity.

*

My conclusion, titled "Little Men and Modernity: From Tom Thumb to The Incredible Shrinking Man," briefly explores three American films of the late 1950's that are directly descended from the eighteenth-century English genre of little men literature: The Incredible Shrinking Man, and two different versions of Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman. I end this study of eighteenth-century English literature with these twentieth-century American texts in order to demonstrate how these films' treatments of male stature, female consumption, and domesticity, provide a direct link between concerns about the future of modern masculinity laid out by Fielding, Swift, and others, and the sexual politics of the mid-twentieth century.
Notes

CHAPTER ONE

"Go. Get Your Husband Put into Commission:"

Fielding’s Tom Thumb Plays and the Labor of Little Men

"In Tasks so bold, can Little Men engage"

-Pope. “The Rape of the Lock”

"my Grand-mamma hath often said. Tom Thumb, beware of Marriage"

-Fielding. Tom Thumb

In 1730, a young playwright named Henry Fielding wrote a series of love poems addressed to “Celia,” otherwise known as Charlotte Cradock, whom he eventually married in 1734. In one of these poems, entitled “On Her Wishing to Have a Lilliputian to Play With,” the author muses: “May I. to please my lovely dame. 'Be five foot shorter than I am: 'And. to be greater in her eyes. 'Be sunk to Lilliputian size.” Reduced to Lilliputian size—just under six inches according to Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels—Fielding imagines himself dancing on his beloved’s hand and carted along in her gown, hat, and pocket, in order to “be. My Celia, what is prized by thee.” The poem’s conclusion finds the miniature Fielding positioned on the sleeping Celia’s pillow “[w]hile I survey her bosom rise.” a voyeuristic scenario permissible only because, as he admits in a parenthetical phrase. “afraid she could not be. Of such a little thing as me”—his body
and genitals, and their proximity to Celia's body and genitals, no longer posing a sexual threat to her, even in bed.  

And yet therein lies the "catch" of Fielding's Lilliputian fantasy: the fantastical circumstances that grant him unprecedented access to Celia's body and bed leave him physically unable to do anything about it. Becoming what Celia desires, "a Lilliputian to Play with," reduces his entire body to penis-size, and thereby makes his own genitalia both physically and symbolically irrelevant. Hence, Fielding states, "Here would begin my former pain And wish to be myself again."  

Read alongside Fielding's better known works of "little man" literature: the popular two-act comedy, Tom Thumb (1730), and the three-act Tragedy of Tragedies (1731), the author's 1730 Lilliputian love poem to his future wife underscores a prominent comical theme in the plays that has yet to be critically explored: the question of how the thumb-sized protagonist and his beloved fiancée, the statuesque Princess Huncamunca, will consummate their impending marriage. Whereas in the poem Fielding precludes sexual intercourse between a Lilliputian man and the woman he desires, in the Tom Thumb plays he goes so far as to suggest that Tom Thumb's size actually makes him a superlative sexual partner for the "real-life" modern English woman. Tom Thumb makes the argument himself when, in the last lines of the epilogue to Tom Thumb, he propositions the women in the audience who might regard him as sexually incompatible because of his "inferior Size." If they put him to the test, he proposes, they might find him to be a superior lover:  

But, for the Ladies, they, I know despise
The little Things of my inferior Size

Their mighty Souls are all of them too large

To take so small a Heroe to their Charge.

Take Pity, Ladies, on a young Beginner:

Faith! I may prove, in time, a thumping Sinner."

The double meaning of the word "thumping" in "thumping Sinner" reiterates the sexual joke by linking Tom Thumb's "thumping" stature—"thumping" meaning "of striking size"—with his ability to "thump," meaning to pound as does a "fist, a club, or any blunt instrument.""

That Fielding spent the years 1730 and 1731 writing a love poem and two comedies depicting a miniature man as the paradigmatic object of female desire would seem to indicate that the sexual pairing of a little man and a normal-sized English woman struck the author as an apt metaphor for heterosexual relations in his time. Recent criticism, however, has had surprisingly little to say about Fielding's interest in sexual and marital relations between little men and normal-sized women. This neglect of the plays' sexual dynamics can be partly explained by the fact that from 1918 to the present day, criticism on the plays has been almost exclusively preoccupied with the ongoing debate over whether Fielding intended the plays as burlesques of Restoration tragedy or satires of Walpole and the royal family. Unfortunately, by focusing upon this debate to the exclusion of almost all else, these previous readings have ignored a cruder, but no less meaningful, side of the plays' satirical humor: "Thumb" being a symbol of female masturbation, and also, like the word "Thomas," a common early-modern colloquialism
for the penis, the plays reiterate in act after act the joke that marital consummation is only possible for Tom Thumb and his normal-sized bride-to-be if she uses his entire body as a phallic sexual prop. This method of conjugal intercourse, Fielding makes clear, would provide great pleasure for Huncamunca but great danger for Tom Thumb, who risks not only physical discomfort but also the possibility of being literally swallowed up in the act.

As we will see, the most surreal and satirical dimension of this comical pornographic scenario is its appearance throughout the plays in the economic and gastronomic terms of male labor and female appetite. Conceived in a nascent capitalist culture marked by widespread anxieties over the emergence of women as consumers in the new marketplace, Fielding’s fantastical presentation of spousal intimacy is as socioeconomically relevant as it is sexually risqué.

Starting in the 1720’s, as recent critics of eighteenth-century culture have noted, the quantity and quality of “goods” in England were greater and more available to a wider range of consumers than ever before. As the consumption of goods came to play an increasingly prominent role in social life, English culture became not only a culture of commodities but also, and by extension, a culture of consumption, the origins of the consumer culture in which we now live. In the early eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for people skeptical about the new consumer culture to project their anxieties over this culture shift onto the bodies of English women, portraying them as all-consuming, ravenous devourers of goods. “Although women’s voracity has long been asserted,” writes Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, “history awaited the proliferation of consumer commodities to make the specific connection between female appetite and the world of goods. With the birth of a consumer culture, women were assumed to be hungry
for things—for dresses and furniture, for tea cups and carriages, for all commodities that indulged the body and enhanced physical life.  

By portraying that woman-consumed thing as a pocket-sized man, I propose, Fielding's Tom Thumb plays combine these anxieties over female consumption with anxieties over contemporaneous changes in the cultural arenas of heterosexual courtship and marriage. When women become insatiable consumers of goods, the plays suggest, what is to stop those women from extending their behavior in the marketplace into their behavior in courtship and marriage, and becoming insatiable consumers of men? Or, to put it another way: what is to stop men from becoming the consumed objects of this new breed of woman?

This paranoiac reasoning behind the sexual humor of Fielding's Tom Thumb plays, though of course comical, is not entirely isolated from the cultural reality of Fielding's time. By the 1730's, gender roles and marital roles were shifting to conform to the new rules of the new middle class cult of companionate marriage (the belief in marriage as a matter of personal choice rather than as an economic exchange of women from family to family, and from father to husband), in which women were thought of no longer as merely exchanged goods in marriage but also as discerning buyers in the marriage market.

It is in the context of this cultural climate that Fielding portrays Huncamunca as an insatiable female consumer who might literally devour her husband-to-be on or before their wedding night. By depicting the little man not only as the object of the female consumer (as both her commodity fetish and sexual fetish), but also as her menial laborer (referring to Tom Thumb as Huncamunca's "Chimney-Sweeper" [1.3.55], and her
"commissioner to discharge" [2.10.44]). Fielding suggests that in a culture in which women are the consumers and men the consumed, women relinquish their roles as producers (of children and of breast milk) in marriage and as consumed objects (as wives and prostitutes) in the marital and sexual marketplace, and men become society’s new sexual labors and the objects of the new female consumption. Extending “On Her Wishing to Have a Lilliputian to Play With” into a full-fledged narrative, Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays transform the personal poem’s subtle sexual humor into a bawdy social satire on modern courtship in the age of the new consumer culture.

*

The reading of Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays that I am endorsing requires an investigation into two other little men of Fielding’s time: “Monsieur Thing” and “Signior Dildo,” the protagonists of an underanalyzed late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century comical pornographic genre best described as anthropomorphic dildo poetry. Representing sexual props as miniature menial laborers, these anti-capitalist poems not only illuminate the sexual and socioeconomic satire behind Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays, but also qualify as the plays’ unacknowledged forebears. Based on actual single-legged anthropomorphic phallic sexual props sold in English “toy shops” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these poems depict their dildo protagonists as French or Italian male workers in the hands of enormous English women who subject them to a form of sexual intercourse characterized in both the poems and in Fielding’s plays as an oppressive and emasculating form of abuse. In each of these poems, the foreignness of the
anthropomorphic male dildo only underscores the Englishness of the women who abuse him.\textsuperscript{16}

Recent criticism of early modern and eighteenth-century pornography has provided much insight into the ways in which the dildo functions as a site of cultural anxieties about depopulation, masturbation, and same-sex desire, but has yet to account for the anxieties and concerns unique to texts that portray the dildo as a miniature man.\textsuperscript{17}

In contrast to non-anthropomorphic early-modern dildo literature, which typically portrays the sexual prop as a symbol of female auto-erotic or homoerotic sexual pleasure independent of men, anthropomorphic dildo literature provides heterosexual scenarios in which the key players are women (the users) and men (the anthropomorphic sexual props themselves). In these texts, heterosexual relations appear as exploitative arrangements between worker commodity (men) and consumer (women), a characterization that sexualizes the economic exploitation of the menial laborer in the new capitalist economy, and targets the new consuming English woman.

One such poem, "Dildoides" (1722), commonly attributed to Samuel Butler, opens by characterizing the titular props as both inanimate commodities and oppressed foreign workers.\textsuperscript{18} Based on a real-life event in which a London mob burned a shipment of imported French dildos, the poem begins with one objecting member of the crowd defending the dildos by appealing to the self-interested capitalist instincts of the other men in the group. Characterizing the dildo as an asset to female consumers, but above all to the male capitalists in the audience, he claims:

\begin{quote}
If Ladyes rather choose to handle
\end{quote}
Our Wax in Dildo, than in Candle.

Much good may'st do 'em, so they Pay for't

And that the merchant never stay for't.

For neighbours is't not all one whether

They wear in Shoes. or P—cks our Leather?"²⁸

This mercantile speaker goes on to claim that although he shares his compatriots hatred of foreigners, he intends to put his self-interest before his xenophobia (or rather, to combine the two) by putting "Monsieur Dildo" to work for his own benefit:

Like you, I Monsieur Dildo hate.

But your intentions let's Translate:

You treat'em may like Turks, or Jews.

But I'lIe have two for my own use.²⁹

The social and economic hierarchy in these passages is clear: at the bottom of the ladder is the exploited foreign worker. Monsieur Dildo; in the middle is the female consumer who consumes him; and at the top is the male capitalist who profits from both the labor of Monsieur Dildo and the buying habits of the female consumer.

Predating Marx's description of the "mystical" quality of the commodity fetish in capitalist culture, "Dildoides" characterizes the props as priapic gods worshipped by the female consumer: commenting upon the actions of the members of the all-male mob who, "[f]orgetting each his Wife and Daughter. / Condemn'd these Dildoes to the Slaughter."
the narrator sarcastically exclaims, "Oh! Barbarous Tymes, when Deitys 'Become
themselves a Sacrifice!" However, rather than confirming their wives' and daughters'
idolatry by turning these little men into martyrs, the mob's burning of the dildos
ultimately defeats the seeming immortality of the dildos' always-erect condition, negating
the props' mystical status once and for all: "Priapus thus in Box opprest, ' Burnt like a
Phoenix in his Nest. But with this fatal difference dies: We find no Dildoes from his
Ashes Rise." Leaving the dildo-burners victorious over the female commodities that
challenge their own authority as husbands and fathers, the poem uses the figure of the
little man to satirize the misogyny and emasculation anxieties behind the backlash against
female consumerism, while at the same time casting doubt on the dildo-defender's belief
that men are the beneficiaries, rather than the victims, of female consumption.

In contrast to "Dildoides," the poem "Signior Dildo" (1673, first printed in 1703),
commonly attributed to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, introduces its protagonist not as
a foreign worker, but as a foreign gentleman, a "Noble Italian call'd Signior Dildo." And yet, "Signior Dildo" asserts its protagonist's alleged gentleman status only in order
to expose it as a false pretense: "Were this signor but known to the citizen tops. He'd
keep their fine wives from the foremen of shops." the narrator remarks, suggesting that in
spite of his pretensions to class privilege, Signior Dildo is in fact a mere consumer
commodity. Although Signior Dildo enjoys the access to high society that his
gentlemanly status provides him, that status and access only serves to make him the
abused commodity of female consumers of the English aristocracy—like the one who
"stifled him almost beneath her pillow. So closely sh'embraced Signior Dildo"—rather
than the abused commodity of female consumers of the bourgeoisie. The titular little
man's tragic flaw, the poem reveals, is his false consciousness regarding his own commercial status. Like the pro-capitalist dildo-defenders of "Dildoides," the "little man" protagonist of "Signior Dildo" disavows female consumerism's emasculating effects upon the male body.

The anonymous "Monsieur Thing's Origin: Or Seignior D___'s Adventures in Britain" (1722), the most narratively complex of these poems, introduces its protagonist as a multinational anthropomorphic dildo of French birth and Italian citizenship (interchangeably referred to as "Monsieur" and "Seignor") who emigrates to England and finds work performing grueling sexual labor for English women. Although the majority of the poem characterizes Monsieur Thing as an oppressed foreign menial laborer made to "slave and toil" for insatiable English female consumers and supervisors, the poem begins by suggesting that upon moving to England and making his unique talents into a profitable career. Monsieur Thing has successfully ascended the socioeconomic ladder and become a mercantile capitalist and bourgeois English husband. In the beginning of the poem, Monsieur Thing arrives in England with his family, in search of work and lodging:

When SEIGNIOR first at London did arrive.
Was put to shifts to know how to contrive.
Or find a Place where's Family shou'd live.
At length all day after they had been trudging.
Tire'd with Fatigue, in seeking of' Lodging.
Were shew'd a TOY-SHOP, nigh to Covent-Garden.26
In the lines that immediately follow, Monsieur Thing seems to have become a social-climbing mercantile capitalist whose “Qualities” and “Capacity” seem to have earned him success, renown, and, above all, the status of “Englishman.”

Where for some time they liv’d in private Room.

But soon became unto the Publick known.

Because his Qualities were really such.

Cou’d with small Help do Little or do Much:

For his Capacity, made Denizen.

’Twas thus Monsieur became an Englishman.\(^{28}\)

As evidence of Monsieur’s ostensible climb up the social ladder, the proceeding lines characterize an increase in the shop’s dildo inventory as a testament to Monsieur’s success as a potent paterfamilias who, having added to his family (of dildos), and having acquired the bourgeois pretensions befitting a successful “Englishman,” moves his growing family from the toy shop in Covent Garden to a larger and better one in the center of town (Covent Garden and Fleet Street both being centers of commerce):

Before ’twas long, the Number did increase.

So the last Brood were to chuse a new Place.

That he should not be taken for a Clown.

A Station chose, in Middle of the Town.
In TOY-SHOP Large, and nigh unto a Church.

In Fleetstreet did this Lovely Creature perch. ²⁹

However, Monsieur Thing soon discovers that he is not a socially mobile English capitalist after all, but is instead an abused immigrant slave laborer whose “Drudge” is to “slave and toil” for the benefit of English women. What the beginning of the poem praises as his “Qualities” and “Capacity” turn out to refer not to any special talents, but instead to his objectified body’s utility to female consumers as an inexhaustible working machine that produces female sexual pleasure. The women:

. . . forc’d him in the Summit of their Bliss:

And after they had tasted, made a Drudge

Worse than a Waterman, who wears a Badge.

Or Ticket-Porter in the Street that plies.

Burthen’d with Loads, is in no worse Disguise.

Than to their Lust he is a Sacrifice. ³⁰¹

Capable of infinitely producing female sexual pleasure because of his eternally erect state, able to withstand incredible abuse, and, like the Marxian worker in a capitalist economy, unable to stake any claim to the product he makes (female sexual pleasure), this self-made “Englishman” turns out to be the paradigmatic objectified, inexhaustible, slave laborer. ³¹
In being even "[w]orse than a Waterman" or "Ticket-Porter" (my italics)—and other free wage laborers in that Marxian category of "individuals" who sell "the particular expenditure of force to a particular capitalist, whom he confronts as an independent individual"—Monsieur falls under the Marxian category of the slave laborer who "belongs to the individual, particular owner, and functions as his laboring machine." 32

The unfortunate reality of this little man's status as a laboring machine becomes painfully apparent to him when—after posturing as an upwardly mobile bourgeois Englishman—he finds himself snatched up by a merchant's wife who:

... boldly work'd him up unto an Oil.
So did she make the Creature slave and toil:
She wrought him till he was just out of breath,
And harrast SEIGNOR almost unto Death:
Until he was forc'd to chuse a new Place.
To alter somewhat of his Slavish Case. 33

Prior to this pivotal moment in which Monsieur Thing is "slavishly" abused by the merchant's wife, he has been comically oblivious to the fact that whatever the illusory distinctions might be between the slave laborer and the mercantile individual who is supposedly "free" as a real or honorary "Englishman" to ascend the social ladder, all working people are mere instruments of production in the eyes of the consumers who benefit from their labor. Fancying himself a bourgeois Englishman, Monsieur Thing has mistaken what he sees as his success as an upwardly mobile mercantile capitalist for what
are really the signs of his own commodification (being sold in various stores alongside
other identical commodities, etc.). It is no coincidence that the abuser who brings
Monsieur Thing to this tragicomic realization is the wife of a merchant: in the poem's
reality, men only imagine themselves to be at the helm of the capitalist system. English
female consumers, the poem suggests, are the ones who truly reap the rewards of
capitalism, at little men's expense.
Invoking these poems' sex-as-menial-labor discourse, Fielding's Tom Thumb plays depict the modern Englishman, specifically the husband or husband-to-be, as an abused, menial-laboring phallic toy in the hands of the new consuming woman. These poems' likely influence in Fielding's Tom Thumb plays is apparent in an early conversation between Huncamunca and her attendant, Mustacha, in which the latter criticizes her mistress's desire for a man of Tom Thumb's size. Proclaims Mustacha: "I am surprised that your Highness can give your self a Moments Uneasiness about that little insignificant Fellow. Tom Thumb. One properer for a Play-thing than a Husband. — Were he my Husband, his Horns should be as long as his Body". To any members of an eighteenth-century audience aware that the term "plaything" could refer not only to a child's toy but also to a sexual prop (sold in so-called "toy shops"), the joke that the thumb-sized protagonist is better suited for a dildo than a husband would have been hard to miss. Huncamunca's rejoinder—"Tom Thumb's a Creature of that charming Form. That no one can abuse, unless they love him"—not only accuses Mustacha of desiring him, but also hints at the physical discomfort for Tom Thumb of being used in a sexual scenario in which Tom Thumb's "charming Form" makes physically loving him the same as physically abusing him (as we have seen in the "slavish case" "Monsieur Thing").

In *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, Grizzle similarly characterizes Huncamunca's diminutive fiancé as "properer for a Play-thing than a Husband":
And can my Princess such a Durgen wed.
One fitter for your Pocket than your Bed!
Advis’d by me, the worthless Baby shun.
Or you will ne’er be brought to bed of one.
Oh take me to thy Arms and never flinch.
Who am a Man by *Jupiter ev’ry Inch.* 37

It quickly becomes apparent to the audience, however, that while Tom Thumb’s pocket size might indeed make him unable to cause his wife go into labor, it makes him perfectly fit for another sexual labor of his own.

Tom Thumb’s status as the laboring sexual prop of his wife-to-be is brought to the fore by the ludicrous metaphors and analogies that Tom Thumb and Huncamuneca use in anticipation of their marriage and its consummation. 38 In the following early speech, for instance, Tom Thumb expresses his delight that he is now able to throw aside his bloody war garments (from the war he successfully waged upon the giants that had been threatening the kingdom) and enter the bed of his beloved. Now that “[t]he dreadful Bus’ness of the War is over,” 39 he proclaims:

I’ve thrown the bloody Garment now aside.

And Hymeneal Sweets invite my Bride.

So when some Chimney-Sweeper, all the Day.

Has through dark Paths pursu’d the Sooty Way.
At Night, to was his Face and Hands he flies.

And in his t’other Shirt with his Brickdusta lies.⁴⁰

In the first two lines of the passage, Tom Thumb’s clumsy effort to contrast his bloody garment of war with the promise of “Hymeneal Sweets” actually ends out making an inadvertent and rather gory comparison between the blood of war and the hymeneal blood of conjugal sex. And yet the truly “perverse” subtext of those lines does not fully reveal itself until the remaining lines, in which Tom Thumb goes on to compare himself to a chimney-sweep who washes himself of the soot he has acquired having “through dark Paths pursu’d the Sooty Way” and then lies in bed with his “Brickdusta” (a term affectionately describing the hypothetical chimney sweep’s wife as the rosy color of “brickdust”).⁴¹ Although Tom Thumb obviously intends to contrast the dirty work of the chimney-sweep with the clean and pure love between a spousal couple, his continued imagery of dirtiness (from the blood of war to the soot of a chimney-sweep) indirectly compares the soot that covers a chimney sweep to the mess that will cover Tom Thumb’s body on his wedding night, thereby linking the chimney sweep’s labor in a chimney to the work of Tom Thumb’s body in coitus, while comparing Huncamunca’s vagina to a chimney’s “dark Paths,” and equating Tom Thumb—as his fiancée’s miniature menial laborer—to the chimney-sweep who laboriously pursues them.
Any further analysis of the plays requires a brief summation of their farcical narrative. Beginning in medias res, the plays open with Tom Thumb’s return to King Arthur’s kingdom after having heroically slain the giant that had been threatening the kingdom. When King Arthur asks the little hero to name his reward, Tom Thumb asks to marry the King’s daughter, the Princess Huncamunca, who is fortunately already in love with him. The King grants Tom Thumb’s wish, but the Queen Dollallolla, who secretly desires Tom Thumb, is outraged. Meanwhile, Lord Grizzle, Tom Thumb’s romantic rival, conspires to do away with his little enemy. All this sets the stage for the outrageous final scene, in which the much-anticipated wedding between Tom Thumb and his physically mismatched fiancée is prevented by an enormous cow who swallows Tom Thumb offstage. Not to be outstaged by this bovine intruder, Tom Thumb returns from the cow in the form of the ghost, only to have his ghost “murdered” by Grizzle. The absurd murder of Tom Thumb’s ghost prompts a parodically Hamlet-esque finale in which the entire cast kills each other off one by one until the only one left standing, the King, takes his own life so as not to be the odd one out.

Significantly, Fielding’s emphasis upon marriage is the narrative feature that most distinguishes these plays from both the anthropomorphic dildo poems and from their other literary precursors, the seventeenth-century ballads. “The History of Tom Thumb” (n.d.) and “Tom Thumbe His Life and Death” (1630). Set in Arthurian England, the ballads—like their 1621 prose predecessor, Richard Johnson’s The History of Tom
Thumb (1621)—narrate the adventures, mishaps, and ludicrous defiances of death on the part of the miniature hero, and ironically claim to be testaments to Tom Thumb’s virility, announcing on their title pages: “TOM THUMBE, his Life and Death: Wherein is declared many Marvailous Acts of Manhood, full of wonder, and strange merriments.” Fielding’s joke in the plays that Tom Thumb and Huncamunca cannot sexually reproduce has its origins in the ballads’ depiction of Tom Thumb’s parents, a farming couple incapable of producing a child. The impotent farmer wishes for a son “though it might be no bigger then his thumb,” and Merlin grants his wish, giving him a “sonne of stature small” for whom “No blood nor bones in him should be.” Although Tom Thumb begins boneless, bloodless, and “an inch in height,” just four minutes after his “birth” he grows “so fast, that he became so tall ‘As was the plowmans thumbe in height,’ and so they did him call TOM THUMBE.” As described in the ballads, the image of Tom Thumb as a boneless, bloodless reminder of his father’s impotence who miraculously grows in four minutes to the size of his father’s thumb is remarkably phallic. And yet, whereas the early ballads narrate the death-defying adventures and mishaps on the part of the miniature hero while testifying ironically to his virile masculinity, the plays shift the focus of the Tom Thumb narrative from a series of life-threatening adventures to a single danger that hovers over Tom Thumb throughout the plays: his impending marriage and its consummation. While the ballads lack any marriage plot whatsoever, in Fielding’s plays the marriage plot is the narrative’s driving force. By the same token, the ballads have Tom Thumb swallowed by a male giant, while Fielding’s plays feature a woman, his future bride, who threatens to swallow him up with love on their wedding night—and another female consumer, the enormous cow, who ultimately does. In this sense,
Fielding’s depiction of a milk-producing cow as a consumer of men functions as the plays’ most overt symbol of the detrimental effects for the English husband of the female producer-turned-consumer, especially given contemporaneous concerns that English women’s consumption of tea would make them incapable of producing breast milk. And thus, Fielding transforms and updates the ballad’s characterization of Tom Thumb’s phallic connotations and ‘devourability’ into a parody of the modern English husband in the age of female consumption.

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Even prior to Tom Thumb’s death-by-cow, Fielding’s excessive use of oral imagery in scenes featuring Huncamunca satirically suggests that the enormous appetites of the new female consumer threaten the life and dignity of any Englishman who desires her. In one exchange between Huncamunca and her father, the King finds his daughter in a state of despair, and asks, “What is the cause? Say, have you not enough of Meat and Drink? We’ve giv’n strict Orders not to have you stinted.” “Alas! My Lord.” Huncamunca complains, “a tender Maid may want What she can neither Eat nor Drink—.” “What’s that?” inquires the King. “Oh! Spare my Blushes, but I mean a Husband.” In The Tragedy of Tragedies, Fielding extends the joke by having the King console his desirous daughter, “Oh! thou shalt gnaw thy tender Sheets no more. A Husband thou shalt have to mumble now”—“mumble” meaning “to eat in a slow, ineffective manner, as if without gums.” In both plays, when Tom Thumb says of his bride-to-be that “she shall be mine: I’ll hug, caress, I’ll eat her up with Love. Whole
Days. and Nights, and Years shall be too short / For our Enjoyment: ev’ry Sun shall rise / Blushing, to see us in our Bed together.” the audience is perfectly aware that precisely the opposite is true: it is Huncamunca, of course. the female consumer par excellence, who is apt to “eat [him] up with Love” “in [their] Bed together.”55

To perpetrate this sexual satire, Fielding makes use of anal imagery as well. Consider the following speech of Huncamunca’s in The Tragedy of Tragedies, in which Fielding underscores the modern suitor’s or husband’s status as the anal-erotic sexual prop of an insatiable female consumer. Engaged to her beloved Tom Thumb, but having previously promised to marry Grizzle, Huncamunca laments:

I, who this Morn, of two chose which to wed,
May go again this Night alone to Bed;
So have I seen some wild unsettled Fool.
Who had her Choice of this, and that Joint Stool:
To give the Preference to either, loath
And fondly coveting to sit on both:
While the two Stools her Sitting Part confound.
Between ’em both fall Squat upon the Ground.56

Characterizing both the tiny Tom Thumb and his normal-sized rival as inanimate objects on which to position her “sitting part,” Huncamunca reveals that she sees all of her male lovers, regardless of height, as virtually indistinguishable commodities, mere sexual props. Simply by wanting to be the husband of this desirous female consumer, Fielding
implies, a normal-sized man can shrink to the size and sexual status of a mere Tom Thumb.

Vaginal and phallic imagery function similarly in another speech of Huncamunca’s, which occurs immediately before their wedding is scheduled to take place. After being eagerly encouraged by the King to impregnate his new bride (a task which, as Grizzle points out, Tom Thumb will have a hard time achieving), an over-excited Tom Thumb exclaims, “I’m so transported. I have lost my self.” upon which Huncamunca responds:

Forbid it. all the Stars: for you’re so small.
That were you lost, you’d find your self no more.
So the unhappy Sempstress. once, they say.
Her Needle in a Pottle. lost. of Hay.
In vain she look’d. and look’d. and made her Moan:
For ah! The Needle was for ever gone.

Given the bawdy dildo jokes leading up to this moment, Huncamunca’s comparison between Tom Thumb’s small body on their wedding night and a seamstress’s needle lost in a stack of hay underscores his status as a phallic female commodity and instrument of production that her genitals might literally and permanently devour in the act of conjugal intercourse. Although Huncamunca characterizes the needle’s disappearance as tragic, the implicit joke is that the modern English husband, like the proverbial needle that gets
tragically and irrecoverably lost in the haystack. is ironically a common and easily replaceable commodity in the eyes of the new female consumer.

In The Tragedy of Tragedies, the Queen herself characterizes the husband as a devourable morsel when praising a polygamous giantess named Glumdalca: “Oh happy state of Giantism—where Husbands Like Mushrooms grow, whilst hapless we are forc’d to be content. nay happy thought with one.”59 While Fielding’s thumb-sized protagonist is warned to “beware of Marriage” to this new breed of woman, this consuming woman laments that the new marriage marketplace is not consumer-friendly enough to suit her appetite for vast quantities of goods. Just as the multiplicity of goods is what most distinguishes the new consumer culture from the old economy, so does the multiplicity of consumable little husbands signify marriage the most advanced and desirable form of marriage for Fielding’s caricatured modern woman.

In the following speech of the Queen’s from The Tragedy of Tragedies, Fielding parodies the cultural shift from woman-as-commodity to woman-as-consumer, and its belittlement of the male body. The Queen proclaims:

I love Tom Thumb—but must not tell him so:

For what’s a Woman, when her Virtue’s gone?

A Coat without its Lace: Wig out of Buckle:

A Stocking with a Hole in’t—I can’t live

Without my Virtue, or without Tom Thumb.

Then let me weigh them in two equal Scales.

In this Scale put my Virtue, that. Tom Thumb.
Alas! *Tom Thumb* is heavier than my Virtue.\(^{60}\)

Observing that a woman without virtue like an imperfect garment (a laceless coat or a punctured stocking), the Queen underscores her own objectification, astutely realizing that a woman without virtue is a flawed commodity of little value in the patriarchal marriage market. In the final lines of the passage, however, by objectifying man as a commodity on par with the commodity of female virtue and metaphorically weighing them both as objects "in two equal Scales," the Queen proceeds to elevates her status from an objectified commodity in the marriage market to a desirous *consumer* of (objectified, commodified) men.

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Through similarly satirical dialogue on the part of the male characters in the plays, Fielding suggests that if women in the new age of female consumerism no longer bear the burden of sexual reproduction (having transformed from producers and objects to full-time consumers), then female consumerism shifts that burden onto the husband. If the modern wife can only consume little men, then the modern husband must be the one in charge of producing them. We can see this axiom at work in the King's eagerness that Tom Thumb will soon father a male heir as perfect as Tom Thumb himself. As the King proclaims in the final act:
Proceed we to the Temple, there to tye
The burning Bridegroom to the blushing Bride.
And if I guess aright, *Tom Thumb* this Night
Shall give a Being to a new *Tom Thumb.*

“IT shall be my Endeavour so to do,” responds Tom Thumb, agreeing to take on that challenging—and, of course, impossible—labor.

Interestingly, it is only the men in the plays (Grizzle and the King) who express concern about Tom Thumb’s ability to produce a child. The women, by contrast, are only concerned with Tom Thumb’s capacity to produce female sexual pleasure. While Grizzle unsuccessfally advertises himself to Huncamunca on the grounds that he is more fit than Tom Thumb for the work of child-production, the King indulges in ludicrous metaphors unconsciously revealing his suppression of his future son-in-law’s inadequacies as a child-producer. After proposing, “Long may ye live, and love, and propagate. ‘Till the whole Land be peopled with *Tom Thumbs,*” the King illustrates his point with an unsavory simile:

So when the *Cheshire-Cheese* a Maggot breeds.
Another and another still succeeds:
By thousands and ten thousands they encrease.
Till one continu’d Maggot fills the rotten Cheese.
Comparing Tom Thumb not to a maggot proliferating other maggots through sexual reproduction, but to a cheese which can only breed maggots metaphorically rather than sexually, the King unwittingly exposes his suppressed knowledge of this ideal husband’s inability to reproduce.

Fielding’s characterization of the inverse relation between the production of sexual pleasure in modern marriage and the production of children provides a different perspective on Lawrence Stone’s well-known description of the emergence of companionate marriage in the eighteenth century. As Stone writes:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there had been two parallel archetypes of sexual conduct in existence: one being conjugal, primarily for the procreation of a male heir; and the other being extra-marital, exclusively for love, companionship, and sexual pleasure. What happened in the eighteenth century was that the two archetypes became increasingly fused into one in certain key social strata, as religious opposition to the second declined or was increasingly ignored, and as companionate marriages of personal choice increased.”

Tom Thumb’s betrothal to Huncamunca, an engagement based on mutual love and heartily approved of by Huncamunca’s father, the King, who repeatedly expresses his desire for Tom Thumb to produce for him a male heir, might seem at first glance to be a perfect representation of what Stone calls companionate marriage’s fusion of the new and old archetypes of marital roles. And yet, as we have seen, rather than suggesting that companionate marriage seamlessly fuses these two archetypes together, as does Stone.
Fielding indicates that these two archetypes require of the modern English husband two
distinct forms of marital labor that are at odds with one another: the (re)production of
male heirs and the production of female sexual pleasure. The modern English husband in
the age of female consumerism, Fielding suggests, can only be capable of the latter.

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As we have seen, both the anthropomorphic dildo poems and their better-known
dramatic successors reveal an aspect of eighteenth-century anxieties over female
consumption unacknowledged by recent criticism on the literature of nascent consumer
culture: in these texts, misogynistic anxieties over female consumption are projected not
only onto the female body but onto the male body as well. In the Tom Thumb plays, the
most striking example of the little man as a symbol of this reversal comes in The Tragedy
of Tragedies when Tom Thumb compares himself to a female prostitute while describing
his relation to Huncamunca and Glumdalea:

In the Balcony that o’er-hangs the Stage.
I’ve seen a Whore two ’Prentices engage:
One half a Crown does in his Fingers hold.
The other shews a little Piece of Gold:
She the Half Guinea wisely doth purloin.
And leaves the larger and the baser Coin.\textsuperscript{5}
Counterintuitively, the commodified and sexually objectified body here belongs not to a female prostitute but to the future husband of a princess. By extension, the sexual consumers of this little man are in turn the women, Huncamunca and Glumdalca, with the coins of different sizes and values signifying their relative charms. The labor of little men, Fielding suggests, is the vocation of every modern husband and male suitor of the new consuming woman, no matter what his class or stature may be. As articulated by Grizzle in *The Tragedy of Tragedies*:

Think'st thou that I will share thy Husband's place.
Since to that Office one cannot suffice.
And since you scorn to dine one single Dish on.
Go, get your Husband put into Commission.
Commissioners to discharge. (ye Gods) it fine is.
The duty of a Husband to your Highness."

Employing conspicuously mixed metaphors of oral consumption and menial labor, Grizzle complains that as Huncamunca's "Commissioner to discharge" in the delegated "Office" of husband, as one "put into Commission" to do his "duty," and as a "dish" on which she dines, any husband or suitor of the new consuming woman is but a mere Tom Thumb—the product he produces being not children but sexual pleasure for the new female consumer.
A closer look at Fielding’s other writings, in light of the author’s literature on little men, reveals his concern with the relationship between masculinity, consumption, and modern marriage throughout his career. As we have seen, for Fielding in the early 1730’s, as for Grizzle in his Tom Thumb plays, the answer to the question of what the modern woman wants in a husband seems to have been “a Lilliputian to play with.” And yet even in the case of his later and even more famous Tom narrative, Tom Jones, we can see the same dynamics at work in the passage in which Tom gives his beloved Sophia a bird, which she names “little Tommy.” As the narrator informs us:

little Tommy, for so the bird was called, was become so tame, that it would feed out of the hand of its mistress, would perch upon the finger, and lie contented in her bosom, where it seemed almost sensible of its own happiness: though she always kept a small string about its leg, nor would ever trust it with the liberty of flying away.”

Just as the Tom Thumb plays show that Fielding’s Female Husband is not the author’s only flirtation with the dildo as a symbol for the tenuousness of modern masculinity, so does the “little Tommy” anecdote in Tom Jones demonstrate that for Fielding the figure of the little man never quite lost its relevance as a metaphor for the modern husband’s dubious role in a consumer culture that engenders a new kind of female desire.
To choose another example from the Fielding oeuvre, his *Female Husband: or, The Surprising History of Mrs. Mary Alias Mr. George Hamilton* (1746)—which most critics would contend was Fielding’s only contribution to dildo literature—when read alongside Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays and “On Her Wishing to Have a Lilliputian to Play With,” reveals its engagement with the themes of the sexual prop, the belittled husband, and women’s relation to commodities, as the titular female husband, Mary Hamilton, disguises herself as a man, seduces innocent women, and fools them on their wedding night by secretly wielding a phallic prop.88 On one unfortunate occasion, Mary, disguised as a man, is seduced by her first wife at a most unfortunate time, when Mary does not have her necessary prop on hand. Rather than characterizing this incident as an example of female castration, the narrator compares the female husband’s momentary lack of the phallus to the predicament of a biological male husband seduced by his wife but unable to “get it up”:

[In the case of a more able husband than Mrs. Hamilton was, when his wife grew amorous in an unseasonable time. ‘The doctor understood the call. But had not always wherewithal.’ So it happened to our poor bridegroom, who having not at this time the wherewithal about her, was obliged to remain merely passive, under all this torrent of kindness of his wife.]89

In the context of the story, the incident suggests that not only the imposter husband Mary, but man himself is but a “female husband,” that his claim to the “wherewithal,” like
Mary’s reliance upon her sexual prop. could at any time be unveiled as a fraud, revealing the modern English husband to be symbolically castrated. a mere Tom Thumb.

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Our reading of Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays also sheds new light on the popular late eighteenth-century children’s chapbook that followed it: Tom Thumb’s Folio; or, A New Penny Play-Thing for Little Giants (1789). A kind of anti-“Tragedy of Tragedies.” Tom Thumb’s Folio earnestly and optimistically teaches its young readers that they, like Tom Thumb, can overcome their own littleness—and their oppression at the hands of overbearing enormous women mothers—by means of extreme self-confidence and shrewd repression. In the chapbook, this development is foreshadowed by the ridiculous title of the second chapter, “How Tom became a Greater Man than his Mother.”

“BEFORE we attempt to prove this,” the chapter begins. “We must enquire what makes a great man. Is it a great head? No. Is it a long arm? No. Is it a big body? No. Is it a large leg? No.”

This passage insists that Man’s ability to become “a Greater Man than his Mother” and possess the phallus lies only in the strength of his imagination. In the end, Tom Thumb marries a giantess who “loved little Tom, and always carried him about in her bosom.” Against all odds, she gives birth to “two bouncing boys, nine hundred times as big as himself.”

Demonstrating his potency as a husband, Tom Thumb proves once and for all that he is “a Greater Man than his Mother.” And thus, whereas Fielding’s approach to the Tom Thumb story exposes the modern husband’s status as a mere human phallus or women’s toy in the age of female consumerism, Tom Thumb’s Folio
practically qualifies as a Freudian conduct book for the pre-Oedipal male child. One could argue on the basis of this later contribution to the ever-developing Tom Thumb narrative that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the masculinity crisis satirized by Fielding had become sublimated into the national subconscious.

But perhaps nothing represents the later sublimation of the anxieties behind the Tom Thumb myth better than American icon P.T. Barnum's General Tom Thumb in the nineteenth century. By bringing Fielding's famous character to life and marrying him off, not to an enormous consuming woman but to the beautiful dwarf Lavinia, Barnum's public spectacle of an ideal middle-class Victorian marriage in miniature ultimately suppresses the crisis in modern masculinity epitomized by the figure of the little man that Fielding's plays bring to the fore.
Notes


3. Cradock eventually became the inspiration for the idealized wife in Fielding’s Amelia.


8. The Tragedy of Tragedies was printed with an introduction and footnotes by the alleged author. H. Scriblerus Secundus, a joke at the expense of the celebrated Scriblerians.


11 L.J. Morrissey remarks that the phrase “for the Ladies” used by Tom Thumb in the
epilogue is a common dramatic convention used since the Restoration to announce
“bawdy implication” (commentaries to “Tom Thumb” and “The Tragedy of Tragedies”.
104). J. Paul Hunter notes that “Size problems sponsor most of the play’s meager plot,
and the jokes, following Gulliver’s Travels, are predictably about size mismatches, often
sexual” (J. Paul Hunter, Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of
Circumstance [Baltimore, 1975] 40). As Peter Lewis observes. “All these characters are
burlesque versions of the exaltedly noble figures in heroic tragedy and behave
accordingly. Arthur, for example, is partial to giantesses and afraid of his wife, who is
attracted to midgets and fond of alcohol. The tragic heroine Huncamunca is a girl with a
truly enormous appetite who yearns for something more than food and is determined to
commit bigamy” (Peter Lewis, Fielding’s Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition
instability, Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding’s Plays and Novels
(Stanford, 1995) briefly addresses the Tom Thumb plays but does not discuss Fielding’s
interest in the physical logistics of Tom Thumb’s wedding night.

12 In addition to previously cited work by Jill Campbell, J. Paul Hunter, and Peter Lewis,
other analyses of the Tom Thumb plays include: Sheridan Baker, “Political Allusion in
Fielding’s Author’s Farce, Mock Doctor, and Tumble-Down Dick.” PMLA 77 (1962):
221-31; Thomas R. Cleary, Henry Fielding: Political Writer (Ontario, 1984); T.W. Craik,
“Fielding’s ‘Tom Thumb’ Plays,” Augustan Worlds, ed. J.C. Hilson, M.M.B. Jones, and
Theater, 1728-1737 (Oxford, 1988); Bertrand A. Goldgar. Walpole and the Wits: The
Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742 (Lincoln, 1976); Samuel L. Macey.
“Fielding’s Tom Thumb as the Heir to Buckingham’s Rehearsal.” Texas Studies in
Literature and Language 10.3 (Fall 1968): 405-14; James T. Hillhouse, introduction. The
Tragedy of Tragedies: Or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great, with the

13 See Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace. Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and
Business in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1997) 6. Other recent studies of
consumption in eighteenth-century literature and culture include: James Cruise.

Governing Consumption: Needs and Wants, Suspended Characters, and the “Origins” of
Eighteenth-Century English Novels (Lewisburg, 1999); The Consumption of Culture,
Consumption and the World of Goods, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London, 1993);
Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760 (London, 1988); Nandini
Bhattacharya. Reading the Splendid Body: Gender and Consumerism in Eighteenth-
Century British Writing on India (Newark, 1998); and Charlotte Sussman, Consuming
Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1835 (Stanford, 2000).

14 Kowaleski-Wallace. 4-5.

15 Peter Wagner cites the testimony of Georges-Louis Lesage, a Frenchman who traveled
through England in 1713-14:
According to this French traveler, who is not identical with the author of Gil Blas, there were always some women in St. James's Park, London, carrying baskets full of dolls which seemed to be in great demand with the younger ladies. Instead of legs, the dolls sported a cylinder, covered with cloth, which was about six inches long and one inch wide. Lesage reports in an anecdote that a young woman found her purchase too big and ordered a smaller one. But the saleswoman insisted on being paid in advance, arguing that she would not be able to sell it, if ever the young lady changed her mind, since only big ones were being asked for.


17 While anthropomorphic dildo poetry has yet to be recognized as a sub-genre unto itself, there have been a number of critical writings on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dildo literature in general. Roughly speaking, these critical analyses tend to fall into one of two categories: those that situate dildo literature in the context of
contemporaneous cultural anxieties over depopulation and masturbation (see Wagner and Gabriel-Boucé), and those that explore the feminist and anti-feminist implications of texts in which artificial penises are characterized as superior to real ones (see Emma Donoghue. *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* [New York, 1993]; and Harold Weber. "‘Drudging in Fair Aurelia’s Womb’: Constructing Homosexual Economies in Rochester’s Poetry.” *The Eighteenth Century* 33.2 [1992]: 99-117; and Jeffrey Kahan. “Violating Hippocrates: Dildoes and Female Desire in Thomas Nashe’s ‘The Choice of Valentines’” *Para*doxa 2.2 [1996]: 204-16).


19 "Dildoides" (London. 1722) 3.

20 "Dildoides," 4.


22 "Dildoides," 10.

female dildo consumption with idolatry. Addressing female readers, the narrator explains:

At the Sign of the Cross in St. James Street.
When next you go thither to make yourselves sweet
By buying of powder, gloves, essence, or so.
You may chance t'get a sight of Signior Dildo.
You'll take him at first for no person of note
Because he appears in a plain leather coat.
But when you his virtuous abilities know.
You'll fall down and worship Signior Dildo. (253-55)

Here, it is Signior Dildo's indefatigable use-value (his "virtuous abilities"), rather than his exchange-value, that make him an object of female worship.


26 "Monsieur Thing's Origin" (Cheapside. 1722). 10.


"Monsieur Thing's Origin." 16.

Fielding. *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*. 2.3.15-18.

Literate audiences in Fielding's day who may never have encountered the poems "Monsieur Thing's Origin" and "Dildoides" may have heard of the minor scandal reported in the *Daily Journal* of June 9, 1722 (eight years before Fielding's *Tom Thumb*). under the headline "Just published. Monsieur Thing; or Seignior D___do's Adventures in Great Britain" (*Daily Journal*. London. June 9, 1722). The full text of the item reads: "Just publish'd Monsieur Thing; or Seignior D___do's Adventures in Great-Britain. at the Pamphlet Shops of London and Westminster. excepting the French Hugonets, who were so unnatural as to refuse their Countryman a Place in their Shop at the Royal-Exchange, which prevented others from being sold. as the Author supposes. she had the Original by her and would not suffer herself to be tantaliz'd with the Picture. She sent Constables to suppress the Hawkers."

Fielding. *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*. 2.3.32-33.


Peter Lewis and J. Paul Hunter have each noted Fielding's use of "completely fatuous" and "ludicrously extended" metaphor and simile in the Tom Thumb plays. Lewis claims that its effect is to mock the overly metaphorical language of Restoration tragedy (Lewis. 123). For Hunter, its effect is to show that "metaphor has gone mad, and the artist is
shown to have totally lost control of his words” (Hunter, 29). In my reading, Fielding uses bad metaphor not to suggest lack of control on the part of the artist, but to indicate lack of control the part of the characters who utter them. These ludicrous metaphors, in other words, function as pre-Freudian Freudian slips uttered by Tom Thumb and Huncamunca.

30 Fielding. *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*, 1.3.50.

31 Fielding. *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*, 1.3.53-58.


33 In *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, a giantess named Giumdalcas joins the cast of lovers and rivals, and falls instantly in unrequited love with Tom Thumb. Launching yet another little man big woman scenario, the King falls in love with the giantess at first sight.

34 The two versions of the play differ slightly in their resolution of Tom Thumb’s fate: in *Tom Thumb*, our little hero is eaten by the cow before the marriage can take place; in *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, the cow consumes him immediately after the wedding. Yet in spite of these differences, one crucial fact remains consistent: in both plays Fielding makes clear that Tom Thumb dies before he and Huncamunca have a chance to consummate their marriage.


36 “But yet the way to get a sonne this couple knew not how.” “Tom Thumbe. His Life and Death.” 177.

37 “Tom Thumbe. His Life and Death.” 178.
"Tom Thumbe. His Life and Death." 178. Fielding's plays refer to Tom Thumb's boneless origins in the opening scene, when a minor character remarks of Tom Thumb: "this mighty Hero / (By Merlin's Art begot) has not a Bone / Within his Skin, but is a Lump of Gristle."* Fielding, *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*, 1.1.17-19.

For a reading of Richard Johnson's *History of Tom Thumb*, a seventeenth-century prose version of the ballads, see Anne Lake Prescott, "The Odd Couple: Gargantua and Tom Thumb." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, 1996) 75-91. Little is known about the precise origins of Tom Thumb, but W. Carew Hazlitt's *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England* (London, 1866) provides an informative literary history. Hazlitt surmises that Tom Thumb dates back to the late sixteenth century, citing a reference to a "Treatise of Tom Thumme" in Nash's *Pierce Peniless His Supplication to the Devill* (1592). Hazlitt cites subsequent references to Tom Thumb dating from Ben Jonson's reference to Tom Thumb falling into a pudding in *The Fortunate Isles* (1624) to William Wagstaffe's satirical "Comment upon the History of Tom Thumb" (1711). Two years after Fielding wrote *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, Eliza Haywood set the play to music in *The Opera of Operas* (1733), which was generally faithful to the Fielding's dialogue, with the addition of various songs.

an Abstract of the Life of Mr. Thumb and an Historical Account of the Wonderful Deeds He Performed (1789). Susan Stewart provides a succinct history of the Tom Thumb legend in On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore, 1988).

40 As Kowaleski-Wallace explains, the new female-oriented tea-drinking culture caused middle- and upper-class women to be thought of as consumers rather than heterosexually reproductive producers of children and of the breast milk to sustain them (Kowaleski-Wallace, 34).

51 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.4.6-8.
51 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.4.9-10.
52 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.4.11.
53 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.4.12.
55 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.2.20-23.
56 Fielding. Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.10.62-70.
57 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.8.19.
58 Fielding. Tom Thumb and Tragedy of Tragedies. 2.8.20-21.
59 Fielding. Tragedy of Tragedies. 1.3.32-34. Glumdalca’s name is an obvious reference to Glumdalclitch. Gulliver’s giant young mistress in the Brobdingnag section of Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels.
60 Fielding. Tragedy of Tragedies. 1.6.1-9.


n6 Fielding. *Tom Thumb* and *Tragedy of Tragedies*. 2.10.41-46.


n8 Citing Fielding’s *The Female Husband*. Paul Gabriel-Boucè notes that “It is rather strange, at first, to find Henry Fielding in the dubious company of writers of erotica or downright pornography.” Paul Gabriel-Boucè “Aspects of Sexual Tolerance and Intolerance” 181. Unsurprisingly, then, Boucè does not mention the Tom Thumb plays in his section on dildos.


n10 *Tom Thumb’s Folio* or, *A New Penny Play-Thing for Little Giants to which is Prefixed an Abstract of the Life of Mr. Thumb and an Historical Account of the Wonderful Deeds He Perfommed, Together with Some Anecdores Respecting Grumbo the Great Giant* (London. 1789) 5.

n11 *Tom Thumb’s Folio* (London. 1789) 5.

n12 *Tom Thumb’s Folio* 16. 18. 19.
CHAPTER TWO

The Short Club: Alexander Pope, Christopher Smart, and Josef Boruwlaski

"Tis certain the greatest magnifying glasses in the world are a man's own eyes, when they look upon his own person: yet even in those, I appear not the great Alexander Mr. Caryll is so civil to, but that little Alexander the women laugh at."

-Pope to John Caryll

Having explored the sexual politics of little men in eighteenth-century Tom Thumb literature and pornographic poetry, we will now turn our attention to several writings on male stature by three real little men of the period: the esteemed Alexander Pope, whose small body was hunched and deformed by devastating disease; the poet Christopher Smart, who was known to joke about his short stature; and Joseph Boruwlaski, a Polish dwarf living in England.

The title of this chapter comes from Pope's "Short Club" and "Tall Club" pieces for the Guardian, which are about a fictitious organization of men under five feet tall, and a fictitious rival organization formed to counteract this trend-setting new group that has somehow set a belittling and undesirable new standard of English masculinity that others feel pressured to follow. Read alongside one another, the texts of this chapter—from Pope's in the early eighteenth-century to Boruwlaski's in the 1780's—could be said to form a short club of their own, displaying a shared understanding that the figure of the little man was somehow an apt metaphor for the condition of the modern Englishman.
In his biography of Pope, Maynard Mack writes that “by the time he began to be known as a successful poet he was already established in his own mind and in the minds of others as a dwarf and cripple.”² We now know that the cause of Pope’s deformities and small stature (he was, in Joshua Reynolds’s estimate, “about four feet six high”) was likely tuberculosis.³ Pope was known to mock his small stature on occasion, as in the following rondeau he composed (a variation of one by Voiture), in the hope that it would be presented to the woman he called “Sappho,” the renowned Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a former friend of Pope’s, who had shunned his advances, then fell victim to his hostile satire, and retaliated by insulting his poetry and person. Writes Pope:

You know where you did despise
(Tother day) my little Eyes.
Little Legs, and little Thighs.
And some things, of little Size.

You know where.

You, tis true, have fine black eyes.
Taper Legs, and tempting Thighs.
Yet what more than all we prize
Is a Thing of little Size.

You known where.⁴
While Pope was quite capable of joking at his own expense, especially if it meant offending Montagu with a bawdy joke, he could also be extremely sensitive about his "little Size." The author's mix of self-mocking humor and sensitivity regarding his stature is captured in a poignant moment in a letter to John Caryll, in which Pope refers to himself as "that little Alexander the women laugh at."

Given Pope's ambivalent feelings about his body, it is no coincidence that, while there are multiple known portraits of Pope's face, the only known full-length picture of his body was sketched on the sly by his friend William Hoare, while Pope himself was not looking.
While Pope's references to the sexual politics of his own stature are interesting from a biographical standpoint, his non-biographical writings on male stature are perhaps even more compelling for their function as social—rather than personal—satire. In June of 1713, Pope published three humorous pieces in the Guardian about a fictitious "Short Club" and a rival "Tall Club." The first of these, Pope's two Short Club pieces, are written in the form of letters addressed to the journal by a fictitious "Bob Short," a man "half as tall as an ordinary man," who has established a club, open to anyone five-feet tall or less, "by which he hopes to bring those of his own size into a little reputation." The motto of the club, states Bob Short, is "Dare to be short," and the aim of its members is to "boldly bear out the dignity of littleness under the noses of those enormous engrossers of manhood, those hyperbolical monsters of the species, the tall fellows that overlook us."

Although of course women would not have been admitted into men's clubs in real life, it is not insignificant that all members of the fictitious short club happen to be male. In fact, like Fielding's Tom Thumb plays and Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Pope's "Short Club"—together with its companion piece, the "Tall Club"—is in many ways a parody of English masculinity in the age of female consumption.

The Short Club's function as a satire of modern gender roles becomes especially apparent when Bob Short comes to describe "[t]he most eminent persons of our assembly," a man named Tom Tiptoe, "a little poet, a little lover, a little politician, and a little hero." The "little lover," Tom Tiptoe, "is the most gallant lover of the age." As Bob Short recalls:
He was, the other night, excusing his absence from the club upon account of an assignation which a lady. (and, as he had the vanity to tell us, a tall one too) who had consented to the full accomplishment of his desires that evening: but one of the company, who was his confidant, assured us she was a woman of humour, and made the agreement on this condition, that his toe should be tied to hers.\\n
And thus, Pope humorously portrays the little man lover as one thinks of himself as a hero and "most gallant lover of the age," and is thought of as such by other little men as well, while being in reality a mere toy for the sexual amusement of English women, particularly the tall ones.

The members of the Short Club embrace this new standard of English masculinity to such an extent that their rules insist that all members must act short in their amours or risk punishment:

Whatsoever aspiring practices any of these our people shall be guilty of in their amours, single combats, or any indirect means to manhood, we shall certainly be acquainted with, and publish to the world for their punishment and reformation.

For the president has granted me the sole property of exposing and shewing to the town all such intractable dwarfs, whose circumstances exempt them from being carried about it boxes.\\n
Presented in this way, the rules of the Short Club indicate that the little man is on his way to becoming a model of English masculinity, rather than an exception to the norm.
In fact, members of the Short Club are so comfortable with their own belittled and commodified status. Bob Short suggests that they feel a brotherly affinity for puppets: "The place we have chosen for this meeting is in the Little Piazza, not without an eye to the neighbourhood of Mr. Powel’s opera [a famous puppeteer and his puppet show], for the performers of which we have, as becomes us, a brotherly affection." Here, Pope suggests, a continuum exists that fraternally links modern Englishmen with inanimate playthings (the puppets that were the real Mr. Powell’s performers). Counterintuitively and unflatteringly, this fictitious letter-writer suggests that the new ideal Englishman has more in common with inanimate objects of popular amusement than with the entrepreneur who manipulates them, the illustrious Mr. Powell, who was himself famously small in stature.
In the last piece of the series, Pope imagines the creation of a reactionary "Tall Club" to counteract the brand of English masculinity epitomized and enforced by the Short Club. Since the publication of the short club letters, the unnamed representative of the Tall Club complains, modern English men actually strive to be short and go to extreme means to do so:

I was very much troubled to see the two letters which you lately published concerning the short club. You cannot imagine what airs all the little pragramtical fellows about us have given themselves since the reading of those papers . . .

I met with one the other day who was at least three inches above five foot, which you know is the statutable measure of that club. The overgrown runt has struck off his heels, lowered his fore top, and contracted his figure, that he might be looked upon as a member of this new erected society: nay, so far did his vanity carry him, that he talked familiarly of Tom Tiptoe [the "little lover" of the Short Club], and pretends to be an intimate acquaintance of Tim Tuck.\(^\text{14}\)

According to the Tall Club, the little man and the prototypical Englishman have become one and the same.

A primary concern of the Tall Club is the idea that if women should come to prefer short men, then all men will strive to be short:

If the ladies should once take a liking to such a diminutive race of lovers, we should, in a little time, see mankind epitomized, and the whole species in
miniature: daisy roots would grow fashionable diet. In order therefore to keep our posterity from dwindling, and fetch down the pride of these aspiring race of upstarts, we have here instituted a tall club.\(^{15}\)

If this new ideal of English masculinity persists, worries the letter-writer, then all Englishmen will strive to be short, if “this society of little men proceed as they have begun to magnify themselves, and lessen men of higher stature.”\(^{16}\)

And thus, in conclusion, the letter-writer states:

I think that we serve our country by discouraging this little breed, and hindering it from coming into fashion. If the fair sex look upon us with an eye of favor, we shall make some attempts to lengthen out the human figure, and restore it to its ancient procerity.\(^{17}\)

The letter-writer’s invocation of “our country” (“I think that we serve our country by discouraging this little breed”) emphasizes that the problem of little men is in fact a national problem, and to correct it is an act of nationalism (to “serve our country”). At the same time, his use of the phrase “coming into fashion” equates this trend with the new consumer culture, while his suggestion to restore the male body “to its ancient procerity” invokes the ancient vs. modern debates of the time, in which modern English men were often described as “dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants” (as in, for instance, William Temple’s “Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning”).\(^{18}\)
Simply put, in Pope's "Short Club" and "Tall Club" pieces, the condition of little men in the eighteenth century is not particular to Pope himself, but is the problem of modern English masculinity in general: by embracing their belittled and commodified status—particularly with regard to women—this new breed of little men have set a new standard by which all other English men are finding themselves judged.
Portrait of Christopher Smart
In 1750, a poem entitled “The Author Apologizes to a Lady, for His Being a Little Man” appeared in The Student, under the name of “Mr. Lun,” a pseudonym for the esteemed poet Christopher Smart. The poem’s self-mocking characterization was characteristic of Smart’s references to his own small stature. As Smart wrote elsewhere, “my stature is so very low . . . [that] in the rest of my person there is nothing very singular, saving that when I take the air, having neither horse nor vehicle, I am obliged to do it on a pair of bandy legs.”

In “The Author Apologizes to a Lady,” Smart’s narrator pleads with the woman he desires to hear his case before casting him aside on account of his height:

Yes, contumelious fair, you scorn
The amorous dwarf, that courts you to his arms.
But ere you leave him quite forlorn.
And to some youth gigantic yield your charms.

Although Smart begins his “apology” with the argument that stature should be irrelevant in affairs of the heart, insisting that it is unwise for this woman to measure “Your lover’s worth by quantity, or weight,” as if he was a mere vegetable or piece of meat at a market, he contradicts this assertion in the remaining stanzas by selling himself to the reader on the grounds that his small size actually makes him more valuable to her as a sexual
object.\textsuperscript{21} Constructing his female addressee as a physically fragile creature who would be better serviced by an amorous dwarf than a hulking giant, the narrator instructs her to:

Look in the glass, survey that cheek—
Where Flora has with all her roses blush’d:
The shape so tender—looks so meek—
The breasts made to be press’d, not to be crush’d—
Then turn to me—turn with obliging eyes.
No longer Nature’s works, in miniature, despise.\textsuperscript{22}

In arguing that his own littleness makes him more sexually compatible with the addressee’s “tender” female body, he suggests that the little man makes for a more sexually pleasing and useful object than his tall rivals. Concluding the poem with a sexual proposition, the narrator challenges the Lady to meet him for a passionate rendezvous where he can put his boasts to the test: “Then, scornful nymph, come forth to younger grove. Where I defy, and challenge, all thy utmost love.”\textsuperscript{23}

We have already seen how Fielding and certain pornographic works used the figure of the little man to characterize female consumption’s belittlement of the male body. In this mid-century poem of Smart’s—and, as we will see, in Boruwlaski’s memoirs—a new factor is added to the mix: the cult of sensibility.

After “selling himself” to the female reader as an ideal woman’s commodity, Smart’s narrator appeals to the popular cult of sensibility to make the case that:
The less the body to the view.

The soul (like springs in closer durance pent)

Is all exertion, ever new.

Unceasing, unextinguish’d. and unspent:

Still pouring forth executive desire.

As bright, as brisk. and lasting, as the vestal fire.\textsuperscript{24}

And so goes the lover’s rather tenuous argument in advertising himself to the female reader: the shorter the man, the greater the soul, and therefore the greater, and longer lasting his desire—a thinly veiled allusion to the narrator’s sexual prowess, reminiscent of Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays. The poem’s tongue-in-cheek equation of the “little man” with the “man of feeling” is a twist on a common theme in eighteenth-century sentimental literature: the privileging of male sentiment and writerliness over macho brute force. As the narrator proposes towards the end of the poem: “The poets shall ensure thy name. Who magnitude of mind, not body boast. Laurels on bulky bards as rarely grow. As on the sturdy oak the virtuous mistletoe.”\textsuperscript{25}

*

These interconnected themes of male stature, sentiment, and writing, are also at stake in \textit{Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf} (1788), the published memoir of a former Polish court dwarf, Josef Boruwlaski, who, after marrying a normal-sized woman, emigrated to England and wrote his memoirs there to sell by subscription in order to
support his new wife and, later, their children. But before we examine Boruwlaski’s memoirs any further, we must first consider the status of the dwarf in eighteenth-century English culture.

It is commonly known that the tradition of European court dwarves flourished from the Middle Ages through the late sixteenth century, and are frequently represented in European painting of the time. Lesser known is the simultaneous fascination with dwarfs’ love lives. It was rumored that female aristocrats would make dwarfs their sexual servants, and members of European royalty and aristocracy—such as Catherine de Medici—actually orchestrated forced matings of dwarfs. “breeding” human beings like animals.  

By the late seventeenth century, however, it seems that interest in dwarf sexuality had less to do with the idea of the dwarf as subhuman “other,” and more to do with a growing concept of the dwarf as somehow representing shifting standards in gender and marriage. Edmund Waller’s poem “At the marriage of the Dwarfs” (1645), for instance, suggests that a marriage between two dwarfs is the ultimate companionate marriage. Waller writes:
The sign or chance makes others wise.
But nature did this match contrive:
Eve might as well have Adam fled
As she deny'd her little Bed
To him for whom Heaven seem'd to frame.
And measure out this onely dame.
Thrice happy is that humble pair
Beneath the level of all care:
Over whose heads those arrows flie
Of sad distrust and jealouzie:
Secur'd in as high extream.
As if the world held none but them.\(^{27}\)

In Waller's poem, the dwarf serves as a metaphor for new standards in English marriage and gender roles, epitomizing the modern companionate husband and wife.\(^{28}\)

A similar fascination with dwarf marriage (as opposed to just sex) is apparent in a mid-eighteenth-century advertisement for:

a little *Black Man*, being but 3 Foot high, and 32 Years of Age, strait and proportionable every way, who is distinguished by the Name of the *Black Prince*, and has been shown before most Kings and Princes in Christendom. The next being his Wife, the *Little Woman*, NOT 3 Foot high, and 30 Years of Age, strait and proportionable as any Woman in the Land, which is commonly call'd the
Fairy Queen, she gives a General satisfaction to all that sees her, by Diverting them with Dancing, being big with Child.²⁹

Another advertisement that reflects a particular fascination with the domesticity and procreation—as well as the sexuality—of dwarfs speaks of “a Little Man. Fifty Years of Age. Two Feet Nine Inches high, and the Father of Eight Children.”³⁰

Matthew Buchinger, the best-known dwarf in eighteenth-century England, was especially famous for his four marriages to normal-sized women, which produced eleven children.³¹ Advertised as a man who defies his physical limitations, Buchinger was described as a man of “twenty-nine inches high, born without Hands, Feet, or Thighs, played on the Hautboy, and on the Strange Flute, in concert with the Bag-Pipe, Dulcimer and Trumpet; wrote in concert and drew with a pen; played cards and dice; performed tricks with cups and balls . . . [and] his playing at Skittles is most admirable.”³²

Buchinger’s ‘success against all odds’ perfectly epitomized the new middle class ideology: any man can achieve anything as long as he worked hard enough.

In certain cases, the English male dwarf’s ability to overcome the limitations with which he was born served as nationalistic inspiration for the tiny country of England itself. as in an advertisement for a dwarf that concludes: ‘Let others boast of stature, or of birth. This Glorious Truth shall fill our souls with mirth: ‘That we now are, and hope for years, to sing: ‘The SMALLEST subjects of the GREATEST King!’³³ Here, the dwarf represents the paradigmatic modern English subject: one who no longer believes that birth determines merit, and yet who still considers himself loyal and subordinate to the English monarchy.
Engraving of Keham Whitelamb,
an English Freak-Show Dwarf, with his "Traveling Closet"
In Boruwlaski's *Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf*, this new relation between
dwarfishness and new standards of English masculinity defined by the new middle class
merges with Smart's theme of the relation between male stature and "feeling." As
mentioned earlier in this chapter, Boruwlaski was an actual Polish court dwarf who
emigrated to England to earn a living for himself and his family after creating a scandal
in Poland—and offending his benefactress the Countess Humieska—by marrying a
normal-sized woman. Penniless and in debt, Boruwlaski wrote his memoirs to sell by
subscription to members of the English nobility for whom he frequently performed by
singing in concerts—also for no other reason than to earn money to support his family.
The memoir, in fact, begins with Boruwlaski's candid admission that "On [these
Memoirs'] reception in the world, entirely depend my future welfare and my family's
support."³⁴ Boruwlaski's overcoming physical limitations with sentiment becomes the
memoir's most prominent theme, as he introduces his memoir with the pronouncement:
"It is so uncommon to find reason and sentiment, with noble and delicate affections, in a
man whom nature, as it were, could not make complete, and who in size has the
appearance of a child, that, being persuaded nobody would even take the trouble to cast
an eye upon these Memoirs. I began to commit to paper some of the principal events of
my life."³⁵ And he concludes the memoir by reflecting:
In writing these memoirs, I not only mean to describe my size and its proportions. I would likewise follow the development of my sentiments, the affections of my soul: I would speak openly: rather tell what I felt than what I did. and demonstrate that, if I can upbraid nature with having refused me a body like that of other men, she has made me ample amends, by endowing me with a sensibility, which, it is true, displayed itself rather late, but, even in my indiscretions, spread a glow of happiness, the remembrance of which I enjoy with gratitude and a feeling of heart. 36

However, over and against the narrative of sensibility, is a Tom Thumb narrative depicting Boruwlaski as a woman’s toy, referred to by his female companions and owners as “Joujou” (“little plaything”), and moving at the age of fifteen from the hands of the soon-to-be-married Lady de Coaroliz into the possession of the Countess Humieska. Exchanged from one benefactress to another, Boruwlaski’s predicament mirrors the traditional patriarchal exchange of women in marriage—from one man (father) to another (husband)—only in this case the genders are reversed. 37

As in Fielding’s “On Her Wishing to Have a Lilliputian to Play With,” it is not Boruwlaski’s feeling heart but his portable size that makes him appealing to women and grants him physical access to them—and to their “caresses”—which would otherwise be considered improper. On one occasion, Boruwlaski writes of “[h]ow agreeably surprised when I beheld about twenty beautiful women, who received me in the most tender and affectionate manner, the smallness of my stature having procured me this very particular honor.” 38 On another occasion, Boruwlaski describes how during his travels, the Queen
of Hungary "took me on her lap." and "much caressed me." When the Queen asks him about his travels, Boruwlaski confesses that he has seen nothing so "extraordinary" as that which he now beholds: "to see so little a man on the lap of so great a woman." This answer gained me her caresses." The Duchess of Modena, who is enchanted by Boruwlaski, takes liberties with him such that "her caresses, praises, and eagerness proved how great her enthusiasm was." Like court dwarfs before him, Boruwlaski is little more than a female plaything, a sexual curiosity. On one occasion, Boruwlaski is upset to hear a group of women speaking about him at the home of his benefactress:

One of the company having put the question, whether Dwarfs possess the faculty of procreating? another advanced, that if they have it, their children would grow to the common size . . . I spare my readers the particulars of that conversation, which was carried very far, and only interrupted by my weeping bitterly . . . I had to conclude, not only that they believed themselves entitled to dispose of me without my advice, but even looked upon me as being merely physical, without morality, on whom they might try experiments of every kind. In this passage, the quasi-Tom Thumb narrative of Boruwlaski's memoir turns from comical to pathetic: and it is at this moment that Boruwlaski first understands how women see him, and he is devastated by what he finds.
But when Boruwlaski discovers the world of the theater, his situation begins to change. No longer merely the object of women's belittling gazes, Boruwlaski finds that attending the theater makes him, for the first time, an empowered spectator in his own right. He writes:

The show itself attracted me: the concourse of spectators, but women above all, who, stirring up in me some kind of new emotions, made me attend the theater with a degree of frenzy. Till then I had lived almost without conceiving any difference between the sexes: but from the inquietude, the agitation, and the trouble which the presence of a woman caused in me, I could no longer conceal to myself that on this enchanting sex depends all our happiness: yet was I not able to define in what and how it might be promoted. 43

Having 'discovered' heterosexual desire through his transformed gaze, Boruwlaski comes to appreciate the fact that his size enables him to attain a physical closeness to and boldness with women that would otherwise be impossible: "Women, besides their continual railleries at the shortness of my stature, their pleasentries on my reservedness and circumspection, completely cured me of that timidity, which seemed, as it were, natural to my size." 44 He writes: "Women, in my eyes, had taken quite a new form. They excited my admiration, my sensibility, my affections; but it was sufficient to be a woman, that title gave her a right to my rising passion: I was fond of the sex, without choice or distinction: I loved them all. In a word, at the age of twenty-five I was like other young lads at fifteen." 45
And thus, no longer content with being the object of women. Boruwlaski now wants women to be his objects:

These emotions, quite new to me, had their charms; and, perhaps, I had been happier if I could have been contented with experiencing them without seeking how to gratify desires which every day grew more pressing. Unhappily, such a resistance is not in the nature of man; pressed by the warmth of my affections, I wished to fix my views upon a particular object. How much was my mind mortified on reflecting upon my stature, which I considered as an insurmountable obstacle to the happiness I longed for with so much ardor! "What!" said I to myself: "the most reserved women take me upon their lap; they embrace me, they bestow upon me the most tender caresses, they use me like a child! How can I hazard, in such circumstances, a declaration at which they will only laugh, whilst I shall remain covered with eternal ridicule?" It was not an easy matter to make my pride agree with my desires. The farther I was from possessing the common size of other men, the more eagerly I wished that difference might be forgotten, and that I might be treated like them. But experience has taught me that I thought as a child. I was ignorant of the effect such wonderful conditions may produce: above all I knew not, forgive me, ye fair! How far women might be led by curiosity—I soon knew it.46
However, when Boruwlaski loses his virginity through his first heterosexual affair—with none other than an actress from the very theater he has been frequenting—he soon realizes that the act of heterosexual intercourse makes him *more* of a woman’s toy, rather than less so:

I was told that my little intrigue was known to everybody, and spoken of publicly: that they laughed at my discretion: and she, whom I thought the most interested in secrecy, did not scruple openly to laugh at my passion and eagerness. at the tumultuous emotions she had excited in me: that she even gloried in it, and deemed it no small proof of her merit to have provoked in a man of my size a sentiment apparently so little suitable to him. This discovery sunk me down. by humbling my pride: I thought I loved sincerely. I had hoped to be sincerely beloved: and it was not without extreme grief I saw the veil fall, and my illusion dispelled.⁴⁷

Here, as elsewhere in the memoir. Boruwlaski is extremely conscious that others, particularly women. see him as an object, a mere plaything. a little “Joujou.”⁴⁸ He writes of being “looked upon by others as a doll: a little more perfect. it is true. and better organized that they commonly are. but. however, only as an animated toy.”⁴⁹ He has become such a commodity that during his travels he becomes “tout-à-fait à la mode” in Paris (“quite in fashion”).⁵⁰
Boruwlsaki’s proposed solution to this problem, interestingly enough, is a very modern and English one: to achieve a companionate marriage based on mutual admiration rather than objectification. For that reason, Boruwlsaki does not want his intended wife, Isalina—a woman of high stature, high birth, and low fortune—to objectify and “caress” him like other women do (“Whilst I suffered every other lady to take me on her lap, and submitted to their fondness and caresses, I was anxiously cautious lest Isalina should do the same... when I would have given my life to enjoy a single one of her caresses as a friend. I scorned to receive all those she would lavish on me as a child”).

Moreover, Boruwlsaki’s desire for a companionate marriage after his failed relationship with the actress is coupled with another paradigm of English bourgeois masculinity: the discovery of feeling and sentiment. Reflecting upon his disastrous affair with the actress, Boruwlsaki learns remarks: “I then began to perceive that sentiment, reciprocal sentiment only, can give animation and liveliness to pleasures, which without it are nought.”

In an English middle-class companionate marriage filled with sentiment, Boruwlsaki can allegedly elevate himself to the level of equal to Isalina. While at the same time making her the subordinated object of his sentimental gaze:
Being now a father, having found in my wife a sincere friend, who partakes of my
pains and pleasures... It was, however, young Isalina's beauty, her sparkling
eyes, the elegance of her figure, which struck me at first sight, and subdued my
heart... I discovered in her a smart and brilliant wit... and that native meekness
which was the plain index of a feeling heart!

And thus, in passages such as the following, Boruwlaski combines the discourses of
sentiment and companionate marriage to create a new identity for himself: a new kind of
masculinity that seems to empower him from the status of female plaything to male ideal
while fitting perfectly with the new culture into which he is trying to assimilate:

my only desire was to spend my life with the object of my affection: and whereas
formerly I had been determined only by the allurements of pleasure and personal
satisfaction. I felt that the end at which I truly aimed was the happiness of the
person to whom I was attached: and that, if I could succeed in making her happy.
there would not be anything wanting to my own felicity. I had every day new
occasions of applauding myself for my sentiments.55

Boruwlaski continues to equate companionate marriage with sensibility when he sets
forth a sentimental philosophy of companionate marriage:
Yet I must own, there is a personal beauty which discloses that of the soul: and when we meet with such tender, sweet and lively countenances, which, being strangers to dissimulation and deceit, exhibit in their features the motions they feel, the impressions they receive, we must acknowledge, at the very first moment, that persons so happily endowed are worthy of our attachment. 'Tis among women especially that this inestimable quality is to be found, which sets off their charms so advantageously: they possess it, notwithstanding all the obstacles that are opposed to it, though the aim of their education incessantly be to instruct them how to dissemble their sentiments, and conceal their natural affections. May I have resolution and wisdom enough to overcome this prejudice in training up my children!\(^4\)

In a later passage, also worth quoting in full, Boruwlaski appropriates and fuses the bourgeois discourses of sentiment and companionate marriage in a similar way:

Yes, it is true. I have sacrificed for this happiness—ease, riches, tranquility. It has been for me the source of a thousand inquietudes, respecting either the subsistence of myself and family, or that of my children for the future. Yet, for these eight years that I have enjoyed it, I have found that nothing in the world is preferable to the satisfaction of pouring our inquietudes, our hopes, our fears into the bosom of a true friend united to our fate, whose tender and feeling soul
relieves our pains by sharing them, and enlivens our pleasures with a far greater
delight.  

But perhaps the best example of Boruwlaski’s assimilation into English middle-class
culture by adopting and blending the English cults of sentiment and companionate
marriage is in the following passage:

[I] have discovered a very comfortable truth, that a man of feeling never regrets
those actions which originate from tenderness of sentiment when unaccompanied
by self-reproach. If a look on my children affect me, if a glance of a dear wife
who has been so long my adored companion, and is now become a sincere friend.
recall to my mind a sweet remembrance. I feel a starting tear, which would be the
tear of happiness. did not other intrusive fears disturb these delightful moments. 

When writing to Isalina to convince her to marry him. Boruwlaski maps out for
her his rhetorical strategy of appealing to both the English bourgeois cult of sensibility
and the cult of companionate marriage. People will talk, he says, but “the wise, and even
the ill-natured must be forced to own, that you had no other motive than a profound
sentiment, a strong friendship, a sincere desire of making me happy.” As in Smart’s
poem. Boruwlaski makes the case that a bigger husband would not have the level of
feeling of a little man such as he:
It is very true, that, at first sight, the idea of marrying a man of my stature will appear somewhat ludicrous; but, my charming friend, are you not already familiarized with this idea? . . . Besides, if I love you better than any other man could do . . . [if] I strive to make you amends by the greatest attentions and cares, would you not be happier than with an imperious husband, who, not knowing how to value you, even ignorant of what love is, would make you sink under the yoke of marriage, and not taste its sweets?"  

For Borułłski, producing a child is a great victory over those who see his marriage as a joke, and also gives him a new source of sentiment: "To the great astonishment of all those who had deemed my marriage a folly, six weeks had scarcely elapsed when she apprised me of my being destined to be a father."  

He writes, on another occasion, "the time came when she was brought to bed, and delivered of a pretty little girl, whose birth made me experience feelings beyond description. Then I felt, on becoming a father, that though the passion which unites us to the object of our love might before be ever so violent, yet it receives quite another energy from this new source of enjoyment."

By embracing the English bourgeois discourses of feeling and companionate marriage, and by fashioning himself as an ideal modern English husband who works for a living—singing in concerts (as the reader learns, though nowhere is there any mention of the extent of his vocal talents) and writing his memoirs to support his new family—Borułłski fully becomes a member of the English "middle class," culturally as well as economically. Writes Borułłski: "Although accustomed to the luxury and magnificence which had surrounded us in the palace of my benefactress, yet without
grief, and even with a kind of pleasure, we should have embraced a middle station of life. 

the only one, perhaps, which gives to the tender and delicate sentiments their full scope and energy. Having absorbed the discourses of feeling and companionate marriage, Boruwałski would have the reader think that he is now fully assimilated into, and empowered by, this "middle station of life." Boruwałski’s step down in class (from upper to middle) is a step up in dignity (from belittled Polish aristocrat to ideal bourgeois Englishman)—or so Boruwałski would have his readers believe.

*

Boruwałski’s rhetorical strategy begins to unravel when the reader learns that Isalina still thinks of him as a "little creature," as she calls him in her response to his marriage proposal.2 and still refuses to see him as anything other than her "little Joujou.”

Writes Isalina in a letter reproduced by Boruwałski: “But, believe me, Joujou, all this cannot alter my resolutions: though you exert yourself to have a contract of marriage in due form, to have me sign it, to take me to church, and to marry me, you shall not cease, for all that, to be my little Joujou.”3

This failure of Boruwałski’s to negate his objectified and commodified status by appropriating the English bourgeois discourse of companionate marriage is characterized beautifully by the illustration that accompanied the original book.
LONDON, 1788.

With a Copper-Plated Engraving, wherein he is represented in a

Family-Scene.

By Mr. DES CARPIERES.

Translated from the French.

Written by himself.

CONTAINING

A Faithful and Curious Account of his Birth; Etc.

A POLISH GENTLEMAN,

JOSEPH BOROWTASCH,

Celebrated Dwarf,

OF THE

MEMOIRS
At first glance, the illustration might seem to depict a touching modern domestic scene among a companionate wife, a domesticated husband, and their child. And yet, upon further inspection, while Boruwlaski appears handing a toy to his son, Isalina seems to be glancing knowingly at the spectator, as if to say: 'You and I know who is the real toy in this picture!'

Boruwlaski’s strategic embrace of English bourgeois values is similarly dismantled when it becomes apparent that while he characterizes himself as a modern-day Englishman working for a living, his English concerts only underscore his objectified status as—like Tom Thumb—a dehumanized laboring object. Boruwlaski, who was in Poland a de facto nobleman, ends up in England as a mere animated commodity selling himself to nobility, belittling himself before them in a new way. Boruwlaski tries to dignify and justify his performances as art:

My (financial) hopes, it is true, were grounded upon a concert; but besides being obliged to wait till the morning was over. I had also new difficulties to overcome. New obstacles to surmount. A crowd of virtuosi were inscribed on the catalogue. At the royal theater . . I was so fortunate as to be honored with a numerous assembly, and almost all the nobility were present. I attempted in a short speech to express my gratitude to them; I wanted likewise to make an apology before that same nobility, who, twenty years ago, having seen me surrounded with the eclat of greatness, saw me now reduced to the sad necessity of appearing in public. Love, and adored wife, a child, the precious fruit of our union, pleaded in my favor: they seemed satisfied with my compliment, and I experienced all the
indulgence of the public, who undoubtedly bestowed their applause, rather on my earnest desire of pleasing them, than on my talents.\textsuperscript{64}

And yet, that strategy falls apart as soon as the concert ends, and a little girl in the audience—a six-year-old Countess—wants to buy him as commodity. As Boruwlaski recalls:

When it was over she ran to her papa, and clinging round his neck, earnestly begged he would buy her this little man… ‘I will keep him in mine, will take the utmost care of him; I shall love to dress and adorn him, and will load him with caresses and dainties.’—In a word, they had much ado to persuade her that it was not possible to purchase the little man like a doll.\textsuperscript{65}

*

Boruwlaski concludes the memoir by lamenting that his size that makes him unable to fully join the English middle class into which he tries to assimilate. His dwarfism making him unable to “labor” to earn a living

Had I been formed like other mortals, I could, like most of them, have subsisted by industry and labor; but my stature has irrevocably excluded me from the common circle of society. Nay, but few people seem to take notice of my being a man, an honest man, a man of feeling. How painful are these reflections! O
beneficent and generous nation [England]! Should I sink under my griefs, I recommend to you my wife and children—my children, who came into life among you; whose glory it is to be your countryman . . . I will take with me everywhere, will cherish, and carefully keep in the inmost recesses of my heart the grateful sentiments which your repeated favors have excited in me."

What makes this passage so interesting is Boruwlaski's appeal to English nationalism ("O beneficent and generous nation . . . whose glory it is to be your countrymen"), and his appeal to his aristocratic readership, who are themselves torn between embracing the new bourgeois values and feeling isolated by them." Just as Boruwlaski's stature allegedly makes him unsuited to work for a living in eighteenth-century England, so does aristocrats' status make them unable to become part of this new culture and its new standards of masculinity. In this way, Boruwlaski knowingly fashions his plight as the plight of the aristocratic Englishman in the eighteenth century. (In fact, it is just as likely that Boruwlaski's privileged economic background and subsequent unfamiliarity with the world of labor is just as responsible for his inability to earn a living as is his stature).

Ultimately, by attributing his misfortunes to his "excess of sensibility."
Boruwlaski manages to deflect the crisis in English masculinity to which he and his English aristocratic audience are subjected as a result of the new bourgeois culture:

I am come at last to a conclusion of the principle events of my life . . . may I be permitted to fix my reader's attention for a moment upon my present situation . . .
May I hope that a noble and generous nation, in the midst of which I have for
these six years found an agreeable retreat, and have enjoyed a multiplicity of
resources and a peaceful existence, will deign to compassionate the fate of a
being, stamped by nature herself with the mark of the marvelous, whose life
presents a texture of events, almost all of which have flowed from an excess of
sensibility.⁸⁸

In this passage, Boruwlsaki seems to be reassuring his audience that the upper-classes are
not too spoiled to successfully join the new middle class: instead, it is their excess of
feeling (the cult of feeling invented by that very same middle class) that prevents them
from doing so—as if in failing to join the new middle-class culture they are effectively
beating the middle class at its own game. Thus, Boruwlsaki asks the England as a nation
to have compassion for him as one who—like the sympathetic English aristocrats that
comprise his readership—is a man of feeling in a time where male feeling has far less
market value than male bodies able to labor for the amusement of consuming English
women—a role which Boruwlsaki claims to be incapable of playing.

And yet, Boruwlsaki’s appeal to the “pure” realm of sensibility over and against
the undesirable realm of labor and work—both middle-class discourses, directed here
towards an aristocratic audience—is undermined by the very purpose of the memoir
itself: to earn a living: as Boruwlsaki writes in the preface: “On [these Memoirs’]
reception in the world, entirely depend my future welfare and my family’s support.”⁹⁹

Boruwlsaki’s appeal to the feeling of a “generous nation” does not make him one of the
men of feeling to whom he appeals, but a pathetic object of sentiment who deserves the
generosity of that generous nation. Boruwlsaki’s attempt to elevate his belittled status by
appropriating certain English bourgeois discourses has only brought him full circle: by evoking in his readers sentiment over consumerism, he makes himself a pathetic object of sentiment and—in begging a “generous nation” to buy his memoirs. He is asking them to take pity on him, buy him (by buying his memoir), and “take him home”—not unlike the little girl at his concert who tries to “purchase the little man like a doll.”
Notes


2 Mack. 153.

3 Mack. 153.

4 Pope. quoted in Mack. 151.

5 Quoted in Mack. 152.


13 Mr. Powell was a highly successful puppeteer, himself a man of "dwarfish deformity," as Ashton writes in Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne (London: Chatto & Windus, 1925).


17 "No. CVIII. WEDNESDAY. JULY 15." The Guardian. (London. 1713) 123.

The expression began with Bernard de Chartres in the twelfth century, who said “In comparison with the ancients we stand like dwarf’s on the shoulders of giants” (1126).

But it was Isaac Newton who brought that phrase to light in 1676 by famously saying in a letter to Robert Hooke: “If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants” (Letter to Robert Hooke. 5 February 1676. Correspondence of Isaac Newton, vol. 1 [1959], ed. H.W. Turnbull, 416). The expression then became a key metaphor in the “ancients vs. modern” debates of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Arthur Sherbo. Christopher Smart, Scholar of the University, (Michigan State University Press. 1967) 61.


Smart. 27.

Smart. 27.

Smart. 28.

Smart. 27.

Smart. 27.

See Leslie Fiedler. Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self (Simon & Schuster. 1979) 51. “King Sigismun-Augustus of Poland had nine Dwarf’s of his very own, and Catherine de’ Medics six: while a Roman cardinal called Vitelli was able to assemble thirty-nine to serve at a special dinner. But within a hundred years royal Dwarf’s had begun to disappear from Western Europe, the last official Dwarf at the court of France dying in 1662” (48).
27 Edmund Waller. "At the marriage of the Dwarfs." (London. 1645) 82.

28 Much of what we currently know about the popular fascination with dwarfs in eighteenth-century England, we know from John Ashton’s previously cited 1925 book Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne, and Henry Morley’s 1880 Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair, in which the authors cite numerous advertisements and fliers for dwarf appearances in fairs and freak-shows.

29 Ashton. 205-206.


31 Fiedler. 52.

32 Morley. 253.

33 Morley. 361. As these sources reveal, the exploitation of dwarfs of both sexes and diverse nationalities—male and female, English and non-English—was a site of reflection upon sexual and national difference. Advertisements for female dwarfs tended to boast of their physical perfection. One advertisement, for instance, stated that:

At the Hart’s Horn’s Inn in Pye Corner, during the time of Bartholomew Fair, will be seen these strange Rarities following. *viz.* a Little *Farey Woman,* lately come from *Italy,* being but Two Foot Two Inches high, the shortest that ever was seen in *England,* and no ways Deform’d, as the other two Women are, that are carried about the Streets in boxes from House to House, for some years past, this being Thirteen Inches shorter than either of them: if any Person has a desire to see her at their own Houses, we are ready to wait upon them any Hour of the Day.
(Ashton, 190-191).

And another, regarding an English female dwarf, similarly states:

Also MISS MORGAN, the Celebrated WINDSOR FAIRY, known in London and Windsor by the Addition of LADY MORGAN, a Title which His Majesty was pleased to confer on her. This unparalleled Woman is in the 35th year of her age, and only 18 pounds weight. Her form affords a pleasing surprise, and her admirable symmetry engages attention. She was introduced to Their MAJESTIES at the Queen’s Lodge, Windsor, on Saturday, the 4th of August 1781, but the recommendation of the late Dr. Hunter; when they were pleased to pronounce her the finest Display of Human Nature in miniature they ever saw.— But we shall say no more of these great Wonders of Nature: let those who honour them with their visits, judge for themselves.

(Morley, 361).

In other cases, dwarfism not only compounded national and sexual otherness, but also epitomized the objectification of people of color, as in an ad for “A little Black Man lately brought from the West Indies, being the Wonder of this Age, he being but 3 Foot high and 25 Years Old.” John Ashton, Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne 198. Consider, by way of contrast, the following advertisement for a British giant, which goes out of its way to emphasize the British-ness of the giant and to portray him proudly and positively as a paradigmatic British explorer:
This is to give Notice to all Gentlemen, Ladys and Others, that there is now to be seen in this Place, a Tall BRITAIN. Born on a Mountain near Llanriost; from the Age of 16 years he has Travelled abroad, and has been shown before all the Foreign Kings and Princes in Christendom: and is now lately come into England, and had the Honour to have been shown before Her Present Majesty of Great Brittain and her Royal Consort the Prince to the Great Satisfaction of all Spectators that have seen him. he being the Tallest Man that ever was shewed in this Kingdom.

(Ashton, 208).

One advertisement for an English female giant "invites the public to the 'Wonderful Tall ESSEX WOMAN. that had the Honour to shew herself before their Royal Highnesses, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the Rest of the Royal Family, last Bartholomew Fair. with great applause" (Morley, 257). Along the same lines, Boruwlaski writes that in England others wished to see him alongside a giant: "A short time after my arrival in London there came also a stupendous giant . . . Many persons seemed desirous of seeing us together." (Boruwlaski, Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf [London, 1788] 199).

34 Boruwlaski. 1.

35 Boruwlaski. 3.

36 Boruwlaski. 69-70.
Boruwłaski writes that the Countess “had frequent opportunities of seeing me, and seemed to have some affection for me, as she often expressed what pleasure she should have, if I came to live with her at Warsaw” (Boruwłaski. 15). Boruwłaski writes:

“I assured the Countess, that, if the Lady de Tarnow, whose bounty rendered her the mistress of my fate, deigned to grant me her consent. I should deem myself happy to live under the protection of the Countess, and would follow my inclination as much as my duty, by earnestly endeavoring to deserve her kindness. The Countess Humieska seemed overjoyed at my consent: ‘I am very glad,’ said she, ‘my dear Joujou (for so they called me), to see you have no reluctance to come and live with me.’ Then addressing the Count and Countess de Tarnow:

‘You cannot retract,’ she said, ‘I have your word and that of Joujou.’”

(Boruwłaski. 19).

38 Boruwłaski. 15.

39 Boruwłaski. 25.

40 Boruwłaski. 25.

41 Boruwłaski. 25.

42 Boruwłaski. 31-33. This passage is censored out of the 1902 version, edited by H.R. Heatley. Unfortunately, that edition is the only circulating copy today (on microfilm). To see the original Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf, one must visit one of the handful of libraries that have one of the few remaining 1788 originals. The original has yet to be reproduced in book form or on microfilm.
Referring to himself, Boruwlaski writes that in Vienna the Prince Kaunitz "could find time to spend on small objects." Boruwlaski. 31.

Notes Boruwlaski. "It was then I bitterly felt all the disadvantages of my size." He claims that he would give anything "to be upon a level with other men" (giving up the love of his benefactress and the kindness of the King of Poland himself): Boruwlaski. 54. And even at this mature stage in his life, Boruwlaski is still totally dependent upon women, as a young woman of the time would be upon her father: "I had no fortune. I was totally indebted to her beneficence for my easy circumstances. I only subsisted through her bounty" (Boruwlaski. 54-55).

For no apparent reason, this entire passage is cut out of the more readily accessible 1902 edition of Boruwlaski's memoir.
The class and rank of Boruwlaski's subscribers can be ascertained by a quick glimpse of the first few pages of the subscriber list that begins the memoir (not reprinted in the readily available 1902 edition): His Royal Highness the PRINCE of WALES.


His Royal Highness Duke of Cumberland. Her Royal Highness Dutchess of Cumberland.

Dutchess Dowager Chandos. Earl of Carlisle. Earl of Chomondeley. La Marquise de


Dublin. Mr. Church. Mrs. Churchill. Rev. Mr. Clarke. Rev. Dr. Cleaver. _____


88 Boruwlaski. 143-4.

89 Boruwlaski. 1.
CHAPTER THREE

Of Microscopes and Men:

Gulliver's Travels and the Sexual Politics of Eighteenth-Century Microscopy

"It is principally the Microscope and that infinite Number of Pigmy Worlds discovered by it, which has rectified our Ideas of great and little."

-Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explained for the Use of the Ladies

Arguably, the strongest argument for the importance of little men in the eighteenth-century English imagination is the fact that the entire first half of the very first English novel—the Lilliput and Brobdingnag sections of Swift's Gulliver's Travels—is about precisely this topic. Upon further consideration, it becomes apparent that the section of the novel dealing most with this theme is not Lilliput—which features both little men and women and stars the relatively gigantic Gulliver—but Brobdingnag, in which our English traveler hero himself becomes contextually reduced to Lilliputian size, often in the hands of enormous women. In this chapter, I will read this influential text and several lesser-known works of the period in light of a contemporaneous phenomenon having to do with littleness, gender, and the new culture of consumption: the sudden popularity of microscopy (microscope use) in the eighteenth century, and its concurrent accessibility to middle- and upper-class men and women alike.

Marjorie Nicolson, the only recent critic to discuss the significance of microscopy in Gulliver's Travels, notes that Gulliver plays the part of an 'enlightened' microscopist
(microscope user) both in Lilliput—the land of the little people, where he is an elevated observer of small creatures and objects—and in Brobdingnag, the land of the giants, where Gulliver’s scientific curiosity is complemented by a perspective that makes everyday objects appear to him in magnified detail, as if seen through a microscope. To prove her point, Nicolson cites Gulliver’s dissection of giant Brobdingnagian wasps and his preservation of their stingers as a gift to “Gresham College” (a.k.a. The Royal Society), and the memorable passages in which he famously observes Brobdingnagian anatomy in hideously magnified detail (as when he recalls “the most horrible spectac[e] . . . a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my whole body”).

Nicolson’s argument has gone heretofore unchallenged, and yet her thesis leaves some significant gaps in its logic. For if Gulliver does play the part of microscopist in Brobdingnag (as Nicolson suggests), then he is a most unusual kind: an unwilling microscopist who cursles his magnified vision. In contrast to scientists of the day, it is not Gulliver’s enlightened mind but his puny body that endows him with microscope-like vision and compels him helplessly and aversely, to observe Brobdingnagian skin “so varified with spots, pimples and freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous.” as well as insects’ “loathsome excrement or spawn . . . which to me was very visible, though not to the natives of that country, whose large optics were not so acute as mine in viewing smaller objects.” Contrary to Nicolson’s argument, Gulliver does not act as a willing microscopist in this passage and in others like it, but functions instead as a helpless ‘seeing-object,’ whose singular function is to view everything in magnified detail, but without the power to pick and choose the objects of his magnified gaze—a power that
belongs not to Gulliver, but to his Brobdingnagian owners and manipulators. In other
words, Gulliver is much more of an eighteenth-century microscope than an eighteenth-
century microscopist.

Gulliver, thought by certain Brobdingnagian inhabitants upon his arrival to be a
"piece of clock-work . . . contrived by some ingenious artist."5 is soon picked up by a
giant man who "was old and dim-sighted [and] put on his spectacles to behold me better.
at which I could not forbear laughing very heartily for his eyes appeared like the full
moon shining into a chamber at two windows." Gulliver's laughter at the sight of the
bespectacled giant calls to mind a microscope staring back into the eyes of its dim-sighted
user and mocking him for his optical inadequacies. And if we look closer at the wasp-
stinger incident cited by Nicolson, we find that Gulliver is only in a position to observe
these enormous specimens in magnified detail because he happens to have been placed on
a windowsill by his gigantic female owner who carries him about in a specially made box
or "traveling closet," just like the microscopes (and also the freak-show dwarfs) of the
day. The anecdote begins not with Gulliver's search for wasp stingers to dissect and
donate to the Royal Society, but with his recollection that: "I remember one morning
when Glumdalclitch had set me in my box upon a window." and only then does he
observe a swarm of wasps come flying into the room. etc.

But what is the significance of Gulliver's microscope-like gaze and subject
position as a portable 'seeing object' in the land of the giants? How should we account
for the fact that more often than not we find Gulliver as a seeing-object in the hands of
Brodningnagian women rather than Brobdingnagian men? And why do these women
invoke so much nausea, misogyny, and gynophobia in Swift's little 'man-microscope'?
These questions necessitate both a closer look at this section of the novel, and a reconsideration of a rarely-examined chapter in the history of science: the microscope’s shift in the late seventeenth century from rare scientific instrument to popular commodity, and its new accessibility to women in the eighteenth century.

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Although the microscope’s precise date-of-origin and the identity of its inventor are up for debate, it’s safe to say that the microscope was invented in the early 1600s and quickly became the much-used instrument of Dutch, Italian, English, and other European scientists such as Antony van Leeuwenhoek, Marcello Malpighi, and Robert Hooke. These men and their fellow natural philosophers were mesmerized to see the innerworkings of small insects under the microscope, and to witness tiny creatures moving about in magnified mold, their own semen, and other organic matter. In 1665, Royal Society member and microscope-maker Robert Hooke published a book called Micrographia, a beautifully illustrated collection of microscopical observations, which was met with high acclaim by the close-knit English scientific community.

Starting in the late 1600s, however, the microscope fell into a century-long “decline” or fall from grace within the scientific community, a phenomenon most commonly imputed to the microscope’s failure to live up to Hooke’s claim in the preface to Micrographia that “by the help of Microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry.” Unfortunately for Hooke, that noble aspiration would be technologically impossible until the mid-nineteenth century, when major advancements in optical glass
technology facilitated the groundbreaking microbiological work of Louis Pasteur.8 When seen from a purely cultural perspective, however, the century-long lapse in microscope-oriented scientific innovation and publication in the 1700s can be read as more of a lateral change of hands than an actual “decline”: for at precisely the same time that the microscope lost its high standing in the scientific community, the microscope caught hold of the English popular imagination (partly as a result of the unexpected commercial success of Hooke’s Micrographia) and began to be produced in English workshops for the consumption of middle- and upper-class men and women. No longer the exclusive property of the male elite of the Royal Society, the microscope became a recreational tool for laypersons of both sexes who could now purchase and enjoy affordable and easy-to-use mass-produced microscopes in conveniently portable small shapes and sizes.

The most popular and most commonly produced of this new breed of scientific instrument was the appropriately-titled “pocket microscope.” Measuring a mere 3 to 6 inches in length, and packaged in elegant snuff-box-sized containers, brass, silver, and ivory models such as “Mr. Wilson’s Pocket-Microscope” and Wilson’s screw-barrel model were not only far more user-friendly (and much cuter) than the ‘big and bulky’ compound model built by Hooke: they were also technologically superior, generating images much more clearly at greater magnification.
Hooke’s Compound Microscope
Mr. Wilson's Pocket Microscope

M. Wilson's Microscope lately Described in
The Philosophical Transactions N°. 281.
at the Royal Olive in Upper Sussex-Habit Garden
These dainty yet powerful instruments caught on quickly as a fashion trend, particularly among middle- and upper-class women who could purchase pocket microscopes with their pocket money. Swift himself toyed with the idea of buying one for his lover Stella, and wrote to her:

I doubt it will cost me thirty shillings for a microscope, but not without Stella’s permission: for I remember she is a virtuouso. Shall I buy it or no? 'Tis not the great bulky ones, nor the common little ones, to impale a louse (saving your presence) upon a needle’s point; but of a more exact sort, and clearer to the sight, with all its equipage in a little trunk that you may carry in your pocket. Tell me, sirrah, shall I buy it or not for you?

But not everybody was amused by this new development. Hooke, for one, saw a direct relation between the fashionable new pocket microscope and the contemporaneous decrease in microscope-oriented Royal Society publication. In 1691, Hooke delivered a pessimistic address to the Royal Society about "the Fate of Microscopes, as to their Invention, Improvements, Use, Neglect, and Slighting." Addressing this recent "Change of Humour in Men of Learning, in so short a Time," Hooke decries the microscope's devolution from a productive tool of male scientists into a miniaturized plaything in the hands of amateurs. Proper use of the Microscope. Hooke complains, has been "reduced almost to a single Votary, which is Mr. Leeuwenhoek: besides whom, I hear of none that make any other Use of that Instrument, but for Diversion and Pastime, and by that reason it is become a portable Instrument, and easy to be carried in one’s pocket." The once
prestigious microscope, had in Hooke's eyes been reduced to a mere plaything—a literal and metaphorical shrinkage that was for Hooke, a symbolic castration of the worst kind. The fact that these fashionable little 'women's toys' could actually magnify better than Hooke's model—a detail notably absent from his 1691 complaint—must only have increased his fear that these contemptible commodities would emasculate the already endangered species of 'enlightened' Englishman (it is no coincidence, then, that the one man named by Hooke as an exemplary microscope-user is Leuwenhoek, a Dutchman—not an Englishman).14

It is this emasculation anxiety at the heart of Hooke's lament that Swift seizes upon in his portrayal of the scientifically-minded Gulliver as a helpless woman-owned 'seeing-object' in Brobdingnag: By capitalizing on Hooke's complaint that the new commodity culture has sacrilegiously encroached upon the 'holy ground' of Enlightenment science, Swift suggests that Englishmen who think of themselves as "enlightened" are tools for imagining themselves to be untouched by the 'unnatural' new world of commodities and consumption. Like Hooke, Swift's Gulliver goes out of his way to distinguish his scientific spirit from the materialism of the new consumer culture by establishing himself as an enlightened man of science and learning. In the beginning of the novel, for instance, Gulliver describes his travels as follows:

I was surgeon successively in two ships, and made several voyages, for six years, to the East and West Indies, [by which I got some addition to my fortune]. My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books: and when I was ashore, in
observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their
language, wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory.¹⁵

And yet, Gulliver’s account of his “enlightened” motives for travel suppresses the actual
purpose of his voyages to the East and West Indies: not to read books and scientifically
observe foreign cultures, but to import foreign goods for English consumption. By using
Gulliver as a metaphor for the recent commodification of microscopy, and the parallel
belittlement and emasculation of the eighteenth-century ‘man of science.’ Swift questions
the presumption that masculine Enlightenment ideals were ever detached from the “base”
world of traded and manufactured goods and female consumption.

This becomes apparent from the moment that Gulliver winds up in the hands of a
breastfeeding giant baby who tries, “after the usual oratory of infants, to get me for a
plaything.” From this vantage point, Gulliver is forced to observe a magnified scene of
mundane domestic consumption that he finds absolutely grotesque:

I must confess no object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous
breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious reader
an idea of its bulk, shape and colour. It stood prominent six foot, and could not be
less than sixteen in circumference. The nipple was about half the bigness of my
head, and the hue both of that and the dug so varified with spots, pimples, and
freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous: for I had a near sight of her,
she sitting down the more conveniently to give suck, and I standing on the table.
This made me reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so
beautiful to us only because they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through a magnifying glass. Where we find by experiment that the smoothest and whitest skins look rough and coarse, and ill coloured.\textsuperscript{16}

Whereas an actual enlightened male microscopist of the time would not have observed the magnified "fair skins of our English ladies" unless he specifically chose to do so. Gulliver is forced to observe grotesquely magnified body parts—specifically female body parts—even and especially when he doesn't want to. And in contrast to female virtuosos of the time, who took pleasure in viewing their own skin and hairs magnified under pocket microscopes (virtuoso being a late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century term for amateur scientist, microscopist, and collector), for Gulliver—from the vantage point of the pocket microscope itself—there could be no sight more horrific. The excessive gastronomic consumption in this passage—the baby's attempt to consume Gulliver, followed by the breastfeeding scene—underscores the microscope's and male microscopist's devolution from participants in the elite masculine world of the Royal Society to consumable objects in the world of women and children.

I should remark here that the misogyny in this passage—and in others like it—is obvious, and has been remarked upon by numerous critics. What interests me about the misogynistic rhetoric in passages like this is how, for Swift, Gulliver's neurotic disgust with enormous female bodies is symptomatic of a very particular phobia or crisis in Enlightenment masculinity—a crisis embodied by Gulliver's microscope-like gaze and subject position as a 'little man' in the hands of female virtuosos and consumers.
When Gulliver is taken to visit the chief temple in Brobdingnag by his forty-foot-tall, nine-year-old mistress, the farmer’s daughter, Glumdalclitch. Gulliver tries to play the part of scientific observer by assessing and measuring his minute discoveries:

I measured a little finger which had fallen down from one of these statues, and lay unperceived among some rubbish, and found it exactly four foot and an inch in length. Glumdalclitch wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and carried it home in her pocket to keep among other trinkets, of which the girl was very fond.\textsuperscript{17}

Gulliver initially seems to play the part of the virtuoso by detecting, observing, and measuring the finger. And yet very quickly we find that Gulliver has merely served as the observing apparatus of his enormous mistress: first by his calling this “unperceived” treasure to her attention after finding it in a pile of trash with his magnified gaze, and second, by assessing it as only he can, with his unique magnified vision. In spite of Gulliver’s attempts to portray himself as a scientific observer in a strange land, by the end of the sentence he cannot keep from unwittingly revealing his true standing: Gulliver, like the phallic “little finger,” is but a “trinket”—a mere commodity—in the collection of this young female virtuoso and collector. It could be said that Gulliver’s early reflection that he is to become the “unhappy instrument” of Glumdalclitch’s disgrace, punningly speaks more to this scientific man’s own disgrace as an “unhappy instrument” in the hands of Brobdingnagian women.\textsuperscript{18}

After Gulliver is bought by the Queen for 1000 pieces of gold—perhaps the most obvious example of Gulliver as woman’s commodity—and the Queen adopts
Glumdalelitch as Gulliver's caretaker in the royal palace. Glumdalelitch with her new access to wealth is no longer just a female virtuoso and collector of specimens, but comes to embody another eighteenth-century prototype: the female "shopper." As Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui explain in their study of shops and shopkeeping in eighteenth-century England, by the 1700s the indoor "shop" had all but replaced the open-air market as the hub of urban consumer activity. Individual consumers, rather than merging with a larger group in an outdoor space, would travel conspicuously by coach from shop to shop, accumulating commodities as they went. Regarding such shopping trips of Glumdalelitch's, Gulliver recalls:

A coach was allowed to Glumdalelitch and me, wherein her governess frequently took her out to see the town, or go among the shops: and I was always of the party, carried in my box. ... Whenever I had a mind to see the town, it was always in my traveling-closet which Glumdalelitch held in her lap in a kind of open sedan, after the fashion of the country, borne by four men, and attended by two others in the Queen's livery. The people, who had often heard of me, were very curious to crowd about the sedan, and the girl was complaisant enough to make the bearers stop, and to take me in her hand that I might be more conveniently seen.

In this passage, Gulliver, being the curious and enlightened English traveler that he is, would like to explore the town, but his will to observe and investigate is thwarted by his role as a seeing-object in the hands of a female-consumer-gone-shopping: as such.
Gulliver sees not the town but enormous others looking down at him. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace notes in her recent book *Consuming Subjects*, the emergence of the female shopper (and of the new verb “to shop”) paved the way for a related cultural phenomenon: the emergence of shopping-as-spectacle. The framed spectacle of the coach window enabled female shoppers not only to display their latest commodities en route to buying more, but also helped them display themselves to the urban public, as if their own bodies were the latest fashions on display. And yet in Brobdingnag, the shop-like display of Glumdalclitch’s coach window does not make a commodity of the female shopper, but instead makes a commodity of the boxed-up Gulliver, the enlightened man of science turned observing-object and object-observed.

While Gulliver’s magnified gaze makes him literally incapable of seeing ‘the larger picture,’ his status as a mere thing-that-sees makes him unable to reflect philosophically on the new economy that subjects him to this treatment and subjects others to worse. At one point, Gulliver recalls another of Glumdalclitch’s shopping trips in which:

the governess ordered our coachman to stop at several shops, where the beggars, watching their opportunity, crowded to the sides of the coach, and gave me the most horrible spectacles that ever a European eye beheld... But, the most hateful sight of all was the lice crawling on their clothes. I could see distinctly the limbs of these vermin with my naked eye, [much better than those of an European louse through a microscope], and their snouts which they rooted like swine. They were the first I had ever beheld, [and I should have been curious enough to dissect one
of them, if I had proper instruments (which I unluckily left behind me in the ship)] although indeed the sight was so nauseous, that it perfectly turned my stomach.\(^{23}\)

On this excursion of Glumdalclitch’s, Swift has Gulliver vacillating between one state of emasculation—as an eager virtuoso deprived of his tools ("I should have been curious enough to dissect them if I had proper instruments")—and another, as a former man of science shrunken to the stature of a portable object with a magnified gaze more intense than that of most European microscopes ("I could distinctly see the limbs of these vermin with my naked eye, much better than those of an European louse through a microscope.") etc.). Overwhelmed by the magnified image before his eyes and reduced to a mere seeing-object, Gulliver is incapable of going beyond his purely sensory response (describing the sight as “nauseous”) and responding to that visual image on an “enlightened” philosophical level as well; by, for instance, reflecting not only upon the particulars of the lice themselves (as a natural philosopher would do), but also upon the socioeconomic condition of the people upon whom these enormous insects live (as an economic philosopher would do). In the philosophical terms of the English Enlightenment, Gulliver’s reduction to a mere thing-that-sees makes him incapable of doing little more than seeing, unable to take the crucial step that John Locke in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding calls the transition from “perception” (which is purely sensory) to “reflection” (which is intellectual)—and therefore unable to see the larger visual and philosophical picture.\(^{24}\) This oblivious seeing-object, incapable of philosophical reflection, is so focused on the sensory world of magnified “minute bodies”
(Hooke's term for microscopic specimens) that he cannot even realize that he is one himself.

The name that Glumdalclitch gives Gulliver. "Grildrig"—translated by Gulliver as "what the Latins call namunculus, the Italians homunculetino, and the English mannkin"—confirms his position in Brobdignag as both a miniature recreational microscope and a female sexual prop. Paul Odell Clark expands upon Gulliver's definition of "Grildrig" in his Gulliver Dictionary. Drawing from Swift and Stella's "little language." Clark translates "Grildrig" as "Girl-thing." In reference to Clark's translation, modern critics tend to equate "Girl-thing" with "doll." However, this reading of "Grildrig" as "doll" limits our understanding of the text by shutting off the divers meanings and cultural resonance of the word "thing" in and before the eighteenth century. The OED tells us that in and before the eighteenth century, "thing" could mean: "an inanimate object as distinguished from a person or living creature." "a material object, a body." "a piece of property, an individual possession." "articles of apparel: clothes, garments: esp such as women put on to go out in, in addition to the indoor dress." " Implements or equipment for some special use: utensils." something "fashionable." and "privy member, private parts." All of these meanings are at work in the Brobdignagian women's treatment of Gulliver: as a fashionable pocket microscope, as a plaything used and carried about by Glumdalclitch and bought by the Queen, and—as we will see—as a phallic sexual prop in the hands of the Queen's Maids of Honor.

Gulliver's status in Brobdignag as a consumable commodity is apparent not only in his microscope-like gaze and status, but also in Swift's imagery of gastronomic as well as economic consumption to characterize Gulliver's plight. As Gulliver wonders upon
encountering his first Brobdingnagian. “What could I expect but to be a morsel in the mouth of the first among these enormous barbarians who should happen to seize me?"^{28}

This, while Swift makes Glumdalclitch a female virtuoso and specimen-collector-turned-shopper, he makes the Queen, in the eyes of Gulliver-as-seeing-object, a voracious eater magnified to misogynistically grotesque proportions. As Gulliver recalls, during his first meal at the royal palace, the Queen

took up at one mouthful as much as a dozen English farmers could eat at a meal, which to me was for some time a very nauseous sight. She would cram the wing of a lark, bones and all, between her teeth, although it were nine times as large as that of a full-grown turkey; and put a bit of bread in her mouth, as big as two twelve-penny loaves."^{29}

During the same meal with the Queen, the court dwarf—who of course towers over Gulliver—delights in reminding Gulliver that he is a mere morsel in the eyes of the Queen and drops Gulliver into a large silver bowl of cream and then inserts him into a marrow bone left on the Queen’s plate, upon which the Queen almost consumes him orally, after just having consumed him economically: having recently purchased him for those 1000 pieces of gold “for the diversion of the Queen and her ladies.”^{30} Gulliver’s use of the word “nauseous” to describe this and other magnified images in Brobdingnag not only reveals the neurotic depths of his misogyny, but is also a kind of pathetic defense against the female consumption that surrounds him. That is to say, Gulliver associates these magnified acts of female consumption with the act of “throwing up”—the opposite
of and antidote to the act of gastronomic consumption—as if his own misogyny-induced nausea was a sort of countermeasure—albeit a futile one—against the female consumption that has the capacity to reduce not only scientific instruments but also enlightened Englishmen themselves to mere ‘seeing’ playthings.

But it is not until Gulliver winds up in the hands of the Queen’s Maids of Honor, who employ him as a sexual prop, that he completes his devolution from enlightened Englishman to object of female consumption with uncontrollably magnified vision. As Gulliver recalls, the women:

would often strip me naked from top to toe, and lay me at full length in their bosoms: wherewith I was much disgusted: because, to say the truth, a very offensive smell came from their skins: which I do not mention or intend to the disadvantage of those excellent ladies, for whom I have all manner of respect: but I conceive that my sense was more acute in proportion to my littleness...  

Horrified by the magnified image before him, Gulliver observes their:

naked bodies, which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting sight, or from giving me any other emotions than those of horror and disgust... when I saw them near, with a mole here and there as broad as a trencher, and hairs hanging from it thicker than pack-threads: to say nothing further concerning the rest of their persons.
The "prettiest" giantess, adds Gulliver, "would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples. with many other tricks. [wherein the reader will excuse me for not being over particular. But, I was so much displeased. that I entreated Glumdaclitch to contrive some excuse for not seeing that young lady any more]."\textsuperscript{33} Although Gulliver censors out of his narrative the particular "tricks" that displease him so much. Swift invites the reader to imagine that this pretty giantess uses Gulliver as a sexual device, a human dildo.\textsuperscript{34,35}

Gulliver's self-censorship of this powerful image of female consumption takes another form in his complaint that what "gave me most uneasiness among these Maids of Honor . . . was to see them use me without any matter of ceremony. like a creature who had no sort of consequence." What should strike us as odd about this passage is the illogic of the word "see," since the miniaturized Gulliver cannot possibly view the scenario from a vantage point that would enable him to observe the women in the act of using him. Rather, his field of vision would be limited to a magnified image of the female genitals that consume him, blown up to abstraction and at the expense of "the bigger picture"—much like one of Hooke's illustrations from Micrographia (Hooke's illustration of a fly's eyes, for instance, looks like something quite different when observed alongside the preceding passages from Gulliver's Travels):
Hooke. *Micrographia*, Illustration of a Fly’s Eyes
The emasculating effect of Gulliver's predicament is that his position as a phallic prop in the hands of enormous women (like the thumb-sized protagonist of Fielding's Tom Thumb plays, in his marriage to a normal-sized woman) renders his own genitalia physically and symbolically insignificant—a stark contrast to Gulliver's adventures in Lilliput in which he uses his enormous member to put out a fire on the Queen's tiny palace. Gulliver suppresses this magnified image not just out of some generic male fear of the female genitals but, specifically, because his position and gaze in this scene represent the climax (so to speak) of his devolution—and that of his fellow 'enlightened' Englishmen in the age of pocket-microscopy—from male 'giant-among-the-dwarfs' to small, woman's commodity.

By functioning as both a recreational microscope and a phallic sexual prop in the hands of women, Gulliver's body and gaze indicate the point of intersection between anxieties over the popularization of the microscope which Pope and Addison, following John Locke's belief that "all true knowledge is acquired through ordinary unassisted sensory experience," ³⁶ scorned as an unproductive "toy[s] of the age" ³⁷ or a reprehensibly unnatural "artificial eye:" ³⁸ and contemporaneous sexual anxieties over the dildo which was perceived by its detractors in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century—as we have seen in chapter one—as a reprehensibly artificial penis and un(re)productive female plaything (and as contributing to what many wrongly perceived as a nationwide depopulation crisis). While woman's appropriation of the artificial penis was perceived as a threat to his claim to the phallus, ³⁹ her appropriation of the "artificial eye" (in physically reduced form) was perceived as a threat to eighteenth-century man's claims to the fetishizing gaze. ⁴⁰
A contemporary of Swift’s: Susanna Centlivre, gives us a very different take on male devolution via female microscopy in her 1706 play *The Basset-Table*. For Centlivre’s unmarried female virtuoso protagonist, Valeria, her microscope and collection of specimens override men and heterosexual romance—so much so that her male suitors are actually forced to compete with her microscope and specimens to gain her attention and interest. "Rather than yield [to a male suitor],” one character observes, “she would go to the Indies in search of Dampier’s Ants.” And when another man proposes elopement, Valeria responds: “What, and leave my Microscope . . . ?”

Like Gulliver in Brobdingnag, Valeria’s suitors are reduced to “baubles” in her collection of specimens and magnifying instruments. And yet for Centlivre, in contrast to Swift, the goods collected by the female virtuoso (fish, ants, and eels) are distinct from the mainstream economic culture of female consumption as represented by Valeria’s spendthrift cousin, Lady Reveler, who exclaims to another woman how “pretty” it is “to have one’s Husband” go abroad “and then to bring one home fine China, fine Lace, fine Muslin, and fine Indian Birds, and a thousand Curiosities.” In Centlivre’s play, both Valeria’s collecting of “valueless” natural objects and Lady Reveler’s consumption of expensive imported goods pose a threat to the heterosexual order in that their love of collecting “things” supercedes their desire for a husband. And yet whereas Lady Reveler’s fetishism of expensive imported goods complies with mainstream English consumer culture, the new female virtuoso’s scientifically-minded participation in a
countercultural economy—of fish, ants, and eels—poses a threat not only to the heterosexual order but also to the male-dominated new English capitalist culture.

Cennivre makes a heroine of this ‘radical female virtuoso’ who threatens capitalist and heterosexual norms, and reduces grown men to microscopes and specimens. Swift’s sympathies, however, are more ambiguous. While Swift clearly does not admire these women, he has just as much contempt for the myopic and presumptuous ‘enlightened’ Englishman who disavows his own connectedness to the consumer culture that he abhors.

In Cennivre’s play, it is not Valeria who is the object of the play’s ridicule but her male suitors. Lovely the Ensign, and Captain Hearty, the favorite of Valeria’s father. A man, Lovely understands, would be a far inferior addition to Valeria’s collection than an exotic new species of insect: “rather than yield [to the Captain], she would go to the Indies in search of Dampier’s Ants.” 43 Man’s status as an immaterial physical specimen in Valeria’s eyes is illustrated again in an exchange that begins when a servant announces the presence of her father with an unnamed guest. “Sir Richard, and a—:” upon which Valeria interrupts. “A—What, is it an Accident, a Substance, a Material Being, or a Being of Reason?” 44 The servant protests in response. “I don’t know what you call a Material Being,” but that as for the unnamed guest, “it is a Man.” 45 Valeria retorts, probably predicting that that man is the Captain. “Pshaw, a Man, that’s nothing,” stating that in her eyes, the male body is scientifically immaterial, and therefore irrelevant. 46

Whatever fondness Valeria expresses for Lovely is as a direct result of the specimens he has learned to bring her as gifts, and his knowledge that the only way to gain her attention is for him to become an accessory in her research. When Lady Reveler
tries to convince Valeria to turn her attentions to heterosexual romance. Valeria responds
"Pshaw, no more of this trifling Subject," and changes the subject of conversation to her
recent dissection of a dove, mentioning Lovely only with regard to her lamentable recent
loss of "the finest Insect for Dissection, a huge Flesh Fly, which Mr. Lovely sent me just
now."

Centlivre’s depiction of Valeria’s attachment to her specimens and her
microscope (when Lovely asks Valeria to elope with him, and she refuses him with the
words: "What, and leave my microscope . . . ?") over and above heterosexual desire
might fit the psychoanalytic profile of the Freudian sexual fetishist whose perversion
impedes normative heterosexual desire for human beings rather than physical objects and
isolate body parts. In the Freudian universe, however, only man can be a fetishist, one for
whom the fetish object signifies the mother’s missing penis and thereby protects man
against the possibility of his own castration. Woman is relegated to fetishism’s female
complement, narcissism, the perversion by which, through her vanity and self-love, she
makes herself, in Lacanian terms, the phallus, the symbolic fetish object of desire. In The
Basset-Table, however, all attempts to convert Valeria from fetishism to narcissism—a
perversion more acceptable than fetishism for women in Centlivre’s time, just as it was in
Freud’s, are in vain.

One scene opens to discover “Valeria with Books upon a Table, a Microscope,
putting a Fish upon it, several Animals lying by.” When Lovely enters to profess his
love for Valeria, she greets him not as a suitor, but with an invitation to become an
accessory in her microsopical investigations: “O Mr. Lovely! come, come here, look
through this Glass, and see how the Blood circulates in the Tail of this Fish.” Lovely’s
response. "it circulates prettier in this fair Neck." has two interrelated aims: to convert Valeria from microscopy to narcissism, and to convert her from her fetishizing gaze (with which she observes specimens through the microscope) to the object of Lovely’s sexually fetishistic gaze by which he isolates her neck as the object of his desire.51

Valeria overrides Lovely’s strategy of converting her to narcissism by drawing attention to her newest scientific fetish: "Pshaw—be quiet—I’ll shew you a Curiosity. the greatest that ever Nature made.—[Opens a Box.]—In opening a Dog the other Day, I found this Worm."52 "[M]ethinks you neglect yourself," complains Lovely, several lines later. "the most perfect Piece of all [Nature’s] Works”—a line which operates as both an expression of his displeasure with Valeria’s failure to be properly narcissistic, and a final futile attempt to convert Valeria to narcissism.53

Valeria goes on to assure Lovely that because the Captain is a man, he is, in her eyes, an inferior specimen: "If he [the Captain] was a Whale, he might give you Pain. for I should long to dissect him: but as he is a Man, you have no Reason to fear him."54 By comparing not only the despicable Captain but “Man” as a category to a dissectable whale, Valeria reduces all men, including Lovely, to mere bodies under her scientific observation, and inferior ones at that. A whale, on account of its magnitude, would require dissection before it could be placed under the lens, but the male body—including that of Lovely—is so trivial and minute a specimen as to be unworthy of Valeria’s gaze or dissection, and therefore her desire. Either oblivious as to Valeria’s meaning, or desperate enough to try once more to override it, Lovely responds by proposing an elopement: “Consent then to fly with me."55 Valeria’s brilliant response. "What, and leave my Microscope . . . ?" demonstrates the strength of her attachment to her
microscope and specimens—and, by extension, the extent to which Lovely is forced to compete with them.

Reducing Lovely to one of the specimens in her collection, Valeria, upon hearing her father, Sir Richard, walking up the stairs, hides Lovely under a tub that she uses to store fish for viewing under the microscope. Sir Richard enters the room pronouncing his contempt for Valeria’s scientific specimens, which he considers mere toys: “What, at your Whims—and Whirligigs, ye Baggage! I’ll out at Window with them!” Because the dramatic tension in this scene is invested in the possibility that he might discover Lovely who is hidden under the fish tub. Sir Richard’s words further reduce Lovely to one of Valeria’s baubles specimens. And when Sir Richard finally discovers Lovely hidden in Valeria’s fish tub, he completes the comparison, proclaiming: “I’ll fend the Servants to clear this Room of your Baubles.”

When Sir Richard contemptuously tramples Valeria’s worm on his way out the door (“Oh, my poor Worm!” cries Valeria. “Now you have destroy’d a Thing, that, for ought I know, England can’t produce again”)—the image, for the terrified Lovely still hidden under the fish tub, signifies Lovely’s belittlement (on par with a worm) and symbolic castration as a result of Valeria’s preoccupation with ‘minute bodies.’

Swift uses the image of the crushed worm to similar effect in “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1730), in which Strephon, the peeping Tom, watches with horror as Celia literally dissects herself before him, while he, like Gulliver, is forced to watch her enormous body—surrounded by her female commodities and primping devices—in hideously magnified detail:
The Virtues we must not let pass.

Of Celia’s magnifying Glass.

When frightened Strephon cast his Eye on’t

It shew’d the Visage of a Gyant.

A Glass that can to Sight disclose.

The smallest Worm in Celia’s Nose.

And faithfully direct her Nail

To squeeze it our from Head to Tail:

For catch it nicely by the Head.

It must come out alive or dead.”

The male observer in Swift’s poem has thus been reduced to a worm inside the nose of an enormous female virtuoso. In Centlivre’s play, Valeria’s crushed worm is in fact much like the modern Englishman in the age of bourgeois individualism: a true individual, one that “England can’t produce again.”
Like *The Basset-Table*, the instructional dialogue *Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explained for the Use of the Ladies* (1739)—bluestocking Elizabeth Carter's popular English translation of Francesco Algarotti's 1737 *Il Newtonianismo per le dame*—also features a woman who takes on the microscope in place of female narcissism and in lieu of making herself the object of the male gaze—in spite of the belittling consequences for the male body.

Algarotti, a renowned Italian scientist and man of letters, began writing the instructional dialogue in his native Italy, but completed it in London as an honorary member of the Royal Society. Written in the form of a conversation on Newtonian theory between the witty Marchioness and the male philosopher who functions as her teacher and friend, *Newton's Philosophy Explained* consists of two volumes, the first of which concentrates upon Newton's *Opticks*. Dismantling the classic stereotype of female narcissism via microscopy and Newtonian theory, *Newton's Philosophy Explained* teaches its female readers to replace the "old" female narcissism for a radical new kind of narcissism that I will refer to here as Newtonian narcissism, a form of narcissism in which a woman achieves pleasure in her mirror image by admiring that mirror image as an optical phenomenon, rather than as the result of a vain self-love by which she makes herself a mere object of male desire.

*Newton's Philosophy Explained* states in its introduction that its goal is to procure for women "a new kind of Amusement." encouraging women to turn away from narcissism and towards Newton, promising them "a new Mode of cultivating the Mind."
rather than the present momentary Fashion of adjusting their Head-dress and placing their Curls. 2 We soon learn that the new kind of amusement the author has in mind comes in the tangible form of the microscope which the philosopher, playing the role of salesman, "advertises" to the Marchioness. Comparing the telescope to the microscope, he tries to advertise to the Marchioness the former. "There is . . . a very remarkable Difference between them, in which I believe the last [the microscope] have the Advantage." While telescopes help us see the vastness and immensity of stars and planets which were formerly "believed to exist for no other End than to please our Eyes." "Microscopes have made us in Reality see an infinite Number of Animals of which we had not the least Knowledge before."

The philosopher's attempt to substitute female narcissism for female microscopy begins with second dialogue of volume one which the author introduces with the basic Newtonian principle that "Qualities, such as Light, Colours, and the like," "are not really in Bodies," but are superficially imposed upon them by the eye of the beholder. 33 The word "bodies" in Newton's Opticks, of course, does not refer to gendered, human bodies, but to all material objects suitable for scientific observation. Yet the philosopher in Newton's Philosophy Explained repeatedly uses the example of the human female body, specifically that of the Marchioness, to demonstrate to her this theorem. He begins by encouraging the Marchioness to view her own hand under the microscope:

You think, for Instance, that your Hands which have been the Subject of so many fine Verses, are smooth and polish'd; and possibly might be greatly offended, if any one should dare to dispute them this Quality. And yet if you were to look upon
them through a *Microscope*, you would be surprized to see a great Number of Pores that separate the Texture of them, and to find that they are cover'd with Scales like those of a Fish. You would discover in them Cavities, Promontories: Valleys and Hills, for the Abode of a Nation of little Animals, who perhaps spend their Life there.\(^4\)

By exposing the Marchioness’s beauty as something not innate to her own body but as an optical illusion, the philosopher persuades the Marchioness to relinquish her narcissism. He encourages her to take on the microscope in its place as a reminder that the vanity of beautiful women, because it is based upon an optical illusion, is itself in vain because it is not grounded in anything that is real and innate to actual female bodies. As he tells the Marchioness, “When the Philosophy of *Aristotle* was in Vogue, who asserted that Qualities were really in Bodies, the Ladies might be something vainer of their Beauty. But now they must renounce the very Things upon which that Vanity was principally founded.”\(^5\)

With the understanding that the microscope has the capacity to destabilize her own beauty and vanity, the Marchioness turns to the consequences of the microscope’s threat to her own standing in the eyes of men. She remarks: “[I]f I had a mind to please any ignorant Person, the very first Thing I would do, should be to forbid him the holding any Correspondence with those Gentlemen who deal in Microscopes: for these might do me a very great Prejudice.”\(^6\) It is unclear if this passage is the Marchioness’s feminist complaint about suffering the misogyny of a microscope-assisted male gaze, or if she is simply complaining that men who deal in microscopes might cause her to forfeit her
status as a beautiful object of male desire. The philosopher, however, clearly finds a feminist response more relevant:

As our Senses are not microscopical, so neither are our Hearts philosophical. It would be very bad for us, if our Pleasure was in the Hands of Philosophers, and if Beauty, in order to prove its Existence, must stand out against all the Experiments of a Naturalist. This is just as if the Chastity of a Lady should depend upon the ill-grounded Suspicion, and diligent Enquiry of a jealous Husband."

To privilege male philosophers' assessment of female bodies under the microscope, he implies, is to privilege ill-grounded misogynistic prejudice over rational truth. His comparison of the microscope-assisted male gaze to the irrationality and paranoia of a jealous husband, together with his promotion of the microscope to the Marchioness as a means for self-improvement, radically suggests that only women are capable of rationally viewing female bodies under the microscope.

And thus, the Marchioness eventually comes to the decision that women must stop subjecting themselves to the male gaze and to their own compliant narcissistic gazes, both of which either value women's bodies as beautiful or devalue them, under the microscope, as grotesque. Women must submit instead to Newtonian science which dismantles both female narcissism and the male gaze. She proclaims: "We [women] must then solemnly abjure all those Charms which you [men] call Roses and Lilies, and submit to that Philosophy which deprives us of them, perhaps to give us in Exchange some greater Good."
It is at this point in the dialogue that the philosopher returns the newly enlightened Marchioness to the example of female narcissism with which the dialogue began, “the present momentary Fashion of adjusting their Head-dress and placing their Curls” before a mirror, this time from a Newtonian perspective:

[a]mong the Phænomena which arise from a Change made by Reflexion in the Rays of Light, you will perhaps be surprized to find one which is every Day present with you, and which perhaps you have never yet considered as a Phænomenon, much less a Matter of Wonder. What Phænomenon can this be, said the Marchioness, to which I have paid so little Regard? It is, answered I, the Image of your self which appears beyond the Looking glass every Morning, when you hold a Consultation with the Graces in what Manner it will be best to give an artificial Negligence to your Hair. This Representation of your self proceeds from hence, that all the Rays which flow from all the Points of your Face to the Looking-glass, are reflected in such a manner to your Eye . . . and consequently you see your Image as at great a Distance from the Glass, as you your self are, and exactly like you: and from the Pleasure this beauteous Representation affords you, you easily conceive what Pleasure the Original must have given others.”

Here, the philosopher’s dismantles the stereotypical female-narcissistic scenario (a woman gazing with pleasure into a mirror), and by extension female narcissism itself, via a scientific exegesis of the illusory nature of the mirror image.
The philosopher's insistence that the Marchioness to see herself in the mirror with "the Pleasure this beauteous Representation affords you" underscores that this new approach to the timeless image of a woman gazing with pleasure into a mirror does not by any means substitute a sober new form of female mirror-gazing for the desire and pleasure involved in the old. This new form of mirror-gazing still entails beauty and visual pleasure, but a new kind of beauty and visual pleasure. What is beautiful and visually pleasurable is not the illusion of beauty in the material "original," but the beauty of the process of mirror optics.

To illustrate this new kind of female mirror scene, the philosopher invokes the following passage from Book IV of Paradise Lost in which Milton also writes of woman being "pleas'd" by her mirror image. Although Algarotti's philosopher quotes it in part, for the purposes of our discussion, the passage is worth providing in full. Eve recalls to Adam her observation of her reflection in a newly formed body of water:

As I bent down to look, just opposite.
A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
Bending to look on me, I started back.
It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd.
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love, there I had fixt
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire.
Had not a voice [God's] thus warn'd me, 'What thou seest.
What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself.
With thee it came and goes: but follow me.
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy Coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call’d
Mother of human Race:’ What could I do.
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I esp’id thee [Adam], fair indeed and tall.
Under a Plantan, yet methought less fair.
Less winning soft, less amiably mild.
Than that smooth wat’ry image:"

Feminist psychoanalytic critics have cited Eve’s “vain desire” for her own reflection in
the water as a stereotypical example of Freudian narcissism, on the grounds that Eve finds
Adam less compelling “[t]han that smooth wat’ry image.”

Algarotti’s philosopher, however, reads this passage quite differently: and in
doing so, embarks upon a remarkable early instance of feminist Milton criticism. The
philosopher tells the Marchioness that “The celebrated Milton has in his sublime Poem
finely described the Delight and Surprize of Eve the first Time she surveyed herself in a
Fountain . . . And this Image of herself appeared so charming, that, like another
Narcissus, she afterwards ingeniously confessed to Adam that though she thought him
fair, yet he seemed ‘less fair ’ Less winning soft, less amiably mild. ’ Than that smooth
wat’ry Image.” In the philosopher’s reading of the passage, Eve “ingeniously” admires her image reflected in the water on account of the Newtonian optics at work therein. Eve may be “another Narcissus,” but she is an admirably “ingenious” narcissist rather than a petty and vain one.

The Marchioness observes that if the philosopher’s interpretation is sound, then Eve’s interest in Newtonian mirror optics comes at the expense of her desire for her husband—a condition with which the Marchioness is content to make do: “Does not this Passage of Milton convey some malicious Insinuation? . . . And is not his real Meaning that the Sight of a Husband gives a woman less Pleasure than even an Image or a Shadow? However I agree, that the first Parent was in the right to admire this fine Phænomenon and I have been greatly to blame in my Neglect of it.” By this point in the dialogue, the Marchioness’s conversion to the new narcissism—which we might call ‘Newtonian narcissism’—is complete, and she proclaims, “I confess that from this Time, I shall survey myself in the Glass with a sort of philosophical Pleasure.”

As the Marchioness observes, the new form of pleasurable mirror-gazing that the philosopher promotes stands in the way of heterosexual romance. This is also the case in Freudian narcissism, in which the narcissist loves his or herself to the exclusion of desire for persons of the opposite sex. However, for Freud, whereas narcissism in men signifies deviant homosexuality, female narcissism is perfectly compliant with the Freudian heterosexual order. epitomizing woman’s function within that order as a passive object of male desire (the female narcissist’s need does not “lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved: and the man who fulfills this condition is the one who finds favor with them. The importance of this type of woman for the erotic life of mankind is to be rated very
high") and as a bearer of children: "[e]ven for narcissistic women, whose attitude towards men remains cool, there is a road which leads to complete object-love. In the child which they bear, a part of their own body confronts them like an extraneous object, to which, starting out from their narcissism, they can then give complete object love." The narcissistic woman may desire herself more than she desires men, but when she becomes a mother—so the Freudian heterosexist logic goes—she is able to give up her own self-love and convert it to heterosexually reproductively proper object-love for her child.

Consider the passage from Paradise Lost. According to Milton's God, as in Freudian narcissism, Eve's attraction to her mirror image is a displaced desire for her self: "What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself. With thee it came and goes." God scolds her because her alleged narcissistic attraction to her self obstructs her wisely and childbearing duties to return to her husband, "bear multitudes" and get on with becoming the "Mother of the human race." But Eve knows better. Enlightened Newtonian that she is, Eve is fully aware that what pleases her more than her husband is not her "self" in the water, not even a "she," but an "it." "a smooth wat'ry image." Understandably, she finds this optical phenomenon, this image, more pleasurable than the prospect of copulating with the only man on earth for the purpose of becoming the mother of the entire human race.

In contrast to the form of female narcissism established by Freud and Milton's God, the type of female narcissism promoted by Algarotti's philosopher cannot be inserted back into the heterosexual order so easily. Simply put, according to the logic of Freudian narcissism, and that attributed to Eve by Milton's God, one can quite easily
transfer one's object-of-affection-as-self into an object-of-affection-as-child: it is merely a matter of substitution, of shifting one's desire from one object to another. But, in the case of Newtonian narcissism, to transfer one's affection for a phenomenon (the optical phenomenon of the mirror image) to object love for a child is another matter altogether because, quite simply, a phenomenon is not an object but a process.

Following the dialogue's feminist critique of a passage in Milton, the Marchioness critiques the work of a neighboring male poet who has made her the object of his sonnets. When a poet infatuated with the Marchioness interrupts her lesson with the philosopher, the Marchioness, rather than allowing the poet's interest to flatter her vanity, exclaims:

What shall we do? I see a Gentleman in our Neighbourhood coming towards us, who in every Visit he makes does me the Favour to repeat Sonnets by the hundred, and yet always finds Time for some Ode. How shall we disengage ourselves from his troublesome Company? Will there be no Vortex so merciful as to snatch him away with itself, and remove him from our System?"

To get rid of her unwanted admirer, suggests the philosopher. "we need only continue our Discourse upon Philosophy" which will inevitably bore him so much that he will leave." The method is ultimately successful. The Marchioness and the philosopher continue their discussion of Newtonian optics while the frustrated sonneteer tries in vain to recite his poetry. Ultimately, the sonneteer (in the last words of the first volume), "[a]s he could find no Opportunity of discharging his poetic Fury, he was obliged to go home
where to find an Audience to a Satyr which it is very probably he had begun to compose against Philosophy.”

This incident, the conclusion of the first volume of Newton's Philosophy Explained, demonstrates that the Marchioness's lesson in microscopy and Newtonian optics has not only empowered her not only with the tools to cease making herself a mere object of male desire, but also with the means to ridicule and assert her superiority over men who are blinded by the illusion of beauty that renders women mere objects of desire in their eyes.

Newton's Philosophy Explained also undermines male pretenses to authority as illusionary by means of a lesson in height perception and microscopy. Explaining that "It is principally the Microscope and that infinite Number of Pigmy Worlds discovered by it, which has rectified our Ideas of great and little," the philosopher presents the Marchioness with the example of Gulliver who "could destroy the Lilliputians like so many Fleas," but who was "among the Brobdingnagians kept in a Cage like a Canary Bird, or for an Ornament upon the Chimney like a Chinese Pagod."

Earlier in the dialogue, the philosopher illustrates the relativity of the gendered dynamics of physical power with an example from the first two voyages of Gulliver's Travels: "Who can tell then, but you may appear to yourself, and I to you, like one of Gulliver's Brobdingnagians, on the contrary each of us may appear to my Sight as small as a Lilliputan does to yours, and who knows too but you may see the whole World after the Proportions of my Brobdingnagian, and I of the same Size as your Lilliputian." This unusual passage warrants restatement: in sum, the Marchioness and Algarotti's philosopher may appear to themselves and to each other as giant Brobdingnagians; or he may appear to both himself and the Marchioness as minute as Lilliputians would appear
to the Marchioness at her "normal" height. Moreover, the Marchioness may see the whole world as if she were of a Brobdingnagian size relative to him, and he may see the whole world as if he were of a Lilliputian size relative to the Marchioness.

Tellingly, in all three of the philosopher’s hypothetical Brobdingnagian and Lilliputian scenarios, he characterizes the Marchioness as Brobdingnagian, while in two out of the three scenarios he portrays himself as a Lilliputian by comparison. In the first scenario, both the Marchioness and Algarotti’s philosopher are Brobdingnagians: in the second, the philosopher is Lilliputian; and in the third, the Marchioness is a Brobdingnagian in Brobdingnag, and the philosopher is a Lilliputian in Lilliput. The Marchioness’s lesson in microscopy, the dialogue suggests, enables her to become a metaphorical Brobdingnagian to the philosopher’s Lilliputian.

By introducing the Marchioness and Algarotti’s female readers to the microscope and Newtonian optical theory, the author has armed them with the tools to unveil patriarchal authority as only the illusion of power. Under the conditions of the third scenario, in which the Marchioness is a Brobdingnagian in Brobdingnag, and the philosopher a Lilliputian in Lilliput, the philosopher remarks, “if it were possible for us to see with each other’s Eyes (which would be a good exchange for me) you would despise the diminutive Size of my Collossuses, and I should tremble at the Gigantic Stature of your Pigmies.” And thus, a simple tutorial in microscopy and Newtonian optics has turned the Marchioness into a Brobdingnagian woman looking down upon the diminutive stature of the philosopher’s supposed colossuses.
Addison’s "Will of a Virtuoso" (1710), a Tatler parody of recreational microscopy in the form of a fictitious virtuoso’s written will, approaches microscopy’s belittlement of the Englishman in yet another way. Here, the male body is belittled not as a result of female microscopy, but by his very own microscopical practice. As Addison satirically proposes, male recreational microscopy is itself as a unique sexual perversion: a variety of sexual fetishism that ironically reduces the male recreational microscopist to the level of the specimens in his collection.

Named after the protagonist of Thomas Shadwell’s 1676 play, The Virtuoso, “Will of a Virtuoso” imagines the last will and testament of a recreational microscopist and collector of specimens. In his introductory remarks, Addison derides microscopic observation as "the mark of a little genius." Reduced to the level of the organisms they study, virtuosos are "wholly conversant among insects, reptiles, animalecles, and those tritling rarities that furnish out the apartment of a virtuoso." and are "able to discover the sex of a cockle, or describe the generation of a mite." The latter passage could be said to foreshadow Pope’s famous lines, "Why has not Man a microscopic eye? For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly." In Addison’s version, however, the emphasis is not upon the insect itself but its gonads. The microscopist who observes the grossly magnified genitalia of small creatures. Addison implies, is commensurate to the infinitesimal reproductive organs of the specimens under his gaze.
Addison’s emphasis upon the genitalia of minute bodies carries over into the fictitious will that follows the introduction. Addison has the specimen-collector of the title bequeath "[m]y rat’s testicles," and "[w]hole's pizzle" to his fellow microscopist and friend, Dr. Johannes Elsckius. "as an eternal monument of my affection and friendship for him," to be inherited only under the condition that Elsckius produce a male child.\textsuperscript{84} It is not merely a modern sensibility that reads Addison’s virtuoso as a parody of a sexual fetishist. The text presents itself as such. The microscopist's gift to his male friend of a pizzle and testicles, contingent upon his beneficiary's offspring having a pizzle and testicles, ridicules the value of specimens among microscopists (who bought, sold, and traded them) as phallic objects central to a sexually fetishistic ritual of male bonding among microscopists (in Micrographia, for instance. Hooke often refers to specimens he gave and received as gifts to and from various colleagues).

In fact, Addison's admitted object of ridicule is the sexually fetishistic tendencies of microscopy’s practitioners rather than the practice of microscopy itself. The first words of the introduction to the will propose that while the study of minute bodies is a noble cause, the overvaluation of tiny specimens on the part of the virtuosos of his day is perversely fetishistic, belittling the microscopist’s own body as that of a “little genius”:

Nature is full of wonders; every atom is a standing miracle, and endowed with such qualities, as could not be impressed on it by a power and wisdom less than infinite. For this reason, I would not discourage any searches that are made into the most minute and trivial parts of the creation. It is, methinks, the mark of a
little genius to be wholly conversant among insects, reptiles, animalcules, and those trifling rarities that furnish out the apartment of a virtuoso.\textsuperscript{85}

Further implicating the virtuoso's collection of minute bodies as perversely fetishistic, the introduction goes on to characterize virtuosos as a "a sort of learned men who are wholly employed in gathering together the refuse of nature." "Hoarding up in their chests and cabinets" what are "refuse" and "trifles" to others.\textsuperscript{86}

By elevating "refuse" and "trifles" to the status of valuables worthy of being passed down in a will, the microscopist's brand of fetishism is perverse not only because it values rats' testicles and whale's pizzes but also because it defies the logic of use-value and exchange-value in capitalist commodity fetishism to which the dominant culture adheres. "I have known one of these whimsical philosophers," writes Addison, "who has set a greater value upon a collection of spiders than he would upon a flock of sheep, and has sold his coat off his back to purchase a tarantula."\textsuperscript{87} The virtuoso's defiance of cultural commodity fetishism by valuing commonly worthless and useless objects (spiders), and negating the value of common commodities (a coat), befits the psychoanalytic rule of sexual fetishism that the fetish object must be valued by the fetishist (or fetishistic subculture) alone, and not by the dominant culture. As Freud puts it, "[t]he meaning of the fetish is not known to other people, so the fetish is not withheld from him: it is easily accessible and he can readily obtain the sexual satisfaction attached to it."\textsuperscript{88} Hence, the virtuoso's friend and fellow microscopist, Dr. Elserickius, will undoubtedly value the rat's testicles and whale's pizzle conferred to him, whereas his wife and children will inevitably receive as absolutely worthless the "box of butterflies."
"dried
cockatrice." "]three crocodile's eggs." and "]my last year's collections of grasshoppers"
which the virtuoso bequeaths to them.89 Likewise, the virtuoso's eldest son John, whom
"I do disinherit, and wholly cut off from any part of this my personal estate, by giving him
a single cockle-shell" will hardly receive his father's slight as the patrimonial cutting-off
that was intended.

As a father and husband, the virtuoso's sexual and economic potency is
compromised by his overvaluation of worthless specimens. He is not the potent
disseminator of a valuable legacy amongst his heirs, as he imagines himself to be: neither
does his pizzle ensure his sexual and economic potency in this life or the next. Instead,
Addison constructs his fetishist microscopist, as we have seen, as an emasculated "little
genius," reduced to the level of the detached pizzle and other minute bodies in his
collection.

*

As we have seen, whether through female microscopy and consumption, or
through a microscopical discourse of fetishism and/or narcissism, in each of the texts we
have discussed in this chapter, the Enlightened male subject is somehow reduced to
Lilliputian size by his association with the microscope, the microscopical gaze, or the
new microscope-oriented and or consuming woman. As such, these texts could be said to
shed new light on Sir Isaac Newton's famous statement of humility in a 1676 letter to
Robert Hooke: "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the
shoulders of giants."90 Indeed, when seen retrospectively through the eyes of eighteenth-
century writers like Swift and Addison. Newton's words might read less like a nod to his scientific forebears might and more like an underscoring of the imagined dwarfing of the "enlightened" Englishman in the age of popular microscopy.
Notes


4 Swift. 130, 148.

5 Swift. 142.

6 Swift. 135.

7 Swift. 149.

8 Hooke, *Micrographia* (London: 1665) iv. A number of additional hypotheses exist for the microscope’s scientific decline, ranging from its inability to observe atoms, to theological struggles over the issue of whether the microscope reveals the orderliness of God’s universe or the godlessness of a chaotic universe. This fascinating topic is beyond the scope of this essay. For more information, see Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Christopher Herbert Lüthy’s dissertation, “Matter and Microscopes in the Seventeenth Century” (Harvard University, 1995); Marian Fournier, *The Fabric of Life: Microscopy in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); James B. McCormick, *Eighteenth-Century Microscopes: A Synopsis of History and Workbook* (Lincolnwood: Scientific Heritage Ltd. 1987); and


10 Contemporary scholars of the history of the microscope acknowledge the pocket microscope’s accessibility and appeal to eighteenth-century women. Rather than elaborating on that point, they acknowledge it as an afterthought or a footnote, generally deferring to Nicolson who is recognized as the authority on the subject. Footnoting Nicolson, Catherine Wilson writes that “[t]he feminization of the microscope also assisted in reducing the prestige of an instrument of interest to and usable by ladies” (228). Marian Fournier also acknowledges “the opportunities this instrument proffered young—and not so young—ladies to participate, however far removed, in the adventure of scientific discovery.” But, referring the reader to Nicolson’s study, says no more on the subject (8).


12 Hooke. “Discourse Concerning Telescopes and Microscopes: with a short Account of Their Inventors. read in February 1691-2.” Philosophical Experiments of the Late Eminent Dr. Robert Hooke and Other Eminent Virtuoso’s in His Time (London. 1726) 5.


14 This chapter’s analysis of the sexual dialectics of microscope-oriented eighteenth-century fiction necessitates a reevaluation of the significance of recreation in the
quintessential eighteenth-century text on microscopy. Henry Baker’s *The Microscope Made Easy* (London, 1743). Modern critics tend to classify *The Microscope Made Easy* as an endorsement of microscopy for the layperson; yet the book is actually a highly self-conscious justification of recreational microscopy in response to prejudices, such as Hooke’s, that recreational microscopy has turned a serious scientific pursuit into a recreational diversion. Baker justifies recreational microscopy not, as one might imagine, by refuting the theory that recreational microscopy is merely the use of the microscope on the part of amateurs for the purpose of entertainment. Instead, Baker embraces that definition and redefines the concept of “entertainment.” Entertainment by means of recreational microscopy comes in two forms. Hooke suggests. There is the bad transient form of microscopic entertainment, sensory bodily entertainment, and the good lasting form of microscopic entertainment, the entertainment of the mind rather than the senses.

“It is something more than an hundred and twenty Years since the MICROSCOPE was happily invented,” states Baker in the introduction (ii). “At the Beginning it was confined to a very few; who, making a Secret of it, endeavoured all they could to keep it to themselves” (ii). Fortunately, Baker continues, today the microscope is more affordable and accessible to those outside the scientific community. “the Apparatus made much easier as well as more useful, and the Price considerably reduced” (iv). Unfortunately, however, many “have considered it as a mere Play-thing, a Matter of Amusement and Fancy only, that raises our Wonder for a Moment, but is of no farther Service” (iii). The problem with microscopy-as-fancy is not that it is entertaining, but that it is transient:
Many, even of those who have purchased Microscopes, are so little acquainted with their general and extensive Usefulness, and so much at a Loss for Objects to examine them: that, after diverting their Friends some few times, with what they find in the Sliders bought with them, or two or three more common Things, the Microscopes are laid aside as of little farther Value: and a Supposition that this must be the Case prevents many others from buying them: whereas, among all the Inventions that ever appeared in the World, none can perhaps be found so constantly capable of entertaining, improving, and satisfying the Mind of Man (51).

In contrast to the fleeting kind of entertainment attained by those who do not know how to use the microscope, Baker offers to demonstrate to the reader how the microscope can fulfill its highest capacity of "entertaining" the mind. Speaking of the happiness attained via intellectual as opposed to sensory entertainment. Baker writes, "That Man is certainly the happiest, who is able to find out the greatest Number of reasonable and useful Amusements, easily attainable and within his Power: and, if so, he that is delighted with the Works of Nature, and makes them his Study, must undoubtedly be happy: since every Animal, Flower, Fruit, or Insect, nay, almost every Particle of Matter, affords him an Entertainment" (xiii).
In the conclusion of *The Microscope Made Easy*, Baker explains that the reason why sensory entertainment via microscopy is fleeting is because it is linked to the transient body and the senses rather than to the immortal mind:

The Universe is so full of Wonders, that perhaps Eternity alone can be sufficient to survey and admire them all: perhaps too, this delightful Employment may be one great Part of the Felicity of the Blessed.—When the Soul shall become diverted of Flesh, the Pleasures of Sense can be no more: and if, by a continued Habit, any Longings after them shall hang about it, such Longings must create a proportionable Degree of Wretchedness, as they can never possibly be gratified. But if its principal Delight has been in the Contemplation of the Beauties of the Creation, and the Adoration of their almighty Author, it soars, when disembodied, into the celestial Regions, duly prepared for the full Enjoyment of intellectual Happiness.” (310-11)

Pleasure in microscopy must not be a pleasure of senses and the body, because the body is transient, and if one’s fleshly desire for microscopical investigation persists after death, one will be immensely disappointed because one will no longer have a body to satisfy. And thus Baker recommends achieving in microscopic investigation an intellectual happiness that transcends the senses and the body.

As we have seen, Baker takes pains to distinguish between microscopy as bodily sensory entertainment and microscopy as intellectual entertainment. However, in
the passages in which Baker actually applies the word “entertaining” to microscopical observations—such as Baker’s acknowledgement that animalcules “are very entertaining Objects examined by any Kind of Microscope, but particularly the Solar one”—Baker’s attempt to separate the word “entertaining” from sensory bodily amusement seems to fall apart (82). This becomes apparent in the section in which Baker recommends to the reader pocket microscopes, which were synonymous with sensory entertainment, noting the majority of them “are entertaining as far as can reasonably be expected of them,” but the best of all is Mister Wilson’s Pocket Microscope, to which he devotes an entire chapter (15). The camera obscura microscope, Baker exclaims in his chapter on the subject, is “the most entertaining of any” (25). In a later passage, Baker notes that “If some Grains of Sand be put among the Eels [animalcules] before the Microscope, it will be highly entertaining to see them struggling and embarrassed, as it were, amongst large Stones” (80). It is hard to imagine that Baker’s application of “entertaining” in the latter quotation signifies anything other than transient sensory amusement. And thus, even in instructional literature on microscopy, there is an implicit understanding that the instrument belongs more to the world of entertainment and consumption than the imaginary realm of ‘untainted’ Enlightenment values.

\(^{15}\) Swift. 54.

\(^{16}\) Swift. 130.

\(^{17}\) Swift. 153.

\(^{18}\) Swift. 134.

20 Swift. 151.

21 Swift. 153.

22 Kowaleski-Wallace. 61.

23 Swift. 151-152.


25 Swift. 134.


28 Swift. 125.

29 Swift. 145.

30 Swift. 147, 148, 139.

31 Swift. 157.

32 Swift. 158.

33 Swift. 158.

34 Paul-Gabriel Boucé is the only recent critic I am aware of who makes note of this. In his essay on the Yahoo woman’s sexual assault upon Gulliver in the final episode of Book Four (Boucé. “The Rape of Gulliver Reconsidered.” *Swift Studies*, 11 [1996] 102-3).
It is not improbable that Swift had read the widely-circulated anthropomorphic dildo poem “Monsieur Thing’s Origin” (Cheapside, 1722), in which the “little man” protagonist is abused by the Queen’s Maid in a passage that merits quoting in full:

From hence Monsieur took moving to the Court.
To see what Pastime there was, or what Sport:
So came he to the Hand of Lady’s Maid.
With whom some little time our Monsieur stay’d
She like Cade Lamb was pleas’d with Monsieur play’d.
No sooner had she tasted of his Favour.
But she embrac’d the Sweetness of his Savour:
To him alone she shew’d her good Behaviour.
By this time Monsieur having thus infus’d
His Friendship in the Maid, she introduc’d
Him to her kind Mistress’s first Acquaintance.
As a fine Thing of noted Worth and Sense:
So that the Lady was to make a Tryal
Of Monsieur’s Skill, which was without denial
The best, most pleasing thing as e’er she felt.
Ever since she near to the Court had dwelt. (20-21)


39 In the introduction to "Monsieur Thing's Origin," for instance, the narrator states, "And my Opinion is, That those Prodigies of Nature, who seem so immoderately displeas'd at the Contrivance of the Creation, that they can't enjoy the Pleasure design'd. without preferring Art before Nature; these ought to be as Detestable to others of the Fair Sex, as those among the Men, who are guilty of Crimes as Enormous, are to other men" ("Monsieur Thing's Origin," 4).

And in "Dildoides," a member of the crowd arguing to burn the dildo refers to the dildo as "false ware" ("Dildoides," 9). Elsewhere, the narrator of "Monsieur Thing's Origin" characterizes the dildo's popularity as the triumph of art over nature: "He first was made, to put a Help to Nature. But Art of Nature now has got the better" ("Monsieur Thing’s Origin," 8).

The dildo poem that most illuminates the similarities between anxieties over women's appropriation of the phallus and the microscope is "The Bauble, a Tale" (1721), in which the female protagonist's relationship with her dildo is as a scientific instrument with which:
Ten Thousand Methods [she] does explore.
Experiments not known before.
Invention racks, in hopes to find
A Thing more pleasing to her Mind.
No Philomath e’er pump’d so hard.
To gain the Longitude-Reward.

UNHAPPY CLOE! Fruitless Brain!
I think, says she, but think in vain

("The Bauble: A Tale" [London. 1721] 5). Describing Chloe as a “Philomath,” the poem satirically portrays female dildo-users as scientifically minded virtuosos. This new breed of scientifically-minded female fetishist, the poem jokes, will eventually render men irrelevant. When she is finally successful, the talented Chloe instructs other women in the art of using this “Instrument for Titillation,” and “Teaches young Virgins, pale and wan.
(without th’ Assistance of a Man)” ("The Bauble: A Tale" 3).

40 As in Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays, Gulliver’s position in the Brobdingnag sex scene is. from a psychoanalytic point of view, a literal inversion of the Lacanian axiom by which only man is entitled to have the phallus while woman can only be the phallus. the Lacanian fetish object of desire. In Gulliver’s case, by contrast, man is the phallus with which “the prettiest giantess” is endowed. In stark contrast to Gulliver’s adventures in Lilliput in which Gulliver uses his enormous penis to put out a fire on the tiny Queen’s
palace. in the chambers of the Queen's Maids of Honor Gulliver's entire body is reduced to the size, subject position, and limited optical scope of male genitalia in coitus and his own penis rendered physically and symbolically insignificant.

41 Susannah Centlivre. The Basset-Table. (London. 1706) 212.

42 Centlivre. 220.

43 Centlivre. 212.

44 Centlivre. 219.

45 Centlivre. 219.

46 Centlivre. 219.

47 Centlivre. 217.

48 Centlivre. 228.

49 Centlivre. 226.

50 Centlivre. 227.

51 Centlivre. 227.

52 Centlivre. 227.

53 Centlivre. 227.

54 Centlivre. 228.

55 Centlivre. 228.

56 Valeria insists to Sir Richard that under the tub is "a Bear's young Cub that I have bought for Dissection" (Centlivre. 228).

57 Centlivre. 228.

58 Centlivre. 228.
Centlivre. 228.


Lovely realizes that there are only two ways for him to consummate his love for Valeria: either to convert her from fetishism to narcissism, which, as we have seen, has proven impossible; or to relegate himself to the role of an accessory to her microscopic research, on par with her specimens and her microscope, as he has managed to do by offering her specimens as gifts and feigning interest in her research. Lovely’s position as a mere accessory in her research, rather than a companionate husband-to-be in a marriage of equals, becomes apparent in the final scene in which Valeria finally marries Lovely. The conventions of dramatic comedy predetermine this as a "happy ending," as the two lovers’ deception of an oppressive father who stands in the way of their companionate marriage. In actuality, however, Lovely has only succeeded in becoming betrothed to Valeria by deceiving her, disguising himself, taking his rival's place in Valeria's arranged marriage to the Captain, and marrying her against her will. Presuming herself to be married to a man she does not want (the Captain), Valeria is miserable until the disguised Lovely cries out, "Will not Valeria look upon me? She us' d to be more kind when we have fished for Eels in Vinegar" ("My Lovely, it is thee!" Valeria responds). As Valeria's new husband, Lovely's declaration of his identity as her accessory in research, rather than as a lover, shows that Lovely, realizing that she would never leave her microscope for him, has reconciled himself to the role of an accessory in her investigations.
62 Algarotti. xiii-xiv.

63 Algarotti. 76.

64 Algarotti. 79.

65 Algarotti. 95.

66 Algarotti. 80.

67 Algarotti. 81.

68 Algarotti. 95.

69 Algarotti. 123.


71 Algarotti. 124.

72 Algarotti. 124-125.

73 Algarotti 125.


76 Interestingly, there is no hint of romance between the philosopher and the Marchioness. Their witty banter is flirtatious, but not in a romantic way. On a biographical note, Algarotti, who is said to have preferred the sexual company of men to that of women, is said to have modeled the character of the Marchioness after his good friend and correspondent, the renowned Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was futilely in love with him. See Robert Halsband. "Algarotti as Apollo: His Influence on Lady Mary Wortley

77 Algarotti. 225.
78 Algarotti. 226.
79 Algarotti. 232.
80 Algarotti. 177.
81 Algarotti. 181 - 182.
82 Addison. 155.
83 Pope. "Essay on Man."
84 Addison. 157.
85 Addison. 155.
86 Addison. 156.
87 Addison. 155.
89 Addison. 156. 157.
CHAPTER FOUR

"A Dwarf in More Articles Than One:"

Littleness and Masculinity in Smollett and Sterne

"Though all the world knows he was born a foetus, of no more than five inches and a half in length, yet he grew to that astonishing height in literature, as to write a book with a title as long as himself"

-Sterne. Tristam Shandy

Beginning with the story of his own conception, the narrator and hero of Laurence Sterne’s Tristam Shandy famously remains a homunculus—a man in miniature inside the womb—for a good part of the novel. In explaining his origins "ab ovo," Tristam characterizes the homunculus as a rational creature and a "little gentleman" ("so young a traveler, my little gentleman had got to his journey’s end miserably spent")

The HOMUNCULUS, Sir, in how-ever low and ludicrous a light he may appear, in this age of levity, to the eye of folly or prejudice: —to the eye of reason in scientifick research, he stands confess’d—a BEING guarded and circumscribed with rights:—The minutest philosophers, who, by the bye, have the most enlarged understandings, (their souls being inversely as their enquiries) shew us incontestably. That the HOMUNCULUS is created by the same hand.—
engender'd in the same course of nature.—endowed with the same loco-motive powers and faculties with us.  

B.L. Reid has remarked that everyone in Tristam Shandy is a homunculus: and yet Sterne’s account of the homunculus actually goes a step further, satirically appropriating the modern discourses of individualism and rights to suggest that the prototypical man in modern “Enlightened” society—“a Being guarded circumscribed with rights”—is no more than a “little gentleman” himself, a mere homunculus. The homunculus epitomizes both man’s ability to thrive in human society and his sheer insignificance within it, much like those Enlightenment philosophers whom we see described in the very same passage as essentially “minute” in spite of their “enlarged understandings” (Sterne is punning here, of course, on Berkeley’s Aleiphron: Or, the Minute Philosopher).

Sterne’s contemporary, Tobias Smollett, the author known to Sterne as “Smelfungus,” creates a similar parody of the eighteenth-century discourses of individualism and rights by comparing the modern male individual not to a homunculus but to a mere atom, in his novel The History and Adventures of an Atom. But before we pursue this matter any further, some background on the history of atomic theory is necessary. Although the concept of the atom has been around since ancient Greece, it was not until the seventeenth century that it ceased to belong solely to the realm of abstract philosophical thought, and became a concern of the physical sciences. In Andrew Van Melsen’s analysis, this delay in scientific interest in the atom is largely the fault of the Aristotelian bias of medieval and Renaissance Western culture. Refuting the Democritean theory that what we perceive as physical change is actually the random
movement of immutable atoms. Aristotle established in its place a more philosophically abstract and optimistic theory claiming that all matter is made up of mutable smallest particles or "minima" which change as they become a part of a different entity, taking on the essential "form" of each living thing.

The emergence of microscopic science in seventeenth-century England saw a return to the more "scientific" atomic theory of Democritus, with the Newtonian and Boylean principle that atoms are indivisible physical entities, compelled by means of attraction, and moving about in a relatively random and accidental manner. Thanks to Newton and Boyle, this enhanced version of Democritus's long-dormant concept of physical atomism was relatively commonplace by the eighteenth century.

But for many eighteenth-century thinkers caught between Democritus and Aristotle, the Newtonian and Boylean concept of the atom posed a significant philosophical problem: If the atoms that compose man are small, random, and unchangeable, then could not the same thing be said for man himself whose smallest parts, according to the Aristotelian model, are in some way representative of his whole? Swift, for one, was ambivalent on this issue. In "A Tratical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind," for instance, Swift tries optimistically to incorporate the idea of the man in miniature into an Aristotelian belief in "minima" as perfectly formed microcosm, a concept incongruous with the atomic theory of randomness:

PHILOSOPHERS say, that Man is a Microcosm or little World, resembling in Miniature every part of the great: And, in my Opinion, the Body Natural may be compared to the Body Politick: And if this be so, how can the Epicureans
Opinion be true, that the Universe was formed by a fortuitous Concourse of Atoms, which I will no more believe, than that the accidental Jumbling of letters in the Alphabet, could fall by Chance into a most ingenious and learned Treatise of Philosophy. *Risum teneatis Amici, HOR* [Could you, my friends, hold back your laughter?]."

But in “A Voyage to Brobdingnag,” as we have seen, Swift portrays Gulliver like a Democritean atom, as a small, random, immutable (i.e. physically stunted) entity of “no sort of consequence,” reduced to (one of) his smallest parts (used as a phallic sexual prop by the Queen’s Maids of Honor).

Perhaps nowhere in eighteenth-century literature is the problem of the relation between grown man and microscopic atom more apparent than in *History and Adventures of an Atom*. However, with the exception of Aileen Douglas’s *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body*, the meager assortment of scholarship on the Atom reads the novel exclusively in terms of its political satire on Pitt and the Seven Years’ War—as if the fact that it is narrated by an atom is irrelevant to the larger political meaning of the novel.

And yet, through the novel’s engagement with the discourse of atomism, Smollett’s Atom portrays the man in miniature as the actualization of an ideology of individualism which reduces man to a disproportionately self-important atom, infant, or Mandevillian bee (in *Fable of the Bees*, Bernard Mandeville’s manifesto of self-interested individualism).

Whereas Sterne has a grown Tristam describe the homunculus as a “being circumscribed with rights.” Smollett goes so far as to have the atom proudly characterizes himself as the paradigmatic, self-interested Enlightenment individual and “an actual.
independent existence”: “Know, Nathaniel, that we atoms are singly endued with such 
efficacy of reason, as cannot be expected in an aggregate body: where we crowd and 
squeeze and embarrass one another.”8 As a microscopic Crusoean individualist.
Smollett’s atom proudly traces his adventures as part of a grain of rice in Japan consumed 
by a Dutch mariner, discharged by the Dutchman as feces used to fertilize a garden. 
carried from an Englishman’s syphilitic penis to a duck eaten by Nathaniel Peacock’s 
father in whose testicles he becomes part of the animalcule which develops into 
Nathaniel Peacock himself. Being an immutable, self-interested, relatively arbitrary 
individual in society is not unlike the status of a Democritean atom, incorporated into 
human feces one moment, and into human genitalia the next.

Pope, on the other hand, in “An Essay on Man.” earnestly tries to reconcile 
atomic theory with self-interested Mandevillian individualism, characterizing the 
movement of atoms in the same way he characterizes his own seemingly anarchic society 
of selfish “small People” and a Mandevillian “realm of Bees.”9 Pope insists that the 
seemingly chaotic and arbitrary movement of “atoms . . . into ruin hurl’d” is actually part 
of God’s highly organized master plan

Look round our World: behold the chain of Love

Combining all below and all above

See plastic Nature working to this end.

The single atoms each to other tend.

Attract, attracted to, the next in place

Form’d and impell’d its neighbour to embrace.10
The self-interested individual resembles the atom in that “self-love,” like atomic attraction, is “the spring of motion [that] acts the soul . . . Man, but for that, no action could attend.”¹¹ By making the comparison, Pope suggests that just as the movement of each ostensibly directionless atom is actually geared towards the greater good of the world, so does each man’s seemingly unproductive “self-love” cause him to act in accordance with the order of the universe: “Each individual seeks a sev’ral goal: ’But HEAV’N’s great view is One, and that the Whole:’ “Thus God and Nature link’d the gen’ral frame, ’And bade Self-love and Social be the same.”¹²

Pope insists that it is by means of “self-love,” tempered with “reason,” that man is able to resemble an atom and feel somehow dignified at the same time. But for Smollett, as for Freud a century later, male “self-love” or narcissism underscores his regression or shrinkage to a microscopic, infantilized subject position. And thus, by portraying the atom as a microscopic male individual and depicting almost every other male character in the novel as a self-loving, impotent fool and a plaything of chance, the Atom exposes the hubris and disavowal involved in narcissistic, self-interested individualism as bound up in castration anxieties which reveal man to be no bigger than the atoms of which he is composed.

This is cleverly demonstrated in an early passage in which the atom provides Nathaniel Peacock with the correct etymology of the word “atom” as “derived from alpha privativa, and temno to cut.” and Peacock visits the curate to confirm it. The curate gives him an etymology that is inaccurate but telling
As for the word atomos, or atime, it signifies a scoundrel. Sir. or as it were. Sir. a thing of no estimation. It is derived. Sir. from alpha privativa, and time. honor. Hence. we call a skeleton an atomy, because. Sir. the bones are. as it were. dishonoured by being stripped of their cloathing, and exposed in their nakedness. ¹³

The atom's own etymology simply denotes his indivisibility, his inability to be cut or reduced. But the curate's etymology projects upon the atom subjectivity and pride ("time, honor"), suggesting that the atom cannot be reduced or castrated any further because he is already maximally stunted in growth, like Gulliver used as a human phallus in Brobdingnag, "stripped of [his] clothing," "exposed in [his] nakedness," and of "no sort of consequence." If the word "atomy" can mean all of the following: "skeleton . . . . atom or particle, or a tiny being," which it does indeed. then the very entity defined by the impossibility of its being cut or reduced. the atom. is indicative of the frailty and symbolic castration of the male body as a skeletal "tiny being," already reduced to his smallest parts. ¹⁴
As Peter Conrad writes—paraphrasing the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosopher Jean Paul—Tristam Shandy’s fascination with microscopical littleness classifies the novel as a work of irony. Using the example of microscopy—a metaphor which, of course, is of great relevance to our present study—Conrad writes:

The sublime is telescopic, irony microscopic vision. In the sublime the senses and imagination despair of responding adequately to the grand phenomenon with which they are confronted: in irony they abandon the attempt and instead lovingly contemplate their own weaknesses.

Whether or not we accept Conrad’s definition of the ironic vs. the sublime, we can agree that Sterne’s Tristam Shandy, rather than concentrating on intimidating enormities (such as the Mont Blanc of his nineteenth-century successors), focuses instead on ‘the small stuff:’ homunculi, insects, and noses; or, in Tristam’s words, people’s trivial “hobby-horses”: “their coins and their cockle-shells, their drums and their trumpets, their fiddles, their pallets—their maggots and their butterflies.”

And yet, Conrad does not pursue an equally relevant part of Jean Paul’s theory which states that this small stuff which seems so trivial as to be only treated with irony, can also be profoundly threatening, arousing our deepest fears and anxieties. Writes Jean Paul: “[t]he imbalance between size and supernatural force opens up an immense terror
field to our imagination; hence our disproportionate fear of small animals . . . In our
dreams we quail more in the face of mystical dwarf’s than of a tall manifest giant. "18 This
also applies to Tristam Shandy, which is not just a comical study of little things, but is
also a novel about the profound anxieties that little things—such as the homunculus,
which we will return to later—evokes in grown men.

Walter Shandy’s obsession with noses, for instance, though presented comically
and ironically, is of grave significance to this patriarch of the Shandy clan, who endows
the human nose with a significance disproportionate to its size and powers. Exclaims
Walter:

you will) . . . O Licetus! Licetus! Had I been blest with a foetus five inches long
and a half, like thee—fate might have done her worst . . . O Tristam! Tristam!

Tristam!19

Walter’s anxiety over the homunculus Tristam’s nose being squashed by forceps
during his delivery leads to the Slawkenbergius’s tale of an enormous-nosed stranger
whose arrival prompts a debate among the comparatively small-nosed townspeople
(among the first to be impressed is “a little dwarfish bandy-leg’d drummer”)20 as to
whether his nose is real or fake.21 Although we never learn the answer, the likelihood
that a nose so big could actually be veiling a nose of the tiniest proportions raises the
possibility Tristam’s father’s enormous nose—the myth of the paternal phallus—is also
an illusion; that although baby Tristam is as small-nosed/castrated as his mother, his
father is quite possibly a castrated homunculus as well—which, for Walter, is a frightening prospect. When we learn, in reference to the sash-window responsible for Tristam’s accidental circumcision, that “nothing was well hung [sash-window] in our family.” Sterne reveals to us that although Walter Shandy’s may have the phallus, he does not in reality have much of a penis. As the Slaukenbergius tale reminds us, “The excellency of the nose is in a direct arithmetical proportion to the excellency of the wearer’s fancy.” Walter’s valuation of large noses in spite of his own lack thereof suggests that it is he, of all the Shandy men, to whom the following of Tristam Shandy’s mock-maxims most suitably applies: “A dwarf who brings a standard along with him to measure his own size . . . is a dwarf in more articles than one.”

*

This discussion of Walter’s anxieties about little things raises the question most relevant to our present study: who is the little man of the Shandy family? At first glance, Tristam and his uncle Toby Shandy appear to be the obvious men in miniature of the novel. Famously, Sterne’s self-described “small hero” spends a good part of the novel as a homunculus, and evolves into a man castrated in “full three fourths of me . . . my geniture, nose, and name.” Tristam compares his own personal history to that of Tom Thumb (“[T]ho’ it be but the history of Jack Hickathrift or Tom Thumb,” notes Tristam, reflecting upon the writer of personal history, “he knows no more than his heels what lets and confounded hindrances he is to meet with in his way”).
Toby's infantile pleasure in his hobbyhorsical manipulation of miniature military
toys on the bowling green reduces him to a hobbyhorse himself, symbolically shrunken
by means of his microscopic gaze to the level of the toys and insects with which he plays
and empathizes. In one of the novel's more memorable passages, when the widow
Wadman tricks Toby into looking into her eye, his gaze is so microscopic that the
authority of the male gaze is instantaneously inverted as he becomes literally lost in the
minutia of her iris, and is consequently "undone."27

At one point, Tristam describes both himself and his uncle as women's candles,
the household object referred to in eighteenth-century dildo literature as that with which
English women "made do" before superior Italian imports were available. By this point
in the novel, Toby has become the candle of the enamored widow "predetermined to light
my uncle Toby; neither at this end or than: but like a prodigal's candle, to light him, if
possible, at both ends at once."28 The dying Tristam, as a candle, is reduced "from little
to less, from less to nothing."29 "cut short in the midst of my days"30:

It is a great pity—but 'tis certain from every day's observation of man, that he
may be set on fire like a candle, at either end—provided there is a sufficient wick
standing out... For my part... I would oblige a housewife constantly to light
me at the top: for then I should burn down decently to the socket.31
Yet in spite of these vivid images of Tristam and Toby as Tom Thumbs and women's objects candles, there is one very important objection to the theory of Tristam and Toby as little men: Although the reader is not aware of it until quite a ways into the novel, both Toby and Tristam are exceptionally tall.

Ironically, as the reader learns rather late in the novel, Tristam's self-aggrandizing father Walter is the Shandy male who is not only the least well endowed but also the shortest in stature. Inevitably, Walter's shortness is the source of much patriarchal anxiety on his part. Walter is continually aware that not only his claim to the phallus (as we have seen) but also his control over his own small body could be overturned at any given moment. As Walter reflects: "Though man is of all others the most curious vehicle . . . yet at the same time 'tis of so slight a frame and so totteringly put together, that the sudden jerks and hard jostlings it unavoidably meets with in this hard journey, would overset and tear it to pieces a dozen times a day."

*

Once we begin to reconsider Tristam Shandy and its depiction of the Shandy patriarch as contributing to a national genre of "little men" literature, it becomes apparent that this novel shares another element in common with the others we have examined thus far: an interest in the subject of female consumption and production with regard to male stature. In fact, the novel could be said to be a story of male anxieties about littleness set against a backdrop that shifts from a story of female production (Mrs. Shandy giving birth to Tristam) to a notorious scene of female consumption that occurs when Mrs.
Shandy's maidservant Susannah associates (in the Lockeian sense of association) the possibility of her mistress's death with Susannah's coveting the deceased's belongings:

A green satin night-gown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head.—Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words.—Then, quoth Susannah, we must all go into mourning.—But note a second time: the word mourning, notwithstanding Susannah made use of it herself—failed also of doing its office: it excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black.—all was green.—The green satin night-gown hung there still.

—O! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress, cried Susannah.—My mother's whole wardrobe followed.—What a procession! Her red damask:—her orange-tawny.—her white and yellow lutestring.—her brown taffeta.—her bone-laced caps, her bed-gowns, and comfortable under-petticoats.—Not a rag was left behind.—"No.—she will never look up again," said Susannah.\footnote{32}

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Dr. Slop, the incompetent "man midwife," called in by Walter to assist in Tristam's birth (against the wishes of his pregnant wife who wants a female midwife), signifies the extent of the little Shandy patriarch's anxieties about women's control over both production and consumption. Portrayed as a "little man," Dr. Slop is introduced to
the reader as an incompetent "little, squat, uncourtly figure . . . of about four feet and a half perpendicular height . . . waddling tho' the dirt upon the vertebrae of a little diminutive pony."33 Although it is in fact Dr. Slop who accidentally shrinks Tristam's nose by crushing it with his forceps, Walter blames Susannah's inadequate nursing breast for this symbolic castration, convinced that the woman's nursing breast "was the undoing of the child, inasmuch as his nose was so snubb'd, so rebuff'd, so rebated, and so refrigerated thereby, as never to arrive ad mensuram suam legitimam."34 Ironically, it is Susannah's clothing that saves the day, by propping up the nose that the man-midwife has crushed: "In bringing him [Tristam] into the world with his [Dr. Slop's] vile instruments, he has crushed his nose. Susannah says, as flat as a pancake to his face, and he is making a false bridge with a piece of cotton and a thin piece of whalebone out of Susannah's stays, to raise it up."35 Walter similarly blames Susannah for "shrinking" Tristam by naming him Tristam—which Walter considers an extremely unlucky name—rather than Tristemagistas. Walter's intended name for his son.36

At every turn, Sterne reveals that the little Shandy patriarch's misogynistic responses to female pregnancy, such as his insistence upon the homunculus/animaleule theory of generation (the belief that man originated as an anthropomorphic sperm) in contrast to the ovist theory (the belief that human life begins in the egg).37 serve as a psychological defense mechanism protecting him against the reality of his own Tom Thumb status.

As Louis Landa explains, the eighteenth-century discourse of the homunculus was bound up in the sexual—as well as scientific—politics of its day. The homunculus was thought to have developed out of a so-called "animaleule," the man in miniature thought
by some to exist in each individual human spermatozoa. Believers in the homunculus (most prominently "minute philosophers" Leeuwenhoek, Hooke, and Henry Baker).

witnessed with their own eyes under the microscope little men swimming about in human sperm, and concluded that man, not woman, was responsible for sexual reproduction, since the homunculus obviously developed directly out of human sperm. According to this theory, woman's role in reproduction is merely to serve as a vessel in which the animalcule must grow. It is easy to see how this theory would appeal to an anxious little man like Walter Shandy, secretly concerned that women's control over both production and consumption might reveal man to be little more than a helpless homunculus himself.

And thus, in typical misogynistic form. Walter scolds not only his wife but Susannah as well for their "false" airs of superiority on the matter of reproduction, complaining that ". . . from the very moment the mistress of the house is brought to bed, every female in it, from my lady's gentlewoman down to the cinder-wench becomes an inch taller for it; and give themselves more airs upon that single inch, than all the other inches put together." Uncle Toby perceptively replies by revealing the unflattering truth behind the little patriarch's anxieties: "I think rather . . . that 'tis we who sink an inch lower."
Notes


2 Sterne. 2.

3 Sterne. 2.


5 Admits Tristam later in the chapter. “[I] am a mortal of so little consequence in the world, it is not much matter what I do.” Sterne. 9.


10 Pope. 3. 9-12.

11 Pope. 2.59, 2.61. 518.

12 Pope. 2. 237-238. 4.317-318.

13 Smollett. 7.

14 Smollet. 135. The connection between male narcissism or “self-love” and miniaturization emphasized is also at issue in some of Smollett’s better-known novels as well, particularly in *Roderick Random* whose very title recalls the fundamental concept
of Boyle’s atomic theory, suggesting that man is as random and small as the atoms which compose him. When Roderick gives the self-loving Narcissa a portrait miniature of himself, he transforms Narcissa from narcissist to fetishist, and affirms his own position as a miniaturized male object of the female microscopic gaze.

A similar interest in the relation between microscopic littleness and modern masculinity is apparent in the eighteenth-century text commonly attributed to Sterne, and known among Sterne scholars as “Fragment Inédit.” This anonymous fragment culminates in the narrator imagining himself as an infinitesimal speck: “I can imagine that I might possess all y‘ same mental powers and capacitys. and exert as vigorous acts of thinking and willing as I now do, tho’ my body were no bigger than y‘ millionth part of a grain of sand.” “Fragment Inédit.” Laurence Sterne: Sa Personne et Ses Ouvrages: Etude Precede de’un Fragment Inédit de Sterne. Paul Stapfer (Paris, 1870) xvi-xliv. xxiv.


16 Conrad, 23.

17 Sterne. 8.


19 Sterne. 216.

20 Sterne 177.
21 Walter's tale also includes the lines: "to the greatest growth and expansion
imaginable—in the triumph of which theory, they went so far as to affirm, that there was
no cause in nature why a nose might not grow to the size of the man himself." Sterne.
186.

22 Sterne, 264.

23 Sterne, 168. Or, "so far was Prignitz from the truth, in affirming that the fancy begat
the nose, that on the contrary,—the nose begat the fancy." (Sterne, 168).

24 Sterne 221.

25 Sterne, 6. 261.

26 Sterne 26.

27 Sterne 408. The passage begins with Toby

Looking—and looking—then rubbing his eyes—and looking again. with
twice the good nature that even Galileo look'd for a spot in the sun.

—in vain! For by all the powers which animate the organ—Widow
Wadman's left eye shines this moment as lucid as her right—there is neither
mote, or sand, or dust, or chaff, or speck, or particle of opake matter floating in
it—there is nothing, my dear paternal uncle! But one lambent delicious fire,
furtively shooting out from every part of it, in all directions, into thine—

—if thou lookest, uncle Toby, in search of this mote one moment longer—

thou art undone.

... I protest, Madam, said my uncle Toby, I can see nothing whatever in
your eye.
It is not in the white: said Mrs. Wadman: my uncle Toby look'd with
might and main into the pupil—

Now of all the eyes, which ever were created—from your own, Madam,
up to those of Venus herself, which certainly were as venereal a pair of eyes as
ever stood in a head—there never was an eye of them all. so fitted to rob my uncle
Toby of this repose, as the very eye, at which he was looking—it was not, Madam,
a rolling eye—a romping or wanton one—nor was it an eye sparkling—petulant
or imperious—of high claims and terrifying exactions, which would have curled
at once that milk of human nature, of which my uncle Toby was made up—but
'twas an eye full of gentle salutation—and soft responses—speaking—not like the
trumpet stop of some ill-made organ, in which many an eye I talk to, holds coarse
converse—but whispering soft—like the last low accents of an expiring saint—
"How can you live comfortless, captain Shandy, and alone, without a bosom to
lean your head on—or trust your cares to?"

28 Sterne 390.
29 Sterne 346.
30 Sterne 347.
31 Sterne 390.
32 Sterne. 252.
33 Sterne. 74-5.
Sterne. 170. Walter’s distrust of female production is also apparent in the “cock and bull” story which famously ends the novel, in which Walter refuses to believe that his bull is impotent—the failure to reproduce must be the fault of the cow.

Sterne. 156.

Sterne. 208. The novel begins with Tristam’s account of heterosexual reproduction as an equal endeavor:

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider’d how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind . . . Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly.—I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me.

Both mother and father are responsible for the formation of Tristam’s body and “figure.”


Writes Landa:
Tristam’s account of the “little gentleman” is based on the microscopic investigations and the speculations of such respected biologists of the late seventeenth century as Harvey, Swammerdown, Malpighi, Leewenhoek, de Graaf, and others whose embryological views were accepted and disseminated in the eighteenth century. These views were reflected in a theory called “preformation” and in two schools of thought concerning human conception, the ovists and the animalculists, whose clashing ideas throw light on the opening chapters of Tristam Shandy.

39 Sterne. 206.

40 Sterne. 206.
CONCLUSION

Little Men and Modernity: From Tom Thumb to The Incredible Shrinking Man

“What was I? Still a human being? Or was I the man of the future?”

-The Incredible Shrinking Man

The 1957 sci-fi classic The Incredible Shrinking Man (directed by Jack Arnold, and based on the novel by Richard Matheson, who also wrote the screenplay) begins with a conventional young bourgeois Hollywood couple of the 1950’s: good-looking, married, and in love. All is well until the husband, Scott Carey (Grant Williams), finds himself shrinking for no apparent reason. “Maybe it’s the cooking ’round here,” he jokes to his wife Louise (April Kent). Soon, he is too small to reach the steering wheel of his car, and Louise must literally take the driver’s seat. Scott becomes too ashamed of his worsening condition to go to work and becomes confined to the domestic sphere of their bourgeois home, while Louise gets a job to support him. This blow to Scott’s ‘manhood’ is too much for him to bear. He runs away from Louise and seeks comfort in the company of an attractive female dwarf named Clarice, who resembles a small version of his blonde-haired blue-eyed wife, and makes him feel better by gazing up at him and cooing. “You know Scott, you’re taller than I am.” Scott takes comfort in courting this ‘less threatening’ woman who is seemingly removed from the realities of modern bourgeois life (they meet in the ‘carnivalesque’ world of the traveling freak show, where Clarice is on display), until one day on one of their “dates” he is horrified to discover that he—
shrinking more every day—has become even shorter than she. Ultimately, reduced to a mere three or four inches, he returns to Louise who confines him to a dollhouse for his own safety—until one day she leaves to go shopping and accidentally lets in a cat—a former pet of the Careys, and an animal often used in Western tradition to symbolize women and female genitalia—which chases him into the dark and dingy basement, where Scott, presumed dead, is lost to Louise and the outside world.

"I just keep thinking that he needed me but I wasn’t there." Louise exasperates to Scott’s brother. Although we soon learn that the reason for Scott’s shrinking is an unfortunate past encounter with sprayed with insecticide from a passing truck, the mise-en-scène and dialogue continually underscore that the ‘real’ reason for Scott’s shrinkage has as much to do with modern sexual politics as it does with modern science: women are leaving the home (to shop and to work, at the expense of “the cooking 'round here”), and men—according to the film’s un-self-consciously misogynistic world view—are consequently becoming reduced to abandoned objects in the domestic sphere. Confined to the dark and hidden depths of the bourgeois home (the junk-filled basement), Scott, like a miniature Robinson Crusoe of the domestic underworld, must struggle to survive in this strange new world of household objects, particularly scissors and spools of thread: “As man had dominated the world of the sun, so I would dominate my world.” Stuck in the basement with these mundane domestic goods, Scott the breadwinner has become reduced to one of these used and neglected female commodities.

This message is captured perfectly in the film’s original publicity poster. Featuring a little man using an enormous domestic woman’s object (a needle) to battle a giant cat, the poster calls to mind the bawdy passage in Fielding’s Tom Thumb plays in
which Tom Thumb is reduced to a needle lost in Huncamunca’s metaphorical stack of hay:

![Poster for The Incredible Shrinking Man](image)

The glaring disparity between the poster’s promise of “a fascinating adventure into the unknown!” and its display of the far-from-unknown mundane household objects that
threaten Scott, speaks to the Freudian “uncanny-ness” of what the film claims to be the modern man’s predicament, a message captured in both the poster’s and the film’s sexually symbolic depictions of a familiar domestic cat transformed into an enormous devourer of men.

Ending not with Scott’s escape, but with his final gloomy words, as he shrinks away to nothing: “What was I? Still a human being? Or was I [pause, and with great emphasis] the man of the future?” This twentieth-century American film is very much in the tradition of its eighteenth-century predecessors, reflecting the anxiety that being a modern man, in Scott’s words, “the man of the future” entails being reduced to a used or used-up female commodity. And yet Arnold’s film sorely lacks the element of self-conscious satire that exists, to varying degrees, in the writings of Fielding, Swift, Pope, Smart, Smollett, and Sterne. Whereas Fielding’s plays make light of the anxieties apparent in Huncamunca’s reduction of Tom Thumb to a needle, a stool on which to rest her “sitting part,” a devourable morsel, and a sexual prop (among other things), Incredible Shrinking Man insists that modern man’s belittlement is no laughing matter.2

While Incredible Shrinking Man expects its audience to sympathize with the struggles of a man ostensibly victimized by modern bourgeois women’s abandonment of their alleged domestic duties, the 1958 cult classic Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman (directed by Nathan Juran) inverts the very anxiety that Incredible Shrinking Man so earnestly articulates, asking its audience to take the side of a female protagonist named Nancy (Allison Hayes), a bored housewife and shopaholic who grows to fifty feet to reclaim and seek revenge on her philandering misogynist of a husband, Harry (William Hudson), while serendipitously wreaking havoc on all the men in town along the way:
Appropriating *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman*’s memorable final line—
“She finally got Harry all to herself”—Christopher Guest’s hilarious 1993 remake of Juran’s film (also titled Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman, and adding a sequence in which the fifty-foot woman sexual propositions her husband in a most Swiftian manner: “I’ve begun thinking of myself as Gulliver, surrounded by all these toys and playthings . . . You’d be the envy of every man alive—imagine, love on the scale of Gulliver!”) follows it up with an ‘appendix sequence’ (set at some unspecified point in the future) in which Nancy (Daryl Hannah) and two other fifty-foot women appear aboard a spaceship where they are holding their tiny husbands hostage in a small box furnished like a psychiatric clinic. The three women lead their little men in a group therapy session geared towards analyzing the masculinity anxieties that make a woman of Nancy’s proportions so threatening to them. The dialogue reveals that Harry, who is obviously a newcomer to the group, is less willing to go along with the plan than the other two little men, who are far more advanced than he:

*Little Man 1.* I believe if we were all going to be honest about this, we’d all agree to being victims of a very unrealistic and limiting idea of manhood.

*Little Man 2.* You’re right; that’s where all the anger, all the hostility, comes from. We’ve been cut off from all the old definitions of masculine and feminine, and that causes the basic insecurity we all feel as men in the modern world.

*Harry.* I’m not hostile, and I’m not insecure! And I don’t have any problems with my manhood—never did.
The camera pans out to show Nancy peering down into the box and scolding him with the
moral of this feminist comedy: "These sessions are for your own good; it's up to you to
catch up with us."

In Guest's feminist homage to a campy cult classic, as in Fielding's satirical Tom
Thumb plays, men's fear of becoming the miniature objects of enormous consuming
women is as much about large-scale responses to broad cultural change as it is about
personal psychological anxiety. In the funny yet accurate psychobabble of little man
number one: "We've been cut off from all the old definitions of masculine and feminine,
and that causes the basic insecurity we all feel as men in the modern world." As all three
films show (with varying degrees of complicity and satire), the anxiety that the little man
is "the man of the future"—a cultural anxiety that emerged at the dawn of modern
masculinity in eighteenth-century England—is still recognizable and relevant today.
Notes

1 Less subtly so, the famously misogynistic writer Charles Bukowski. in his short story “Six Inches,” has the male narrator reduced to penis-size by his “witch” of a girlfriend so she can use him as “a thing of entertainment, a sexual toy.” Charles Bukowski. “Six Inches.” The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories. ed. Gail Chiarello (San Francisco: City Lights Books. 1967) 29.

2 The French poster for the film—featuring Scott looking up towards the heavens as if crying out ‘Why me?!’ while his wife holds him in her hands as if wondering ‘What on earth am I to do with this funny little man?’—seems almost to mock the film’s solemn tone and its misogynistic paranoia:
The Belgian and Italian posters, on the other hand, focus exclusively on the film's theme of modern man as victim of modern science:
Harry's phobic response: "This is sick, unnatural, and freakish. What did you expect me to do, get a wetsuit and a flashlight?" Nancy, enraged, responds by calling him an "insect" and a "tick," and threatening to "pop your head like a little Concord grape."

Daryll Hannah following in the footsteps of Allison Hayes:
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