Sim, Stuart. *The Eighteenth-Century Novel and Contemporary Social Issues.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

Stuart Sim, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel and Contemporary Social Issues* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 35-49.

CHAPTER 3

Gulliver's Travels, Multiculturalism and Cultural Difference

THE ISSUE

At least in theory all major Western countries are committed to multiculturalism: the belief that various cultures can coexist happily in one nation, with each respecting the values and lifestyles of all the others while acknowledging themselves to be fellow citizens under one national government. Cultural difference is not just to be allowed, but fostered and protected under such a system, with religious freedom guaranteed for all. Contemporary cultural theory is very much in favour of multiculturalism, with its implicit assumption that no one culture or way of life is superior to any other and that cultural difference need not lead to conflict, that in fact it can be mutually inspiring and help to engender a more tolerant world order. The West has led the way in this in a conscious attempt to address its own recent history. To adopt such a perspective, it is thought, is to distance oneself from the bad old days of cultural imperialism, where the West assumed it was its destiny to impose its own value system across the globe, trampling over all others in the name of progress. The key requirement now, however, is to refrain from making value judgements about other cultures and to accept that they are as valid as one's own. Diversity is to be celebrated.

In practice, multiculturalism has proved to be harder to uphold in its idealised form, despite official government approval throughout Western Europe. Immigrant groups, especially those from the Third World living in Europe, feel under constant threat from the dominant

indigenous population, which often has a very different, and frequently irreconcilable, concept of human rights from theirs, creating considerable social tension when these clash. Islamic societies segregate the sexes in most public activities, for example (even including hospital care), which breaches Western notions of gender equality, which are held to be unchallengeable. To go against such notions is to undermine what the West understands by the concept of modernity. Rows have broken out in several countries of late, most notably France, about Moslem women's right to wear the veil, which again has become a complicated argument about the nature of gender equality. Is wearing it a proud assertion of gender identity or an imposition by a patriarchal cultural system concerned to keep women subordinate? Many political commentators have become deeply pessimistic about the multicultural ideal, arguing that it is more likely to lead to confrontation between competing cultures than harmonious coexistence.

Some commentators go as far as to regard multiculturalism as encouraging cultural separatism, with ethnic groups keeping to themselves and resisting any pressure to integrate into the wider society of which they are a part. The consequence is a series of parallel societies which have little contact with each other, and this hardly fosters cultural exchange. As one critic of this system, the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner, has remarked, the effect is to keep everyone 'imprisoned in their history', locking them into a particular tradition and preventing them from developing outside the conventions that involves.[1] As Bruckner goes on to argue, the inhabitants of each culture 'are refused what has always been our privilege: passing from one world to another, from tradition to modernity, from blind obedience to rational decision making'.[2] While this is admittedly a very Western-centric viewpoint, and somewhat emotively expressed, it does draw attention to what is arguably the most critical issue in this entire debate – the extent of individual rights. The West has put this concept at the centre of its cultural ethos, whereas other, generally more traditional, cultures have either resisted it or simply see no need for it. Overcoming such obstacles is one of the most pressing problems facing the multiculturalist cause.

THE TEXT

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) the hero undertakes a series of voyages across the globe, to arrive by accident in lands completely unknown to Europeans, where cultural clashes are generally the norm – not least between the hero and the native inhabitants – with human nature seemingly highly resistant to the virtues of multiculturalism and unable to overcome cultural difference. The Big-endians and Little-endians in Lilliput, for example, are embroiled in a series of wars because of a minor difference in their eating habits. Gulliver himself is treated with deep suspicion by the Lilliputians on their first encounter, and proves to be a disruptive force within a society containing various opposed factions; someone who, in a quite literal sense, just cannot fit in to the existing system. The Yahoos are about as far removed from the multicultural ideal as one could be, despite the model of sober and rational conduct provided by the ruling class in Houyhnhnm land. Yahooism represents the dark side of human nature that gives birth to unthinking prejudice against almost all others, and is a searing indictment of humanity by an author with a notoriously low opinion of his species ('But principally I hate and detest that animal called man').[3]

Swift very successfully portrays the barriers that exist to multiculturalism in what Frances D. Louis has called his 'anatomy of misunderstanding', and many contemporary commentators are in agreement with his essentially pessimistic view of human nature, seeing cultural difference as a divisive rather than unifying force in the world.[4] Whether we are really as self-interested and culturally chauvinistic as Swift seems to believe we are is a point still well worth pondering. At the very least the amount of conflict that currently exists between nations and cultures globally, and which shows little sign of dissipating, provides food for thought as to the validity of Swift's negative assessment. Suspicion of the other gives every impression of being hard-wired into the human character, as is a capacity for disagreement.

Gulliver is a trained surgeon whose wanderlust leads him to sign on for several long voyages as a ship's surgeon, sometimes only a few months after returning from the last, invariably danger-ridden, one. Curiosity about the world continues to motivate him, although what

he finds on his travels does little to dispose him towards the rest of humankind. Each journey involves him being cast away on his own in a strange land, inhabited by even stranger races and species, conforming to none of the known characteristics of humanity: smaller than life-size, larger than life-size, distorted in feature, and then, to cap it all, horses endowed with speech and rationality. Each journey tests Gulliver's abilities quite severely – in effect, he is given a crash course in cultural difference. It is a course from which he emerges almost totally alienated from the rest of the human race, considering each member of it a mere 'Lump of Deformity' puffed up by entirely unjustifiable pride.[5]

Lilliput and Brobdignag place Gulliver in the position of the colonial oppressor and colonial oppressed respectively, because of the power imbalance that obtains between him and the inhabitants in each case. This gives him the opportunity to experience multiculturalism from two very contrasting perspectives. In Lilliput Gulliver swamps the culture by virtue of his size, becoming a factor in Lilliputian life that the inhabitants cannot ignore. His power of action is so superior to the Lilliputians as to render him a threat to their entire culture, as he is duly informed: 'it is certain, that an hundred Mortals of your Bulk, would, in a short Time, destroy all the Fruits and Cattle of his Majesty's Dominions'.[6] Quite simply, Gulliver looms over everything: 'the *Great Man Mountain*' as he is dubbed, who requires a daily provision of food and drink equal to that consumed by 1,728 Lilliputians.[7] The Lilliputians' attempts to keep him subdued prove futile, and they are thrown back on trusting to his goodwill, which luckily for them Gulliver does feel towards them. As Kathleen Williams observes, it is in Lilliput that Gulliver 'is at his most attractive' as a character.[8] He agrees to be bound by a contract as to his future behaviour, but the Lilliputians would be hard pressed to enforce this if Gulliver chose to breach any of its clauses.

The inability of nations to live in harmony with one another is revealed in the long-running conflict between Lilliput and its neighbouring island empire, Blefuscu. It is the disagreement between the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians over which end of an egg to break before eating it that lies behind this. When the monarchy throws its authority behind the Little-Endian cause after one of the royal family accidentally cuts his finger while breaking the big end, as custom has

dictated, the result is full-scale civil war. The Blefuscudian empire is quick to take advantage by giving its support to the traditionalist Big-Endians, who are granted exile within their kingdom from where to continue opposition. The absurdity of the struggle is evident when considering their holy book's verdict on egg-breaking: '*That all true Believers shall break their Eggs at the convenient End*'.[9] The interpretation of this passage by Reldresal, a leading figure in the Lilliputian government, seems eminently sensible: 'which is the convenient End, seems, in my humble Opinion, to be left to every Man's Conscience, or at least in the Power of the chief Magistrate to determine'.[10] Yet for the parties in question such a compromise is unthinkable, and each is driven by a desire to prevail over the other, no matter how much bloodshed this may cause.[11] Even Gulliver cannot avoid becoming caught up in this conflict, and while still in favour with the Lilliputian court contrives to capture a large part of Blefuscu's fleet by shackling the ships together and pulling them ashore, much to the king's pleasure.

As well as this external threat to Lilliputian culture, there are significant 'intestine Disquiets' to record.[12] Lilliputian politics is blighted by a struggle between its two main parties: those who advocate the wearing of high and low heels respectively (*Tramecksan* and *Slamecksan*). So seriously is this issue taken to be that supporters of each side 'will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other'.[13] Swift deliberately makes the controversy ridiculous, but it is not so much more ridiculous than the religious divisions of his own day, as he is only too well aware, and just in case we are moved to feel at all superior, many of our contemporary religious disputes too. Seen from a future perspective, the current disputes in the Anglican and Catholic Churches over gay priests may appear just as ridiculous, as if sexual orientation was of any greater importance in the overall scheme of things than the height of one's heels. It is the ability of human beings to keep manufacturing such divisions that makes social existence so unstable, and, we might add, multiculturalism so hard to establish as a viable system. Humanity seems to have an infinite talent for creating division, particularly in the realms of politics and religion, and Swift's satirical eye is quite merciless in spotting this. One would have to say this talent is no less in evidence in the twenty-first century.

If anything symbolises the extent of the cultural difference between Gulliver and the Lilliputians it is the episode of the royal palace fire. Gulliver feels he has performed a great service to the nation in putting

this out, but his hosts are appalled at his method: urinating copiously on the building from above. Since it is forbidden to urinate anywhere within the palace grounds Gulliver is technically guilty of treason, and although the emperor promises to obtain a pardon for him, the empress is so incensed that she vows never to enter the buildings again and swears revenge for the outrage to her royal dignity. Gulliver cannot really understand how much his coarseness has offended his hosts, nor does he put himself in their position to wonder what it would feel like to have one's surroundings drowned in urine cascading from a great height. Yet he is horrified when the situation is reversed in Brobdignag, where the Maids of Honour treat him as if he were no more than a pet whose presence can be disregarded: 'Neither did they at all scruple while I was by, to discharge what they had drunk, to the Quantity of at least two Hogsheads, in a Vessel that held above three Tuns.'[14] Eventually, the palace episode returns to haunt Gulliver. He is privately warned that he is about to be charged with treason for breaking the law against urination, and he finds it expedient to flee the country for Blefuscu to prevent the officially prescribed punishment of blinding being carried out on him.

It is court politics that leads to Gulliver's fall from grace, and political intrigues sour his stay in Lilliput:

> I had been hitherto all my Life a Stranger to Courts, for which I was unqualified by the Meanness of my Condition. I had indeed heard and read enough of the Dispositions of great Princes and Ministers; but never expected to have found such terrible Effects of them in so remote a Country, governed, as I thought, by very different Maxims from those in *Europe*.[15]

He has early evidence of court intrigue after his success in putting so much of the Blefuscudian fleet out of service. This exploit merely spurs the king on to ask for even more damage to be exacted, in the hope that Blefuscu can be brought under control as a mere province of Lilliput. Gulliver's refusal to comply with the king's wishes, the 'unmeasurable . . . Ambition' he shares with most other princes, means that he has made a very dangerous enemy, and the king immediately starts conspiring against him with some members of his Council.[16] From then onwards Gulliver is a marked man, who has to be extremely careful whom he trusts or confides in.

The mean-spiritedness of courts is a recurrent theme of Gulliver, and when the Emperor of Blefuscu also tries to press him into service Gulliver declares himself 'resolved never more to put any Confidence in Princes or Ministers, where I could possibly avoid it.' Instead he takes the opportunity offered by the discovery of a small boat washed up on the island's shore to make arrangements for his departure.[17] What he has learned from his stay in Lilliput is that court life promotes scheming and the development of factions, and that the impulse towards political division and civil discord is extremely powerful in human affairs. Politicians in general are disposed to harbour 'unmeasurable ambitions' in their breast and to treat such as Gulliver as mere resources to be exploited for their own sectarian interests.

In Brobdignag Gulliver discovers what it feels like to be in the position of the Lilliputians and forced to rely on the goodwill of others physically far superior to oneself. This leaves him perpetually fearful for his physical well-being, and he is often in a state of considerable anxiety about his safety during his stay there amongst a nation of lumbering giants, for whom he is no more than a curiosity. He is at the mercy of whoever is keeping him, as he discovers when his original keeper turns him into the equivalent of a circus novelty act in order to make money out of him, travelling from town to town to put him on display. In what is almost a parody of multiculturalism Gulliver is made to perform while being observed by the Brobdignagians as if he were a museum exhibit rather than a living being. To the Brobdignagians his ways are quaint and laughable, and they are unable to relate to him on a personal level as a creature like themselves. The discrepancy in size merely magnifies the cultural difference between them, which neither can overcome.

Gulliver is brought close to a complete breakdown because of the physical demands made on him by his keeper and the customers he attracts. His keeper's reaction to his declining health is to work Gulliver even harder, exploiting him to the full while he can on the assumption that he will soon die. There are a few exceptions to this somewhat callous attitude amongst the Brobdignagians, in particular his minder, Glumdalclitch, the daughter of the family where he first finds refuge. She remains caring and affectionate towards Gulliver all the while he is in her charge, but this does not save him from maltreatment from jealous individuals while they are both resident

at court. The queen's dwarf, for example, takes a strong dislike to Gulliver, seeing him as a rival for royal attention, and at one point tries to drown him by dropping him into a large bowl of cream on the dining table.

The lack of generosity towards others different from oneself, which Swift regards as so characteristic of human nature, is graphically illustrated by the reaction of the King of Brobdignag to Gulliver's tales of the culture of his homeland:

> Then turning to his first Minister . . . he observed how contemptible a Thing was human Grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive Insects as I; And yet, said he, I dare engage, these Creatures have their Titles and Distinctions of Honour; they contrive little Nests and Burrows, that they call Houses and Cities; they make a Figure in Dress and Equipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray.[18]

Gulliver bridles at the patronising air with which this is delivered, although it is not all that different from his own attitude towards the Lilliputians, amongst whom he wanders inspecting their customs almost as if they were a laboratory experiment set up for his benefit. The idea that each society might actually learn from the other is signally missing: other races are no more than objects of curiosity.

It is to the Brobdignagians' credit, however, that their king is so horrified at Gulliver's description of gunpowder, indignantly refusing Gulliver's offer to introduce it into his kingdom as a weapon to be used against his majesty's enemies. Swift's satire is at least as much at Gulliver's expense at such points, with his 'Indignation to hear our noble Country . . . contemptuously treated', revealing his own sense of clearly misplaced cultural superiority,[19] but the underlying point about the pretensions of human beings strikes home forcefully nevertheless. Such pretensions make it all but impossible that different cultures can ever live together in harmony and mutual respect, and indeed the only beings with which Gulliver feels such an idyllic existence would be possible turn out to be the non-human Houyhnhnms, who hardly treat Gulliver as their equal. (As one critic has put it, what distinguishes the Houyhnhnms is their 'unpleasant coldness [and] self-satisfaction', and Gulliver is to be criticised for his 'exaggerated devotion to them'.)[20] Human beings, of whatever shape or size, are not

well disposed towards each other, particularly when cultural difference comes on the scene. In fact, they have the greatest difficulty making the leap of imagination required to see life from another cultural perspective than their own. They betray a distinct tendency to patronise each other, and assume their own cultural superiority when faced with radically different lifestyles. Multiculturalism in its more positive sense offers little appeal to such self-absorbed individuals.

Even within Europe we cannot rely on respect for cultural difference, however, with the author's characteristically caustic irony coming through in Gulliver's reflections on the lack of worldly knowledge of the Brobdignagian king: 'The want of which Knowledge will ever produce many *Prejudices*, and a certain *Narrowness of Thinking*; from which we and the politer Countries of *Europe* are wholly exempted.'[21] Gulliver's cultural chauvinism stands revealed for all to see. Prejudice and narrowness of thinking are what mark out human nature in general, and although Brobdignagian society has much to commend it, there are still elements of those traits in the king's dismissal of Gulliver and his fellows as 'diminutive Insects' ('impotent and groveling' too, as he arrogantly asserts).[22] Brobdignagians find it almost impossible to take someone like Gulliver seriously, and to that extent they too can be said to be 'imprisoned in their history'.

Gulliver's sense of cultural superiority is probably at its most marked during his stay on the flying island of Laputa, where he finds himself among a race of individuals absorbed in their own peculiar obsessions: 'the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the Discourses of others, without being roused by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing.'[23] This obliviousness to their surroundings can only be overcome by their being gently struck on the mouth, ears or eyes at regular intervals by a bladder wielded by a servant called a Flapper. The most dramatic effect of these intense speculations is to be found in their Academy at Lagado, where Gulliver comes across a series of increasingly bizarre experiments while being shown round: for example, an attempt to extract sunbeams from cucumbers or to return excrement to its original state of edible food. Gulliver is predictably scathing about the entire operation. Indeed, everything about Laputa and its inhabitants proves to be skewed:

> Their Houses are very ill built, the Walls bevil without one right Angle in any Apartment; and this Defect ariseth from the Contempt they bear to practical Geometry; which they despise as vulgar and mechanick[.] . . . I have not seen a more clumsy, awkward, and unhandy People[.] . . . They are very bad Reasoners, and vehemently given to Opposition, unless when they happen to be of the right Opinion, which is seldom their Case.[24]

Gulliver is dismissive about Laputa and its odd ways, remarking that 'I saw nothing in this Country that could invite me to a longer Continuance'.[25] Multicultural coexistence with the Laputans would not seem to be a very desirable objective: as far as Gulliver is concerned they have little to contribute to humankind's stock of learning. As a critique of cultural insularity, the Laputa episode is quite devastating. Here is a society which is unable to establish any firm relationship with the rest of the world, their floating condition neatly symbolising their detachment from everyday reality.

Laputa has its civil discords too, manifested in its uneasy relationship with the continent of Balnibarbi over which it hovers as the putatively ruling force. There has already been a major rebellion in the city of Lindalino, which had almost succeeded in disabling Laputa's mechanism for floating in the air, the intention being to kill the king and install a new government. Balnibarbi itself is in a state of considerable social disarray because of the passion for 'projecting', such as is being carried out at academies like that in Lagado. Because none of the many projecting schemes has been 'yet brought to Perfection . . . the whole Country lies miserably waste, the Houses in Ruins, and the People without Food or Cloaths'.[26] None of this has deterred the inhabitants, however, who remain as committed as ever to wildly experimental projecting, considering this the only way to improve their lot, their faith in its eventual success being unaffected by its present failure to deliver anything at all of value.

The impression of a culture which is incapable of governing itself correctly because of what we would now probably call an obsession with technology is very strong. It may seem mad to act this way, 'not only ludicrous but evil' in Kathleen Williams's assessment of the Laputan lifestyle, but there are various Third World countries which are expending vast sums on weapons or the pursuit of nuclear power, despite widespread poverty amongst their populations[27]. North Korea

and Iran spring readily to mind. The relationship between such countries and the West is fraught, and the cultural divide seemingly unbridgeable. As Gulliver's host in Balnibarbi gently chides him, he has to recognise 'that the different Nations of the World had different Customs', but if these are as diverse as Gulliver's travels are revealing, then there seems little hope for any beneficial cultural exchange.[28] Gulliver cannot understand why they behave the way they do; they cannot understand his objections. A society that contained citizens of all the lands that Gulliver visits would be unworkable, defeating the best efforts of even the most committed of multiculturalists. Cultural diversity as Gulliver experiences it is more like cultural anarchy, with cultures so far apart in their customs as to make any meaningful *rapprochement* between them all but impossible. If there is a common feature, it is the inability to appreciate the perspective of others: even the Houyhnhnms are baffled by the Yahoos, although as ultra-rationalists faced by sheer brutes this is hardly surprising. But one does not sense much of a basis for multiculturalism in any of the societies Gulliver visits.

One possible exception to this anti-multiculturalist outlook is the island of Luggnagg, one of the stops Gulliver makes on his journey from Laputa to Japan. Here he finds a trading nation, in contact with its neighbours, and 'a polite and generous People' who 'shew themselves courteous to Strangers'.[29] But even in this ostensibly happy dominion Gulliver is to encounter a darker side to existence – the Struldbruggs. These creatures are immortal, yet far from turning out to be the 'superiour Beings' Gulliver expects, they prove to be pathetic individuals cut off from their peers and totally lacking in the wisdom that age is supposed to bring.[30] They eventually lose their memory, rendering them almost useless to the rest of society. It is as if they are another race (Struldbruggs are even marked out from the mass by having a large spot over their left eyebrow which changes colour several times over the course of their lives), and the fact that the state declares them legally dead after the age of eighty indicates that their fellow citizens hardly know how to deal with them. Being legally dead carries with it the penalty of their estates passing to their heirs and the Struldbruggs being left to survive on a meagre allowance. They are as close to being classified as non-persons as it is possible to be. The Luggnagians would rather they were not there, and do their best to marginalise and ignore the Struldbrugg community in their midst.

This hardly looks like the multicultural ideal in operation either, with the Struldbruggs being barely tolerated. Once again we get the impression that human beings find it very difficult to deal with the different.

The Luggnagians may be courteous to those like themselves, but even here the court is to be treated with the utmost caution. It is one of its customs that those being presented to the king must '*lick the Dust before his Footstool*';[31] in other words, crawl up to the king on their belly while licking the floor in front of them. If the king turns against anyone, then the floor is sprinkled with poison which kills the unfortunate individual being presented within a day. When a maliciously inclined page deliberately neglects to clean the floor after one such episode, it causes the death of a blameless young noble. Gulliver is left to wonder again at the dangers of court life with its many intrigues. He has already discovered, while on the island of Glubbdubbdrib near Luggnagg, where he is enabled by magic to converse with the dead, that those who have done good service at such courts throughout history are omitted from the public record and go unknown to future ages.

Gulliver's sojourn amongst the Houyhnhnms turns out to be his most dramatic experience of culture shock, and his encounter with the Yahoos has a profound effect on his character. The Yahoos turn out to be Gulliver's worst nightmare: human beings devoid of reason and without a trace of fellow feeling for each other. The contrast with the calm and well-adjusted – if admittedly cold and somewhat self-satisfied – Houyhnhnms is stark. Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master informs him that 'the *Yahoos* were known to hate one another more than they did any different Species of Animals', which hardly suggests a future for multiculturalism there either.[32] The Yahoos represent a throwback to the state of nature, with Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master going on to observe that 'if . . . you throw among five *Yahoos* as much Food as would be sufficient for fifty, they will, instead of eating peaceably, fall together by the Ears, each single one impatient to *have all to it self*'.[33] This is humanity reduced to its most brutish, and the example of the Yahoos is enough to alienate Gulliver himself from the human race, to the extent that he can barely stand the company of his own wife and family when he finally returns to England:

> I must freely confess, the Sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt; . . . And when I began to consider, that by

> copulating with one of the *Yahoo*-Species, I had become a Parent of more; it struck me with the utmost Shame, Confusion and Horror.[34]

Gulliver now finds it all but impossible to cope with the rest of humanity and does his best to live a parallel life to them, spending much of his time in the stables communing with his horses instead.

Gulliver's travels reveal a very odd world populated by some very strange races and species. But it is noticeable that he is just as much in danger from his own kind while on his travels; pirates cast him adrift at one point, and his own crew mutinies against him. Overall, humanity is not a very trustworthy group and little reliance can be placed on its innate goodwill. Civil discord seems to be endemic wherever Gulliver journeys, and even the Houyhnhnms, who appear to have abolished discord completely within their own species, have to deal with the Yahoos, who represent a rogue element in their society. Gulliver's attraction to non-human species becomes all the more understandable after his run of experience at the hands of humankind, and his closing judgement on the entire species is damning:

> I am not in the least provoked at the Sight of a Lawyer, a Pickpocket, a Colonel, a Fool, a Lord, a Gamester, a Politician, a Whoremunger, a Physician, an Evidence, a Suborner, an Attorney, a Traytor, or the like: This is all according to the due Course of Things: But, when I behold a Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind, smitten with *Pride*, it immediately breaks all the Measures of my Patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an Animal and such a Vice could tally together.[35]

At this point one suspects that the character's and the author's misanthropy come into alignment, with humanity being rejected out of hand;[36] the rich, the powerful and the learned being no less 'lumps of deformity' than criminals are, and no section of society seemingly being worthy of praise. The human race would appear to be beyond redemption, with Gulliver wishing to keep contact with it to a minimum in consequence.

CONCLUSION

Swift's is a particularly pessimistic vision of humanity, and he dwells at length on our many weaknesses and foibles: as Frances D. Louis sums it up, '[t]he dominant figure in Swift's satiric universe is man fumbling his way towards knowledge; the dominant event in that pilgrimage is man falling on his face'.[37] Extreme though Swift's assessment of his fellows is, it has a ring of truth when we consider the attitudes to cultural difference in our world. For all the talk of multiculturalism, cultural difference presents a significant obstacle to its implementation. One of the results of this is that, as various commentators have complained, multiculturalism is in danger of becoming a byword for cultural separatism, where there is minimal contact between cultures who instead lead parallel lives, thereby protecting their assumed cultural 'purity'. At the other end of the spectrum of debate are those who insist that all immigrants should seek to integrate fully into the society they have joined and to efface their differences with the host culture, arguing that multiculturalism runs the risk of undermining the ideals of liberal democracy.[38] To such thinkers, multiculturalism is a regressive step. Arguments against the use of the Islamic veil, which surface with great regularity in Western Europe these days, tend to see it as an expression of otherness and as such deeply symbolic of the threat an authoritarian theocratic culture could pose to a secular one like our own.

It is a positive step that multiculturalism is being explored as much as it is, because the West has proved such a magnet for other cultures, its prosperity and opportunities for economic advancement far outstripping the rest of the globe, and therefore being extremely attractive to citizens of impoverished Third World nations. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The social tensions that immigration has caused will only be eased once there is a recognition that all cultures have the right to exist and to express themselves in their own particular ways; but the issue of just how far that expression should be allowed to go remains. Undoubtedly there has to be some degree of integration, but that does raise the fear of complete assimilation, and cultures as a rule, particularly traditional ones, find that very threatening. It is a prospect that often has the unhelpful effect of making such groups retreat further into their own cultural system. Even if full assimilation is not demanded, there is still the barrier of suspicion of

cultural difference to be overcome – no less a problem on the part of the host nation than its immigrant communities, it has to be emphasised. We may not share Swift's extreme pessimism about human nature, but, like Gulliver, we live in a world rife with feelings of cultural superiority, where far too many of us are in practice imprisoned in our history. Unless we overcome the attitudes involved in our imprisonment then a truly multicultural society is unlikely to emerge, but it will need a significant commitment to compromise on all sides that is only intermittently visible at present. Misunderstanding of each other is still, unfortunately, very much the rule in human affairs.

23. Ibid., pp. 185–6.
24. Ibid., pp. 185, 186.
25. Ibid., p. 203.
26. Ibid.
27. David Trotter, *Circulation: Defoe, Dickens, and the Economies of the Novel*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988, p. 37.
28. *Crusoe*, pp. 14–15.
29. Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1927.
30. For more on the contradictions and complexities of Crusoe's belief system, see my *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
31. Maximilian E. Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962, p. 48; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), ed. J. B. Wharey, revd. Roger Sharrock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, 1960.
32. Bishop Simon Patrick, *Fifteen Sermons upon Contentment and Resignation to the Will of God*, London, 1719, Sermon X, p. 247.
33. Ian A. Bell, *Defoe's Fictions*, London: Croom Helm, 1985, p. 108.
34. Ibid., p. 98.
35. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), ed. Alastair Fowler, London and New York: Longman, 1971.
36. For one such prominent scientific convert to intelligent design, see Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
37. See Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867), vol. I, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, London: J. M. Dent, 1930, revd. 1972, pp. 50–2.

3 *Gulliver's Travels*, Multiculturalism and Cultural Difference

1. Pascal Bruckner, 'Enlightenment Fundamentalism or Racism of the Anti-Racists?', http://www.signandsight.com, 24 January 2007.
2. Ibid.
3. Jonathan Swift, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, vols I–V, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–5, vol. III, p. 103.
4. Frances D. Louis, *Swift's Anatomy of Misunderstanding: A Study of Swift's Epistemological Imagination in* A Tale of a Tub *and* Gulliver's Travels, London: George Prior, 1981, p. xxv.
5. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Claude Rawson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 276.
6. Ibid., p. 43.
7. Ibid., p. 29.
8. Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*, Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1958, p. 158.
9. *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 43.
10. Ibid.

11. Here I diverge sharply from Williams's reading of Swift's works, that they are designed to show the virtues of 'practical and fruitful compromise' (*Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*, p. vi). Swift to me seems to demonstrate just how unlikely this is to occur.
12. *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 42.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 108.
15. Ibid., p. 60.
16. Ibid., p. 47.
17. Ibid., p. 69.
18. Ibid., p. 96.
19. Ibid.
20. Kathleen Williams, 'Gulliver's Voyage to the Houyhnhnms', in Richard Gravil, ed., *Swift*, Gulliver's Travels: *A Casebook*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974, pp. 136–47 (p. 137). Critics are very divided on how to read the Houyhnhnms: for an analysis of the spectrum of opinion on the topic, see James L. Clifford, 'Gulliver's Fourth Voyage: "Hard" and "Soft" Schools of Interpretation', in Larry S. Champion, ed., *Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1974, pp. 33–49. For a recent positive interpretation of the Houyhnhnms see Ian Higgins, *Jonathan Swift*, Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004, chapter 4.
21. *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 122.
22. Ibid., p. 123.
23. Ibid., p. 146.
24. Ibid., p. 150.
25. Ibid., p. 179.
26. Ibid., p. 165.
27. Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise*, 1958, p. 17.
28. *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 163.
29. Ibid., p. 193.
30. Ibid., p. 195.
31. Ibid., p. 190.
32. Ibid., p. 242.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 271.
35. Ibid., p. 276.
36. Claude Rawson has suggested that author and narrator are not all that easy to separate from each other in a general sense in the narrative, arguing that Gulliver is not 'sufficiently independent from Swift' to be a true 'novel-character' (C. J. Rawson, *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader: Studies in Swift and Our Time*, London and Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 27).
37. Louis, *Swift's Anatomy*, p. 123.
38. In a notorious case, the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who espoused such views very strongly through the political party he founded ('Pym Fortuyn's List'), arousing considerable controversy in doing so, was assassinated in 2002 by someone opposed to his position.