

The Revolt of the Yahoos

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A New Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms, being the Fifth Part of the Travels into Several Remote Parts of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver: From an unpublished manuscript edited, with notes, by Matthew Hodgart, M.A., Sometime Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970. 91 pp. \$2.95.*

I

SATIRE, according to Dryden, a conspicuous practitioner of the art, is

the boldest way, if not the best,
To tell men freely of their foulest faults.

And yet it is often a self-defeating exercise, sometimes because the satirist's victims do not recognize themselves in his caricatures, sometimes, when the satire is combined with high humor, because it provokes more amusement than indignation. There is also the danger that the unimaginative reader may miss the satirical content within the allegorical framework. Of each of these pitfalls *Gulliver's Travels* affords an illustration. Swift had looked forward to its publication with some trepidation and went to much pains to conceal its authorship even from the printer. But the book produced no such political repercussions as had the *Draper Letters* a short time earlier. It was received with delight by Whig and Tory alike, though the allusions to contemporary political and theological squabbles—Low-heels *versus* High-heels, Little-endians *ver-*

sus Big-endians, and so on—were not lost on either. If Sir Robert Walpole, the powerful Whig Prime Minister, saw his counterpart in the acrobatic Lilliputian politician Flimnap, he never let it be known. The first edition was sold out within a week. "I find no considerable man who is very angry at the book," wrote Pope to the author, and Swift, it seems, was both pleased and disappointed, for he had boasted to his friends that he wanted to vex the world rather than divert it. Meanwhile, however, an Irish bishop was reported to have asserted that most of Gulliver's purported adventures were too implausible for a grown man to believe, and afterwards a French translator decided that he was dealing with a nonsense book suitable for children. Ironically, this has been the general judgment of later generations; almost every child at a certain age is given *Gulliver's Travels* to read, but very few besides specialists in eighteenth century history and literature return to it as adults.

This may explain in some part why Mr. Hodgart's book has received so little attention from the reviewers. A more probable explanation is that it is an even broader and more savage work of satire than its model and that its allusions to our conflict of generations are pungent and unmistakable and occasionally pointed up by footnote references to recent events in various citadels of the higher learning, for in 1969 Mr. Hodgart was a visiting professor at Cornell University and is acquainted with what has happened there and with similar doings at Berkeley, Columbia and elsewhere. The manuscript referred to on the

title page is purported to have been found in the attic of an ancient house near the close of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, to have been positively identified as the writing of Jonathan Swift, and to have been precisely dated "to 1744, the last year of Swift's long and troubled life." It tells of Captain Gulliver's continuing revulsion toward his own species, how he could not bear the company of his wife and children at table—"even though I kept my Nose well stopp'd with Rue, Lavender, or Tobacco-leaves"—or any company except that of the horses in his stable. It tells of his yearning and presently his resolve to return to the island of the Houyhnhnms, those noble beings, superior in all respects to mankind. He knew, of course, or at any rate believed, that his return would mean his death; for, as may be recalled, he had at the conclusion of Part IV been expelled from Houyhnhnm Land by a unanimous vote of its Assembly on the ground that, being possessed of some rudiments of reason, he might if allowed to remain employ them to incite the Yahoos to rebellion against their equine overlords. Even so, he felt that if he could but enjoy "a few Days, or even Hours," in the solacing companionship of the Sorrel Nag, or in rational conversation with his former Master, the wise and noble gray stallion, before execution of the sentence, death would be a small price to pay for such exquisite pleasure. And so by a series of narrative conveniences similar to those introducing the earlier Voyages Captain Gulliver induces Don Pedro de Menzes to convey him to the same watery latitudes from which that amiable Portuguese mariner had once rescued him.

II

GULLIVER, alas, was to discover that many changes had taken place in Houyhnhnm Land during his absence in England. His first surprise was to find that the Yahoo inhabitants had greatly multiplied.

In the seven Years since I last saw them, their Numbers seemed to have increased

beyond all Measure; since most were young Adults I conjectured that a prodigious Amount of Breeding must have taken place, even while I was last on the Island. I wondered greatly that so many were congregated on this Spot, and not usefully employ'd in the Fields and Pastures of the Houyhnhnms, many Miles away. But even more surprising was the bodily Appearance of these New Yahoos (as I must perforce call them). Their Hair, the Reader will recollect, had always been excessively long; but now it was even longer; when one of them occasionally came into a standing Position the Hair of the Head would fall below the Waist. . . . By Reason of this Abundance of Hair, I could not always distinguish the Gender of a Yahoo, as I had formerly been able to do. . . . That most if not all were infested with Vermin . . . was evident from the continued Scratching of the affected Parts.

Gulliver found the behavior of the New Yahoos even more disgusting than their appearance and tells of it in language that a modern critic of Jonathan Swift considered "sometimes coarse but never lewd"; or rather in the present case the lewdness is not so much in the description as in the things described.

Having by inadvertence landed at a part of the island occupied by Yahoos, Gulliver is for a time in great fear of being detected and captured by them; but he contrives to elude them and from a concealed place of observation on a mountain cliff to take note of their habits. "I shrink," he writes,

from further Description, even in the Obscurity of a learned Language; but conclude that their strenuous [sexual] Exertions tend to leave them in a State of perpetual Lassitude. From this Lassitude they try to rouse themselves by the taking of certain Herbs that have a Chymical Impulsion. In addition to the Root, very juicy, that I described in my last account as producing the same effect: that *Wine* hath among us, they eat great

ly of a plant, which I was unable to identify on first Sight, but have subsequently ascertained to be a variety of *Cannabis indica*. The Effects of this Herb are obscure, beyond the manifest raising of a sweet, sickly Odour; but there can be no doubt that, although it may cause momentary Elation, it indisposeth most Yahoos to Labour, and aggravateth the detestable Vice of Idleness among them; while among a small Proportion of them it leads, by way of a *Crapula*, to sudden and irrational Rage, and sometimes to more deadly Appetites. Those who have graduated from Cannabis, seek out a rare mushroom that hath the Property of causing Hallucinations. I have since been told by observant Houyhnhnms that some Yahoos after eating this Fungus take on an Appearance which we in England would describe as Visionary, Prophetick or Enthusiastick; the Houyhnhnms hold that the wretched Beasts have a temporary Illusion that they are rational Creatures, and even understand something of the World around them. . . .

Some diversions of the New Yahoos are curiously reminiscent of the behavior of our Hippies and Teeny-boppers at a big folk-rock music festival. For example the Young Yahoos, says Gulliver,

seem in Particular to be much gratified by a Sort of Howling, which affordeth them infinite Relief. A small Group of three, four or five Beasts will crouch on a Mound uttering Cries, which though they have no Melody, yet would seem to have a certain Rhythmick Principle, since the Executants will from Time to Time stamp on the Ground or beat with their Hands on a hollow Log. The Response of the listening Yahoos varies between a cool Indifference . . . and a sort of painful Ecstasy: the younger Kind will let out Squalls and Screams in a high-pitched Tone, which causes me to believe that these are usually of the *Female Sex*. At certain moments the whole

Gathering will reform itself into Pairs, each whereof, shuffling about rapidly on all-fours, maketh in concert gross movements resembling the obscene and carnal Play of the Species; but whether these movements are made in time with the Howling of the vocal Group, or no, I have been unable to determine. . . .

III

EVENTUALLY, Gulliver made his way to the habitations of the Houyhnhnms and was joyfully welcomed by his old friend the Sorrel Nag. At the same time he learned to his great sorrow that his old Master, the gray stallion, had died suddenly and mysteriously some years before and that his place in the councils of state had been taken by a congenital gelding—an anatomical anomaly formerly unknown among the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver also learned there was no possibility that he would be put to death or otherwise punished for his return to the island where, as he was told, “the winds of change” had been blowing briskly ever since his departure. One change that Gulliver noted for himself was in the younger generation of Houyhnhnms, the “Colts and Twenty yearlings, who crowded around me in silent Wonder” . . .

I was struck by the Appearance of some of these Youths: they were remarkably unkempt, and did not sport the glossy Coats and trim Fetlocks that Houyhnhnm Convention once demanded and disciplined Exercise produced. A few even had Manes so shaggy that they would distantly have reminded me of Yahoo’s Hair, had I not banished such an Absurdity from my Mind. Others carried Burrs and Clots of Dirt on their Legs, whereof the accustomed grooming should have rid them. . . .

As for the Yahoos, they had become ungovernable. They refused to work or would do so only on their own terms. They made nightly raids on the asses and cattle of the Houyhnhnms. On one occasion a group of

Yahoos rushed into the principal stables, drove out the young mares and foals that were feeding there, and barricaded themselves inside. A special session of the Assembly was called to deal with this unprecedented situation, but there was much inconclusive debate. Some members were for instant action against the intruders; others thought it better to hear the Yahoos' grievances and to negotiate a solution with them. But when the Yahoos made it plain that their demands were non-negotiable, a majority pushed through a motion to employ the herd of bulls that was "kept in reserve for any grave Emergency that might arise." Gulliver's friend the Roan described the aftermath to him:

. . . The Herd was brought up to the Stables and turned loose; and in a few moments the Bulls had smashed down the Doors and Barricades with their Horns and evicted the Occupants, not without tossing and goring a few Individuals. Most of the Yahoos, however, escaped without much Hurt, thanks to their prodigious Nimbleness that enabled them to Somersault over the Bull's Horns and run off to the Woods. We rapidly brought the Bulls under control and herded them back to their Corral, and then went inside the Stables to inspect the Damage. To our Horrour we found that the Yahoos had broken every Manger and every Flint and Wooden Tool . . . and had left the Stables in total Disorder. They had also deposited their Excrements in extream amounts all over the Hay and the Floors. . . . The Condition of the Stables . . . was such as to make them unfit for further Habitation. Accordingly, we decided to burn them down and build them anew

In his effort to find out how such things had become possible Gulliver consulted another eminent acquaintance, the Chestnut, whose views, as it turned out, were more liberal than the Roan's. It had been a serious mistake, the Chestnut told him, to have sent in the bulls to clear the stables, since

that had only served to augment the grievances of the Yahoos and to inflame further the activists among them. Instead, the Houyhnhnms should have granted at least some of the demanded reforms and then have politely entreated the Yahoos to leave, which if the entreaty were couched in sufficiently conciliatory terms, the Chestnut was satisfied they would have done. In the Chestnut's opinion, the Yahoos

were originally an uncorrupted People, with an inborn Capacity for Benevolence; they took, at first, their greatest Pleasure in doing Good to others, and to them self-love and social were the same. It was only by degrees that they fell from their primal State of Innocence and became the unhappy Creatures that they are today; and for this Change the Houyhnhnms themselves must take most of the Blame. The Yahoos were the Victims of the Society that the Houyhnhnms had created. . . . Hence all Houyhnhnms ought to feel guilty. . . . All Yahoos had been born free, and now were everywhere in Chains; or rather (he corrected himself) they were so until recently, when they had shown some Inclination to improve their Conditions of Life. . . . Their *Concern* to better the wretched Lot of their Fellow-Creatures had something commendable about it, though sometimes he deplored the Means they employed. They might be Savages, he thought, but they were Noble Savages. . . .

The real solution, the Chestnut believed, lay in education; not to be sure in the traditional education of music and gymnastic, that is to say in the study of the ancient equine legends, odes and epics and in the daily canters on the downs, followed by plunges into the cold river, and in the annual athletic competitions as described in Part IV. Those narrow and circumscribed disciplines had already been abandoned by the more progressive Houyhnhnm teachers. The new emphasis was on social studies, especially the study of the prevailing consti-

tution of society ("with a View to altering it") and on the vital workings of the Yahoo Community. Above all, said the Chestnut, the young must be permitted

to develop all their Capacities without Let or Hindrance; and in this the Yahoos do set us a good Example in the liberal Treatment which they give their Brats. Kindness is all; for what Wisdom do you find that is greater than Kindness? It is this new and improved System of Education that we wish to apply to the Reclamation of the Yahoo Kind, and we doubt not that it will be wholly beneficial.

The troubles of the times, the Chestnut felt, were merely the birth pangs of a bright New Order

. . . There would be hard Days ahead . . . but he was certain that Reason and Liberal Sentiment would prevail in the End, Nay more, there was a great Day about to Dawn, in which Yahoo and Houyhnhnm would walk together, Hoof in Paw, through the Meadows of Communal Joy. . . . If it were objected that the Yahoos' Appetites were excessive, he would reply that the Road of Excess led to the Stables of Wisdom; if some said the Brutes were violent and angry he would tell them . . . that the Yahoos of Wrath were wiser than the Horses of Instruction. He concluded by saying that he saw a shining Vision of the Future, a new Sky and a new Earth, which would be peopled by a new and glorious Race of Beings, the Horse-Yahoos!

IV

AFTER A NEW demonstration by the Yahoos, the Assembly was again called into session and while the debate over what to do about the menace of Yahoo Power wound on and on, a foal galloped in with the announcement that some bands of Yahoos had rushed in from the woods and made off with all the remaining asses,

whereupon the sitting was adjourned. Shortly thereafter, however, the Assembly was reconvened and a motion put forward that it remain in continuous session. This was vigorously opposed by the Conservative Right, whose leader, the Dapple-Gray, argued that in the present emergency, deprived as they now were of both asses and working Yahoos, it would be folly to neglect their cattle and crops to spend long hours in committee. In the midst of the debate fifty Yahoos broke into the Assembly and squatted on the ground. The Dapple-Gray immediately demanded that the ushers be directed to eject them. The matter was put to a vote, and by a close margin it was decided to let them remain for the rest of the sitting. The new Master, approving the decision, said it would enable the Yahoos to become acquainted with parliamentary procedures. And so, when debate on the previous question was resumed,

the Yahoos took an increasingly active Part in Proceedings. They crudely imitated the oratorical Gestures of the Speakers. . . . They raised Shrieks of Applause, shaking their clenched fists when the Piebald spoke in Denunciation of the rigid and out-moded Customs of the Assembly; and when Iron-Gray, a friend of the Dapple-Gray's, tried to make a speech in defense of Tradition and the Laws of Reason, they howled him down, drumming on their Chests until he could no longer be heard, and even trying to lay their Paws on him. It soon became apparent that there was no longer any Freedom of Speech for any but the more extream of the Houyhnhnms, so loudly did the Yahoos intervene, grunting "Ut, Ut Ut," hissing, making lacivious Gestures and throwing Showers of Dirt. . . .

Gulliver wondered how the Yahoos could know which speakers to applaud and which to menace until he saw that a certain Skewbald, or Screwball, one of the ungroomed young Houyhnhnms, was making signals to them behind his back. Suddenly, as if at

another signal, the Yahoos got up and departed in body, "leaving their customary Tokens behind them on the Ground." That night the Dapple-Gray gave Gulliver his verdict on the new, or "now," generation of Houyhnhnms, of which Skewbald was typical. "Although there be some," said the old horse,

among the younger Breed . . . who are true to the old Ways, many of them . . . are Scoundrels or Imbeciles. . . For this I much blame their Dams and Sires who have failed to enjoyn to them the Lessons of *Temperance, Industry, Exercise* and *Cleanliness*, but have permitted them to grow up in *Idleness and Luxury*. Thou hast heard them speak of the Herb *Cannabis*; but didst thou know that they go into the Yahoo Region to eat of this Herb, that is expressly forbidden by an Exhortation of the Assembly? And some—horrible to relate—have criminal Intercourse with young Yahoos of both sexes; falling into the Sleep of Reason, they beget Monsters. As to their Politicks, they talk much of Reform, but in their Hearts they intend, as they will sometimes admit, the Destruction of our Institutions. . . . What they will set up in place of our established Polity, they know not, but hope that out of Chaos there will arise the New Horse. To compass these ends they will lend support with their Tongues to the most violent deeds of the New Yahoos.

V

EVENTS in Houyhnhnm Land were now rushing toward a revolutionary denouement. At its next and last session the Assembly was surrounded by virtually the whole Yahoo population, "quavering and slaving" in anticipation of the imminent triumph of their species. Within the Assembly, two young horse radicals, Skewbald and Piebald, announced that they and some of their contemporaries would occupy the new stables unless fifty of the Yahoo agitators were admitted as full legal repre-

sentatives. Thus intimidated, a majority of the elders complied. The Yahoos then seized the podium and with cries, howls, postures and gestures presented a new demand, namely that the horses from now on should comport themselves like Yahoos, and begin by rolling in the dirt and eating it. It is probable that this outrageous demand would have been resisted had not a series of fires suddenly broken out in the vicinity. In the panic that followed some of the horses were frightened into submission, but the Dapple-Gray and a few followers fought fiercely; then by a concerted charge broke through the encircling Yahoos and made for the coast, where taking to the sea they perished by drowning. Gulliver, who luckily had with him his hanger, or cutlass, fought off some Yahoos that attacked him and mounted the faithful Sorrel Nag. After a few steps, alas, the Nag stumbled and fell, and was immediately torn to pieces by the Yahoo mob. Gulliver would have suffered the same fate had not a son of the Dapple-Gray galloped up just in time to rescue him. After some further adventures he managed to find the place where he had hidden the boat from Captain de Mendez's ship in which he had made his landing. The current carried him rapidly out to sea.

The Yahoo Revolution, as it turned out, was short lived. In his first night at sea Gulliver was astonished to observe a very bright light move rapidly across the clouded sky, then heard a violent noise like a thunderclap and beheld a violent flame in the direction of the island from whence he had fled. In the morning when he could look through his Perspective Glass he found the island had disappeared and in its place there was only "a faint Smoak rising in the air." Perhaps, though, the Yahoos were fortunate to have been destroyed by the comet or volcanic eruption—which ever it was—in the very hour of their triumph, and thus to have been spared the post-revolutionary experience so poignantly described in that other and curiously similar satirical allegory by the late George Orwell, called *Animal Farm*.