

# **Narrative Satire in Context: The Journey and Wisdom in West and East Europe**

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of satirical works from four cultural spheres of Europe. Moving among texts in English, French, Russian, and Serbian, I investigate the technical and creative characteristics that define the genre of narrative satire. Distinguished stylistically from other literary genres and from theoretical, philosophical and ideological discourses, narrative satire provides a pragmatic, sober and realistic outlook on social life, and emphasizes a self-critical and subversive perspective on the culture of its origin. I argue for a context-based reevaluation of satire and its role in the history of both East and West European cultural canons.

The study shows how various writers employed satirical narratives and plots based on the concept of the journey to reflect on decisive social and political issues from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Satire emerges as a particularly relevant cultural agent in my discussion of several influential artists who left an indelible mark on their respective cultures. I focus on Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire's *Candide*, Nikolai Leskov's *The Enchanted Wanderer*, and Radoje Domanović's *Ruminations of a Serbian Ox*. I interpret the connections between these writers as evidence of an overlooked and important transnational and transeuropean literary tradition.

This study testifies to the long-lasting and transformative power of satire, as it travels across cultures and languages. Each of my chapters focuses on a unique cultural context and moment. I compare and contrast the conditions in the early eighteenth century England and pre-revolutionary France to the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century processes in Russia and the Kingdom of Serbia. I explore the unique literary and historical circumstances of each writer

as I make an argument that knowledge of the context is essential for comprehension of satire.

Ultimately, I interpret satire as a form of knowledge and philosophical wisdom, and a way to learn about the past and think about the present. I emphasize the significance of the journey as a narrative device. The journey is not just a theme or topic, but the structural principle that generates the narratives I discuss. The journey is a way to tell stories, experience the world and acquire profound knowledge that I call “satirical wisdom.” Through narration based on movement and action, satire manages to travel between cultures and enlighten its readers. My dissertation presents four detailed case studies to support this argument.

## **Introduction and Overview**

This dissertation is an effort to emphasize the transformative power of satirical literature across cultures and centuries. I analyze satirical works by four European authors: Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, Nikolai Leskov and Radoje Domanović. I document the background of these writers' complex literary works and show their significance in context, as well as their importance for our own time. At the heart of my project is a claim, and a hope of sorts, that there exists a literary tradition of narrative satire specific enough to be acknowledged and described. I dub this subtle, understudied literary genre “narrative satire,” in contradistinction to verse satire and the novel. I analyze similar and vital treats in different writers whose prose may be of different cloth, but – I argue – uses similar weaving techniques. I describe an undercurrent, a network of cracks and fissures, that does not coalesce to a grand plan and does not result in a triumph. Rather, it provides a humorous comfort of some sort. I trace the lines of unity, continuity and similarity – not sameness, but not irredeemable difference either. Similarity and comparability are cultural values and attitudes that provide grounds for this study.

I contend that, despite their cultural differences and contexts, the satirical authors I analyze share a predilection for thinking through movement and change. The narratives I describe are all based on the journey, and spatial and intellectual movement. As such, they also make special demands from their readers. Narration and the journey join forces. The imaginative act and imaginative creation require that we, as readers, suspend our strong opinions and



convictions, and follow along to see where the narrative and imaginative journey takes us.

In this approach, I hope to reflect the works themselves. Satire has a lot of good points, but it offers no big arguments or claims. Good observation and detection are more important than overwrought and inflated argumentation that is majestically parodied in Swift's *Battle of the Books*. Thinking about humor and satire requires agility, grace of style and commentary. In my effort to demonstrate the advent of the genre of narrative satire, I take an effort to attentively describe the literary works I discuss, before making general remarks about the essential connections between satire and the journey.

As a whole, the dissertation moves toward a broader social, historical, and theoretical perspective, as I account for the emergence and development of the genre of narrative satire across European cultures over the course of two and a half centuries. I show how this genre was driven by a profound and wise skepticism that provided the comfort of wit and the luxury of reason in a context where spiritual life and free thinking were routinely repressed. I also show that in our own time, satire remains an indispensable educational resource and a means of critical dissent that provides a sense of purpose and vigor to the field of literary studies.

The principal aim of my study is to show that, differences and uniqueness of these writers notwithstanding, an attentive reading of their works indicates that a certain type of dry, intelligent, skeptical and witty prose coalesced into a special type of wisdom and worldview with shared values and assumptions, and in so doing formed a literary legacy worth exploring and re-evaluating. I argue that narrative satire is a significant strand in the history of comparative and world literature, and represents an overlooked and under-appreciated tradition in the canonical literature of the West. I argue that the sharp satirical spirit emanates a highly potent and

subversive sort of acute, anti-philosophical and even anti-intellectual wisdom. I analyze and point to the cognitive, ethical, political, and – most important – aesthetic benefits of reading, teaching and adopting this wisdom as the unstable horizon of one's worldview. I claim that the skeptical and particularistic consciousness of the artists whom I discuss makes for a powerful paradigm through which to instill independent thinking and derive pleasure in art.

Another contribution that I make in my study of narrative satire is to differentiate narrative satire from the long tradition of verse satire and the genre of the novel under which satire has often been subsumed. I discuss some of the distinctive features of narrative satire, and emancipate it from other traditions and genres. I explain the role of the satirical plot, the role of the reader in satire, and the role of the context for the creation and reception of satire. I pay special attention to the role of the satirist, whom I understand as a liminal, marginalized figure who provides a unique and critical perspective on one's own culture.

Finally, I emphasize the subject of the journey in satire. The plots of all of the works that I analyze in my dissertation are based on a journey of some sort. The journey is of paramount importance for the worldview, wisdom and structure of narrative satire. I understand the journey not only as a theme within the story, but also as a narrative device that enables the satirical critique to take place. I show how the journey operates at the level of the plot, and how it generates and drives the plot. I show that the journey is the most conducive form of narration for the satirist as a marginalized observer of his or her own culture, that is, as someone who is at the same time an outsider and an insider.

In this regard, it is important to make a clear distinction between the key structural principles of the novel and narrative satire. Both genres have proven to be difficult to define,

especially with the dissolution of “classical” conventions throughout the twentieth century. Still, the effect of this looseness when it comes to defining the two genres has resulted in the subsumption of satire into the novel. Satire is often regarded as a quality or feature of another genre (primarily the novel) rather than a literary form in its own right. It is said that Dickens or Balzac are satirical writers, for instance, but satire in their works is taken to be an element of their novels, a thread in the longer narrative and not a separate genre. In case of the novelists, and precisely because of the resilience of the novel, so well described in Bakhtin's studies on Dostoevsky, this subsumption of satire could be seen as justified. Satirical attitudes and above all satirical irony can indeed be an element of a novel, and a rather prominent one, but the novel remains a broader, larger form whose scope surpasses the sharp, “militant” overtones of satire.

However, this should not preclude a distinction of satire as a separate genre with its own techniques and properties. A novel with the elements of satire is not the same thing as a full-fledged satirical novel, and conversely, a short story, or a novella with certain satirical undertones is not the same thing as a piece of narrative satire written in such a way that chief structural principles of satire are essential for the interpretation and appreciation of such a narrative. It is impossible to draw a neat and unquestionable line of division, and to insist on doing so would perhaps be pedantic. It is important, however, to keep in mind the general sense of difference between the genres, especially as the keenness and extremeness of narrative satire can be overlooked if satire is subsumed under the heading of the novel.

John Snyder has made fine and helpful distinctions along these lines. He distinguishes between the organicist formal criteria employed to define a novel, and the more style and language focused “rhetorical standards” at the heart of satire. Furthermore, the novel tends

toward aesthetic seamlessness and organic unity, and satire strives to make a point, to instruct; it has a didactic direction (Snyder 136). Again, these distinctions apply more neatly to the works of the nineteenth century than to those of the twentieth century, but they are by no means irrelevant. Diverse tones, attitudes and structural principles can be easily overlooked if all fiction of substantial length is categorized as a novel. A certain aesthetic amorphousness and anomie emerge. Nothing matters any more, everything becomes a “novel,” or even more vaguely, “fiction.”

In contrast to this, I argue that narrative satire is a distinguished genre that comes of age in the works of Jonathan Swift. Previous examples can surely be seen as its predecessors, but not as full-fledged satire written in prose. Rabelais' writings are often hilariously satirical, and their loose structure is reminiscent of the later satirical works. The same could be said of the picaresque novel. It is worth pointing out that *Don Quixote* was translated to English in 1700, and *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in 1693. Swift had an opportunity to read both Rabelais and Cervantes. Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* (1511) is another, even older predecessor of satire, albeit the “warmth” of the Renaissance lingers in it and it does not quite have the caustic bite of later satire. In Britain itself, satire had many forms and purposes, and in addition to the long tradition of verse satire, satirists employed prose frequently and for various ends, often petty and low ones. So, on the one hand, the Renaissance spirit allowed for a libertine and critically inclined mindset to emerge with a new vigor, and on the other hand, the use of prose allowed for a less “dignified” form of satire to evolve into a serious, multifaceted and multipurpose genre quite divorced from both novel and verse satire.

Another significant aspect of the question is the self-awareness of a writer with regard to

the genre. Rabelais, Cervantes or Erasmus did not care much, if at all, about the genre of their works. Critics and readers often call these works “novels” or “satirical novels” or “parodies” or, somewhat anachronistically in the case of *In Praise to Folly*, “essay,” but these works remain generically undefined, and perhaps undefinable. It is no wonder that Swift who, by contrast, wrote with a mature awareness of his genre, and gave a “finished” shape to it, wrote in a similar spirit and found a lot to emulate in these works. However, his writings are more defined in terms of genre, and are more rhetorically anchored. Many of the figures of speech and rhetorical modes that Swift employs were already tried out, and presented in the form of sharp, vigorous prose, and even practiced in Elizabethan grammar schools. Irony, hyperbole, digression, mock-encomium (or adoxography), mock-utopia, grotesque, periphrasis, *reductio ad absurdum*, and many other tools indispensable to a satirist were employed with liberty and dexterity, opening a path to the establishment of prose satire as a genre. Still, I make a case that Swift's groundbreaking satires mobilized the full potential and crystallized the genre of narrative satire, with its crisp and concise style of a novella that is decidedly, and even defiantly different from the novel.

### **Satire As the Journey**

Movement is very important in narrative satire. Narration and characters move a lot. Meandering, digressive narration follows characters as they endure extravagant adventures. One of the main contentions of this study is that the narrative mode of the journey, as well as the theme of the journey, are integral to narrative satire. Swift employs wild, digressive narration with great skill in virtually all of his writings, especially in his prose satires. He does it with ease

and success in *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels*, his major work I discuss in the first chapter. In the Travels Swift achieves his trademark stylistic equilibrium and simplicity, gives a more mature and definitive touch to narrative satire, and distills the acerbic undertone of narration into a standard “pitch” of satire. Book IV in particular establishes the tone and attitude that differs prose satire from verse satire. The intensity, unsparing criticism, and even outright misanthropy were previously unimaginable in the degree in which they are expressed in Swift. *Gulliver's Travels* is a particularly brutal and confrontational book that dispenses with all authority and cajolery – verse satire was often written not just to challenge authority, but to earn its protection; what better example than Dryden? – and employs the journey as its main tool and mode of critique.

It is, therefore, crucial to pay attention to how structuring the plot on incessant travel shapes the narration itself, giving it loose, serpentine and “arabesque” contours. When travel is not used as a theme, it is less obvious, but the structural principle remains the same. Narrative satire operates through incessant and digressive movement, and it does not have the “building blocks” and solidity of the nineteenth-century novel. If there is a genre of the novel that is structurally akin to narrative satire, it is the modernist novel. Woolf, Joyce or Proust write in a similar “arabesque,” “non-teleological” way and employ the journey, either spiritual or literal, to organize narration. Another close relative of narrative satire is Sterne's anomalous *Tristram Shandy*. I also argue that East European satirists such as Russian Nikolai Leskov and Serb Radoje Domanović “push” narrative satire into the territory of aesthetic modernism, rather than that of realism.

What is binding the works I will be analyzing is not their conformity to a clear-cut notion

or definition, but their kindred spirit and sensibility. Still, an understanding of satire entails a broad body of literary works which expose and ridicule error, vice and folly by virtue of linguistic excess, heavy use of devices such as hyperbole, irony and adoxography, unrestrained mixing of ideas and categories, narrative meandering and mischievousness, and, finally, persistent divestment of ideas and notions typically endowed with great prestige and dignity.

Swift was a major synthesizer and innovator of the early modern tradition of the English language satire. Swift brought the light-hearted, playful verses of satirical poets such as Dryden to earth, so to speak. He gave it a form of sharp, elucidating, intelligent and ultimately serious prose. He made satire an independent, powerful vehicle of understanding the world. He gave satire the force of a worldview. It is where the *satirical spirit* manifested its strength, seriousness and sharpness, and broke through as a force on its own, and in a form of its own – the one of dense, mischievous but above all poignant prose. The tightness of style, and the critical edge of prose are Swift's key accomplishments, and a model for narrative satire, assuming a more coherent and defined shape than its predecessors such as the great Renaissance writers Cervantes, Rabelais, and Erasmus.

*Gulliver's Travels* were written and published at the beginning of the eighteenth century. To the contrary, Domanović is almost a modern writer, who died in 1908. Yet, his prose is made of the same cloth, and imbued with the same artistic spirit. His enemies are the same – social hypocrisy, ludicrous patriotism, complacency of petty minds, oppressive religious hierarchy. These are also the main targets of Voltaire's or Leskov's ridicule, in their particular, but similar-enough styles and narratives. There is a sense of correspondence and confluence, a similar sensibility and worldview, that show consistency, continuity, and a sense of legacy. These are all

literary and cultural outlaws and outliers.

Hence, it is crucial to demonstrate the pertinent connections and continuities – stylistic and thematic – through each individual chapter. The chapters will center on individual writers and their works, but my comparative method and comparative awareness will reveal a continuous, long-running streak of relevant analogy, correspondence, and congruity.

One of the binding elements – a ground for comparison, indeed – is the subject of the journey. Swift's *Travels*, a cleverly orchestrated narrative pandemonium that presages Joyce and Beckett; Voltaire's *Candide*, a narrative about a character who is “*toujours allant, toujours souffrant*” (*always going, always suffering*) (Fenaux 1982) on his impossible journey; the ramblings of Leskov's enchanted wanderer Ivan Flyagin, and Domanović's sad but funny stories of exiled and naive patriots discovering their beloved, glorious homeland as a dismal den of corrupt thieves – all these stories resonate with a sense of narrative and thematic commonality, and with a kinship of spirit based on the thematics of the journey.

Of course, there are still other threads which I will try to tie together, ranging from the peculiar use of artistic devices such as hyperbole and irony, stylistic mannerisms manifest in meandering and exhibitionist syntax, thematic units such as the humorous use of excessive and unsolicited violence, or an overall distrustful and subversive attitude to the prominent and dominant questions of each respective epoch, particularly with respect to fervent ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism and religious fanaticism.

Lastly, I will strive to weave the main threads of my analyses into a resilient web of insights that account for the satirical view of the world and its deep and restrained wisdom. Refraining from exaggerated conclusions, my study will try to conjoin the moral, political, and



aesthetic lessons, and articulate the skeptical wisdom of the satirical heretics and outcasts whose art I analyze. In this way, my thesis will take an important step outside of the “isolated” and “self-sufficient” realm of the works, and make a meaningful contribution to the current scholarship on satire.

### **Methodology**

My main goal is to stay true to the tradition of comparative literature. By this I mean writing a study that will devote its attention to literary works in several languages, and deal with them in the language of the original. As I mentioned before, an insistence on comparing the works of art and their language, that is, a constant paralleling of the devices employed by the artists, will be the main instrument of creating cohesion and maintaining the flow of my argument. An awareness of the unique linguistic and cultural qualities will make the act of putting these works side by side all the more thought-provoking. It will also make the common qualities all the more demonstrable. Sustained attention to these subtleties and sustained comparison and correlation of the textual particulars will be the best test for the overarching argument about the continuity of the genre of narrative satire.

My method is not fully argumentative. I rely on the technique of *ekphrasis*, or *paraphrasis*. I strive to give a sustained and patient attention to the way the works unfold. Just as *ekphrasis* provides an intensely focused, somewhat dramatized description of a visual work of art, and brings to life the object of its observation, so does a technique of *paraphrasis* give an accurate and immersive description of a literary work in the full richness of its details. The passionate and invested attitude of a critic is important and needed. However, this approach

needs to be counter-balanced by the ability to remain detached and observant. In my close readings, I employ a cautious, detailed and self-aware process of interpretation, with obligatory attention to the text and techniques used. The benefit of this is that it discourages *apriori* proclamations of arguments and ideas. Like the humor and wisdom of the satirical masterpieces I am studying, the main argument and recognition are “delayed,” and expounded late in each chapter and this study as a whole. I want to make readers want to revisit the actual works – to re-read the *Travels*, *Candide*, *The Enchanted Wanderer* and Domanović's dark but beautiful stories.

I try to think of all these works through an inductive and empirical lens. One might think of each chapter as a case study executed through a careful detection, enumeration, and investigation of the many particulars comprising a work of art. This type of approach requires the scrupulous ascertainment and gathering of details, a “walk through” approach to the works that can yield results – and reward their readers with wisdom and knowledge – only once the tiresome toil of processing all of the relevant details is completed. By refraining from making a strong, “conventional” argument, I hope to avoid the interpretative *devitalisation* of a work of art, to borrow a term of Florian Bratu. Patient observation and commentary serve the wonderful satirical works I am describing better. As Caryl Emerson puts it in her juxtaposing of Boris Eichenbaum with Viktor Skhlovskii, a critic thrives when he or she is “willing to serve the individual artwork” rather than striving to “illustrate a bold theoretical premise with snatches of fictional text” (280).

My dissertation also underscores the continuity and permanence of humor in literature. All comedy, including satire, is rooted in the practical and real, even “banal.” The structure of the Greek tragedies was such that it included as its vital part a “satirical play,” an intermezzo of a

sort, a playful and humorous respite from the emotionally demanding happenings of the tragic play. Far from being restricted to the role of a provider of so-called “comic relief,” humor in ancient art evolved into its own genres and forms.<sup>1</sup> The ancient mime turned the social and cosmic hierarchies on their head, and it served as the source of Greek comedy. In Aristophanes' comedies<sup>2</sup> – and arguably even in Aristotle's theory of humor<sup>3</sup> – as well as in medieval farces,<sup>4</sup> in the Renaissance theater, Rabelais and Cervantes, and early modern satire, we have evidence of the protean creativity that warrants recognition as a form of knowledge or wisdom. As Eric Vivier observes, pointing out the limitations of theories of satire that seem to exhaust their efforts at the level of generic definitions and the questions of form: “The deeply controversial nature of satire requires us to think about texts in terms of what they do – as agents in a culture continually reshaping, reinforcing, and reproducing itself” (2014).

In other words, the wisdom of satire fosters clear thinking driven by sound skepticism that seeks truth and evidence, and in so doing reshapes culture. It dispels confusion, and makes human relations transparent, while avoiding unnecessary abstraction and speculation. It affirms reason and exposes human folly. As such, satire makes for a particularly useful form of knowledge and, importantly, self-knowledge. In particular, I deem the profundity and “edge” to be a feature of narrative satire that distinguishes it from “mere” comedy, or even verse satire. Narrative satire belongs to the comedic spectrum, to be sure, but its acerbic humor and “serious” quality, its ability – or, in fact, willingness – to engage the darkest of subjects (such as evil and extreme violence) give it a distinctive quality and a sense of lasting social and cultural presence.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the ancient theories of the laughable, see Grant 1924.

<sup>2</sup> For the emergence and definition of comedy in Aristophanes, see Silk 2002.

<sup>3</sup> For an attempt to unearth Aristotle's theory of humor, see Janko 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Farces were a structural equivalent of the ancient satirical plays, this time interpolated (literally “stuffed”) into the course of medieval mystery plays. *Farcire* means “to stuff” in Latin.

The authors whom I discuss share an unapologetic scorn and a humorously critical spirit in their relation to human vice and folly – a hallmark of great satire and the satirical view of the world. A core supposition of narrative satire is that something is wrong, unsatisfactory, and imperfect about society and the way it is organized. No satirical work praises human life. Instead, satire presents a skeptical, sometimes scornful, view of its subject and is associated with a marginal perspective of a social outcast. This is why this study emphasizes the importance of the cultural context. A reader has to unearth and decode a plethora of references and contextual allusions in order to understand the writer's tone and mood, and the overall attitude expressed. I interpret the works and values of very different authors – Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, Nikolai Leskov and Radoje Domanović – in their precise and unique cultural circumstances that cover four different cultures and languages and almost two centuries. With this in mind, it becomes difficult, in fact, impossible, to make a decisive set of propositions and arguments.

My study, instead, offers observations about similarities, tendencies, and affinities that can be contrasted and compared, and that, on the whole, constitute a literary legacy and a genre. My approach is that of a medieval illuminator. I mimic the caution and patience of the writers I engage with. I offer unobtrusive commentary on the margins of brilliant literary works whose prowess surpasses the limitations of their ideology and time. Yet, this method yields concrete results. Through *ekphrasis*, a genre emerges. Methods, styles and the overall way of seeing and experiencing the world coalesce into a distinct and pliable genre within the broader literary form of satire.<sup>5</sup> My “soft” method aims to present a persuasive case for a legitimate tradition of

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<sup>5</sup> In my interpretation, the term “genre” does not have an all-encompassing meaning it usually has in Anglophone criticism. In terms of literary classification, I use the term “genre” in the sense that might be more accurately described (in English) as a “sub-genre.” However, I deem it more practical to use the term “genre” in this study, assuming a literary phenomenon that is “smaller” and “narrower” than a literary “form” or “mode” such as the novel or satire “in general.”

narrative satire that shares a serious and profound (albeit “low”) view of the world, and partakes in a shared form of knowledge – the “satirical wisdom.” With this in mind, I interpret narrative satire as a transnational – or, at the very least – paneuropean phenomenon.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

In Chapter I titled “Jonathan Swift and the Advent of Narrative Satire” I start by presenting Swift as an originator of narrative satire. I show how Jonathan Swift used humor to criticize British expansionism and excessive nationalist pride. In his major work, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Swift mocked the folly of human greed and desire to conquer and subjugate others. He also exposed the excesses of ecclesiastic and bureaucratic institutions, giving a dark vision of human nature and life. In so doing he originated the genre of narrative satire on which I am focusing, and provided a model for other writers to follow. Swift established satire as a serious, high-minded and critically charged literary genre. I make a case for Swift's seminal role in the upsurge of “satirical wisdom” characterized by the the practical and self-critical enterprise of narrative satire, and I account for various literary and rhetorical techniques – including parody, irony, hyperbole and adoxography – that gave shape to the genre.

My analysis proceeds through analysis of the four books comprising *Gulliver's Travels*. I juxtapose four different voyages undertaken by the protagonist and analyze the subtle workings of language and style that produce Swift's remarkable satire. The voyage to the Lilliput is contrasted to the voyage to Brobdingnag and interpreted in terms of relativism of size. The smallness of the Lilliputians and the gigantic stature of the Brobdingnagians conceal the simplicity of Swift's wisdom and insight. Behind the seeming contrast, there lies similarity of

customs, as well as shared inclination toward error and folly. Book III is interpreted as an uncanny anticipation of the totalitarian societies of the twentieth century. I provide analysis of how Gulliver's journey teaches him about the propensity of human cultures to misuse the great inventions of science and mathematics. Finally, Gulliver's voyage to Houyhnhnmland – the land of horses – makes for an ultimate anthropological, but also satirical, foray. I interpret Book IV as a profound manifestation of satirical wisdom and the prime example of the ability of the satirist to reach self-knowledge by means of the journey.

In the wake of Swift's breakthrough, the French satirist and philosopher Voltaire adopted the same critical spirit during his exile in England, and applied the same critical attitude in his satire *Candide* (1759). In this polemical attack against the optimistic philosophy of the great German philosopher G. W. von Leibniz, Voltaire ridicules the notion that the world can be explained through abstract reasoning, and pleads for empirical and sober inquiry and humorous awareness of mankind's humble stature in the universe. Voltaire continues along the same path Swift has opened, and adds to the sharp satirical bite of the genre, especially since his literary masterwork was published anonymously and disseminated illicitly (to great public interest), turning satire into a particularly powerful and accessible vehicle of dissent. With this in mind, Chapter II “*Candide's* Journey Around the Globe” analyzes how Voltaire’s critique of French culture demonstrates the importance of intellectual honesty and a self-critical attitude toward one's own country. It also shows how satire adopted a more significant public role and came to exert a more prominent influence. My contribution emphasizes the dissident, even rebellious nature of Voltaire's work, and documents the powerful impact it had on its readership over the years. The chapter asserts that narrative satire became a reputable and accomplished genre

capable of articulating sharp and uncompromising critique, unafraid of political and religious authority.

In this chapter, I address several topics and devices that are essential to narrative satire. I discuss the plot structure and the role of the journey in it. I analyze Voltaire's use of irony and insinuation as polemical and satirical techniques. I explain the contextual and cultural background of Voltaire's satire, and shed light on its roots in the Gallic spirit (*esprit gaulois*). Special attention is paid to one of the central topics of this study – violence, especially violence in a mechanical and caricatural form. Voltaire's treatment of violence is both comic and horrifying, and my reading of *Candide* invites readers on an adventurous and at times shocking journey.

On that note, I also discuss the role of the reader in satire, arguing for a proactive reading experience that encourages a sense of participation and agency, and fulfills the mission of satire to provide wisdom to its readers. The final sections of the chapter discuss the relationship between the journey and utopia, and the relationship between boredom, or *ennui*, and the need for travel and action. The chapter ends with an analysis of Voltaire's own contribution to satirical wisdom. The famous final words of *Candide*, “Let us cultivate our garden,” are understood as an invitation to humble, moderate and sober life. I interpret the final episode that takes place in Constantinople as a powerful example of the role of the journey in acquisition of wisdom and self-knowledge.

Chapter III titled “The *Skaz* and ‘Reduced’ Humor in Leskov's Satire” is an attempt to show how narrative satire itself was able to travel across cultures and borders. The innovative efforts of Swift and Voltaire left an indelible mark on the national literatures of England, Ireland

and France, but their influence also expanded into other cultural spheres, notably Russia. Torn between the desire to uphold its own decidedly Russian Orthodox identity and the impetus to open itself to Western European cultures, nineteenth-century Russia absorbed foreign influence with simultaneous eagerness and reluctance. The work of Nikolai Leskov bears witness to this rich and contradictory cultural dynamic, as I argue in the third chapter. Leskov's popular novella *The Enchanted Wanderer* (1873) is one of the great achievements of Russian literature. The sharp, playful prose shows great resilience and power and possesses its own unique features and narrative techniques that draw from Russian folklore. Basing his narrative style on the imitation of oral speech of the common people – a technique called “skaz” – Leskov developed a particularly refined way to deliver his satirical portrayal of the contradictions of the Russian society. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the author uses the *skaz* to present an astute and understated critique of the Russian society and its values. I rely on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of “reduced humor” to explain Leskov's sophisticated narrative style and make a case that his seemingly benign and fond account of Russia is indeed satirical.

This point comes to prominence especially in the sections in which I discuss the topic of excessive and absurd violence, and the topic of cultural prejudice. Leskov portrays Russia as mired in irreconcilable contradictions and harsh customs. Ivan Flyagin, the novella's protagonist, embodies this dynamic fraught with tension and friction that come to prominence during Flyagin's voyage into the Asian part of the Russian Empire. I argue that, ultimately, Leskov aims to show Russia's needless fear of its Asian, “Tatar,” Other, and to interrogate in a subtle, yet satirical, way the prevalent attitudes and cultural “myths” of his time.

Finally, Chapter IV explores the emergence of satire in late nineteenth-century Serbia,



torn by intense dynastic power struggles. Subversive and satirical literature posed a particularly significant threat to the absolutist tendencies of the monarch, as Serbia, like Russia, was trying to find a balance between the assertion of its own identity and the need to import Western ideas and values. “Domanović's Voyage Back Home: Nothing There” highlights the innovative and creative work of the Serbian satirist Radoje Domanović, whose oeuvre stands as one of the most daring, honorable, and worthy examples of subversive creativity in Yugoslav literature.

Domanović criticizes excessive nationalist pride, anthropocentrism, political and institutional corruption, military fanaticism and the gullibility of the general populace. The writer's oeuvre becomes not only a form of wisdom and understanding of the sociopolitical reality, but a true *modus vivendi*, a way of life and a means of spiritual and moral survival for his readers.

Domanović's masterpieces provide a deep philosophical wisdom that combines the author's free-spirited wit with the mournful observation of his environment.

Chapter IV treats the subject of patriotism, which is one of Domanović's main themes and a staple of sorts of narrative satire. I see Domanović's treatment of patriotism as a merciless attack on what I call “collective narcissism.” Domanović ridicules the unfounded and excessive love of one's own country and the haughtiness and pride that have no backing. A great patriot himself, Domanović found it hard to reconcile the aspirations of his country with the country's reality. Therefore, the author's stories typically tell a tale of a nightmarish journey in which a passionate patriot desperately seeks his beloved homeland without being able to find it.

Paradoxically, the journey starts from the outside – as if the patriotic traveler were already exiled – and its ultimate revelation is the one of disillusionment and betrayal.

However, complacency and conceit do not stop at the collective sense of superiority over

other nations. It extends to the way “superior” humans see animals. Domanović’s treatment of human-animal relations lays bare the misguided narcissism of humankind. My chapter analyzes the rich use of animal metaphors in Domanović in order to show the writer’s satirical penchant to provocatively equalize humans and animals. What is more, one of the author’s most beautiful stories, *Ruminations of a Serbian Ox*, presents a train of thought – a mental journey of sorts – of a seemingly common ox in which the ox is shown as morally and intellectually superior to humans. This perspective allows me to “push” my interpretation of the story toward the field of animal studies, and to show surprising signs of the modernist sensibility in a writer that would be typically understood as a nineteenth century realist. In fact, I situate Domanović between Serbian Literature, Russian classics and Western modernism, in an effort to underscore a complex mixture of circumstances and influences that was particularly favorable for the emergence of an explosive satirical talent.

My conclusion ties together various threads discussed in the analyses of the four writers and their national traditions. I revisit the topics that are essential for narrative satire. I summarize the relationship of satire to violence and evil and the power of satire to transmute the terror of violence through mechanical and absurdist humor. I foreground satire’s moral and intellectual superiority to authority and power. I assert that satire is a form of power, as well as form of patriotism whose main duty is to subvert and criticize patriotic complacency. Finally, my thesis goes full circle by contrasting the profound wisdom of satire to satire’s main targets – human vice and folly. I highlight the role of the journey as an instrument of self-knowledge and self-discovery, and as the ultimate way to reap the fruit of cultivating one’s own garden – satirical wisdom.

## CHAPTER I

### Jonathan Swift and the Advent of Narrative Satire

#### Introduction

*Gulliver's Travels* provides great material that lends itself to the analysis of the relationship of the journey and satire. Better yet, satire can be shown "in action." Its main techniques as well as spiritual and philosophical preoccupations can be gradually explained by virtue of tracing the various stages of the journey itself. I will add that scholarly expressions such as "structural principle," "device" or "discourse" can help, but also inevitably lead into mechanical, inorganic criticism if they are not accompanied by an awareness of profound significance of the journey for the outlook, that is, a particular view of the world presented in Swift's best known work. The journey drives the narration, but it also shapes the world and the mind of the traveler, and puts the reader into immediate contact with the practical, "real life," as well as "eternal" questions of existence.

There are two poles, two dominant traditions of interpreting Jonathan Swift's work. There is a well-established historicist tradition that emphasizes the context and historical circumstances. This approach is convincingly articulated by Griffin's notion of "historicist understanding" of satire (127). According to Griffin, the rhetorical "particulars" of satire must be "defined in terms of historical context. To assess the satirist's purpose and strategy, we need to know for whom and against whom the satire is written." Historical context, Griffin writes, is not

an “inert background” but a milieu that produced “the satire, the historical world it conjures up and (rhetorically speaking) the various historical audiences for which it was originally intended.” Understanding the social function of any satirist's work is impossible without familiarity with the existent legal and quasi-legal procedures such as scapegoating, shame, banishment, excommunication, branding, display in the stocks, show trials, or even public execution (Griffin 188).

With this in mind, it is crucial to know that Swift was an Irish-born Anglican pastor who spent his life traveling between Ireland and England, Dublin and London. His views were critical, dangerous, and subversive of authority. His political allegiances were with the Tories, but he considered himself to be an old Whig, and deemed the Whig's contemporary politics to be treacherous.<sup>6</sup> Depending on the changes of political fortunes, Swift would move back and forth between Dublin and London, while developing strongly pro-Irish sentiments. He fought for the whole of Kingdom of England, but deemed English to be exploitative of Ireland, as well as of its colonies worldwide. Most of these views were not palatable to the ecclesiastical and political mainstream. Therefore, in order to negotiate dissent and power – Swift eventually rose to become a Dean of St. Patrick's church in Dublin, and even wrote a speech for Queen Anne in 1714 – he also had to strike a delicate balance between conformity and rebellion. Most of his writings were published under false names. His *Public Spirit of the Whigs* was deemed a “scandalous libel” by the Lords of the parliament. The famous *Letter to Whole People of Ireland* published in 1724 under the cryptonym of “Drapier” as the fourth of the *Drapier's Letters* put the author at considerable risk. In October of this year, as Swift was writing the key, pro-Ireland

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<sup>6</sup> Modern-day distinction between Tories and Whigs as political conservatives and liberals is not altogether applicable to the British Isles of the early eighteenth century.

parts of *Gulliver's Travels*, a reward of 300 pounds was offered for naming the author of the notorious letter (Swift 2010: xx-xxi).

Yet, while these important fragments of contextual information paint a complex and usually neglected picture of the environment in which English narrative satire came to life, it is equally important to refrain from interpreting the works exclusively in the light of their context. A counter-tradition of reading Swift cautions against aggregating an overwhelming “clutter of annotations,” as F. P. Lock puts it. Lock takes issue with “those puzzlingly particular annotations that have made generations of readers wonder why Swift clogs his general satire with so many topical references.” Instead, this scholar strives to revive Swift's satires in their self-contained power and beauty, and relocate them in a “wider context of politics and political thought” (3). Interpretations by Harold Bloom also tend to emphasize the artistic merit of various works as they appear to our time. Bloom's indisputed favorite is *A Tale of a Tub*, a seminal work that established narrative satire as a full-fledged, albeit not thoroughly described fictional genre. Its digressive and developed narration, its arcane but profound style, and its unsparing critical spirit extend far beyond verse satire in the vein of Dryden or even Pope. It laid the foundation for a different and influential satirical genre. Arguably, the default, “lazy” notion of satire today is precisely that of a loosely structured prose narrative written in a witty and harshly critical, “satirical” manner. All of the key features of the genre are already present in *A Tale of a Tub*. When stripped of all of its context, the remaining narrative skeleton is the indubitable prototype of narrative satire. It is a narrative the journey, whose language operates by means of agile and incessant motion, and whose tone is that of a superficially quiescent, but essentially outraged pariah. *A Tale* is about an uncompromising, almost heretic departure and dissent. All of these

features come forth more prominently when the “burden” and “clutter” of the context is stripped away.

Liz Bellamy is, therefore, correct to assert that “while it is often instructive to read it [Swift's satire] alongside the poetry of Pope and the drama of Gay, it needs to be seen in relation to the emergent fictional genre.” Bellamy writes: “At the time Swift was writing, the conventions of fiction had yet to be fixed. There was no established genre of the novel, but instead there was a plethora of prose narratives, which took a range of forms and fulfilled a variety of social, moral and political functions” (8).

The main goal of this chapter is to elucidate the work of Jonathan Swift and show his contribution to the genre of narrative satire. Other chapters will follow the development and consolidation of the genre in comparable narratives from several different traditions of European literature. As I already observed, Swift's work that will be most fit for the purpose is *Gulliver's Travels*. In spite of *A Tale of a Tub's* seminal importance, and its unsurpassed accomplishment, the *Travels* is more appropriate for several reasons.

First, it is more digestible and lends itself to a more neat analysis. It is easier to show what “narrative satire” is and how it works on the example of the *Travels* than on *A Tale*. Second, Book IV that will be central to my analysis, is the creative pinnacle of Swift. It is arguably his best piece of writing, even better than *A Tale of a Tub*. Everything comes together in it in a particularly compressed form, and it is most easily discernible how the satirical spirit takes shape before moving on to haunt the satirists of other cultures and centuries. Finally, there is a simple and handy thematic overlap. *Gulliver's Travels* is explicitly about the journey, it features a journey-based plot. As such, it extends a bridge toward other satirical narratives discussed here:

Voltaire's *Candide*, Leskov's *The Enchanted Wanderer*, and Domanović's stories.

However, as the introduction already suggests, I will not limit myself to a mere attempt to describe the genre and re-enact the spirit of Gulliver's satire through a close reading. To the contrary, the “historicist understanding” will play an equally significant part. I argue that contextual immersion and a judicious use of social and historical background are essential to the vital understanding of narrative satire. While it is an essential task of criticism to provide an inspired, uncluttered reading of a literary work, in case of narrative satire, such a reading will only take us half the way unless it is thoroughly informed by the context of each work. Literature of this type can be fully understood and appreciated only if it is read against its rich cultural backdrop. The journey of reading begins around the date of actual publishing, and ends in the modern reader's time and day. This means that the modern reader has to be informed about the milieu in which the work appeared, and understand the mindset of the contemporary, eighteenth century readers. This does not imply that the work is in anyway obsolete; rather, that the engagement with it can help us learn about history and allow the past to speak to the present.

In the following sections I analyze the most pertinent parts of each book of *Gulliver's Travels*. I also shed light on the circumstances of Swift's work, its main stylistic features, the author's philosophical and religious views, his political convictions, as well as the elements of his problematic and challenging worldview. The features of the nascent satirical genre emerge in the process.

### **Book I: A Voyage to Lilliput**

The beginning of *Gulliver's Travels* offers a *tableau vivant* of the satirist's condition. A

castaway intruder surrounded and trapped by well-organized and malevolent enemies is about to wake up to a frightful and irrevocable reality. Gulliver among the Lilliputians is a lot like Swift among the subjects of the British crown. He did not belong to it, but was simply appropriated by it. He did not want to live under it, but had to learn to bear with it.

“Swift was a product of an Irish rather than an English landscape, and the peculiar circumstances of his native land coloured the terms of his presentation of society,” writes Liz Bellamy in her account of the cultural background of Swift's life and work. She adds that “Ireland in the eighteenth century was endowed with an emasculated parliament, and was in practice under the political and economic dominance of England” (7).<sup>7</sup>

We will see how important this was later, but for now let us make note of the symbolism of the opening scene. The protagonist is lying flat on his back. He is passive and overpowered, as well as confused and shocked. His sole arms in the face of a discombobulating reality are forbearance and sobriety. Dry, calm description of his condition is his first response, and his first available strategy.

Indeed, the famous Voyage to Lilliput is permeated by detailed, precise and at times overwhelming descriptions.<sup>8</sup> They might be seen as “defamiliarizing,” awakening us to forgotten aspects of reality, just as Gulliver is awoken from his sleep in the beginning to find himself in a new, unimaginable but undeniable universe. As such, these descriptions have their childlike appeal. They stimulate imagination and re-calibrate our sense of “normal” – that is, habitual – proportions. Kathleen Williams sees this as the fundamental aim of satire: “to make us see ourselves, or certain aspects of ourselves, afresh, as though we have never seen them before”

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed account see: Fabricant: 19-21.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will refer to different parts of *Gulliver's Travels* simply as “Book I,” “Book II” and so on. This is a common and convenient practice in scholarship on Swift.



(15). The tiny, six inches tall humanoids – so called “homunculi” – inevitably intrigue us. Not only their size or shape, but also their social organization and character draw comparison to human life and nature. The Lilliputians are brash, conceited, pugnacious, and ostentatious. As such, they resemble humans. What is more, their minuscule size corresponds to the “actual” moral stature of diminished humanity. The homunculi of Lilliput are everything humans cannot confess to be.

Thus, far from being an artless exercise in perception bending, *A Voyage to Lilliput* sets the satirical enterprise on its way. In fact, the obstinate attention to detail and data already reveals concealed mockery on Swift's part. Williams highlights Swift's “satiric use of apparently straightforward description” (12). This technique is paramount in Book I. Its understated ridicule is crucial but difficult to understand – in fact, almost impossible on the first reading. This especially holds true as the Lilliputians are used in two different, contradictory ways. Sometimes, it is to mock or parallel some aspect of human life and society. They are made to be like humans. Then again, these ant-like creatures are sometimes presented to be more organized and capable, as well as more morally advanced than humans, if only slightly. Their customs and laws are in some regards superior. The Lilliputians are small, amusing, and on the whole reprehensible, but all things considered they are just a little more capable than humans.

This is how Gulliver describes their customs: “In choosing persons for all employments, they have more regard to good morals than to great abilities . . . [they believe that] Providence never intended to make the management of public affairs a mystery to be comprehended only by a few persons of sublime genius . . . they suppose truth, justice, temperance, and the like, to be in every man's power” (GT 53).<sup>9</sup> This *apparently* straightforward account enforces an uneasy

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<sup>9</sup> For citations from *Gulliver's Travels*, I will abbreviate references as “GT” followed by a page number.

comparison to human ways of managing the same affairs, and insinuates that humans wrongly prefer “great abilities” to true morals, as well as that they suppose the art of governing – the politics – to be something only few gifted people can fathom. Common people cannot grasp truth or justice. It remains a mystery to them.

The narrator then brings into play a different technique that is even more exemplary of Swift's satires. The style becomes ornate and laborious. “But they thought the want of moral virtues was far from being supplied by superior endowments of the mind; and at least, that the mistakes committed by ignorance, in a virtuous disposition, would never be of such fatal consequence to the public weal, as the practices of a man whose inclinations led him to be corrupt, and who had great abilities to manage, and multiply, and defend his corruptions” (GT 53-4).

Apart from anticipating and encapsulating the state of our corrupt postmodern politics, why is this sentence important and interesting? I would argue that in it we have Swift's style in a nutshell. The meaning of the sentence is clever and simple. In order to figure it out, however, the reader has to read it several times, and strain one's brain as if it were a muscle. Rather than being straightforward, the sentence is convoluted, and, crucially, *periphrastic*. It uses more words than “necessary”, and resorts to complicated turns of the phrase to deliver two simple ideas: great abilities of mind do not equate to morality; mistakes committed by an ignorant but benevolent person do less harm than “practices” of a capable but corrupt person.

Such is the use of periphrasis in Swift. Complicated syntax is put in service of lucid and morally unshakable views. Simple, but neglected truth is cloaked in rhetorical exhibitionism and “learned” excess. A refined interplay occurs between verbal overflow and eye-opening

succinctness. Periphrasis is a condition for immediacy. Circumlocution paradoxically enhances the sharpness of discourse. Without it, satire would be insipid. It would be flat and blunt. With circumlocution, it gains bulk and substance, as well as an air of mystery and conspiracy that makes its candor all the more striking. Importantly, circumlocution (saying something in a roundabout way) is not the same as equivocation (avoiding to say anything specific). The satirist does not avoid making overt claims, even if they are presented with delay, or through innuendo. Ambiguity, deflection and evasion are not the business of satire. So, to say that Swift's style is periphrastic – that it uses more words than “necessary” to convey a point – is not to say that his style is designed to equivocate, or to evade expressing a point. He is not trying to mislead or to avoid commitment. Quite to the contrary, a sense of agenda and purpose is present throughout, even though the “innocent” reader cannot know this during the first reading.

In fact, the first book of *Gulliver's Travels* is frequently and quite mistakenly treated as children's literature. This is mistaken not because children's literature is an inferior form of literature, but because the underlying satirical indignation of the *Travels* is the only thing humans cannot understand before adulthood. However, when reading the Lilliput book for the second time, a sense of sly, menacing and seditious enterprise is apparent immediately. Satire can be seen as engaged literature *avant la lettre*. As we will see, already in Swift and Voltaire there are elements of literary interventionism driven by astute social consciousness. Admittedly, satire usually halts at problematizing rather than proposing a solution to various issues or sending out a clear political message. On the other hand, its uncompromising critique of society entails a proactive attitude, a tendency to proscribe or attack very specific social events and issues. In this sense, satire is an engaged and risky endeavor.

Of course, periphrasis may be deemed a “mere” matter of rhetoric. Use of indirect rhetorical persuasion has its purchase on the readers, and is of course a legitimate expressive tool since antiquity. Yet, in the case of satire there is a contextual and circumstantial element that makes periphrasis not only an apt, but also indispensable rhetorical weapon. It is risky and dangerous to publish texts that engage current and contentious issues. All Swift's satires were originally published either anonymously or pseudonymously and the author used ever-changing names behind which he hid his public self. He published as “Dean,” “Bickerstaff,” “Drapier,” “Martin Scriblerus,” and “Gulliver.”<sup>10</sup> These are all, as Ian Higgins puts it, “putative speakers.” Higgins notes that “personal safety was undoubtedly uppermost” for Swift and that his works “do often have scandalous, seditious, subversive and indeed treasonous elements, often unrecognized by modern readers” (21). It is for this reason that Swift's satires are marked by “constitutional cautiousness,” for which, clearly, circumlocutory style was the most suitable vehicle.

This also results in a beautiful interplay of two other indispensable figures of speech. Understatement and hyperbole are often fused and virtually indistinguishable, yielding a particular complexity of tone, a sort of tone behind a tone through which accusatory and censorious jabs become all the more prominent in spite of the elaborate and elusive surface appearance of style. In *Gulliver's Travels*, the authorial voice is latently present behind that of Gulliver and adds a certain coloration and spin to every Gulliver's utterance. Similarly, the interplay of privacy and overt publicness, of anonymity and defiant transparency is integral to the lasting validity and success of the *Travels*. Immensely popular upon publication, the book

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Scriblerus was the pseudonym used by a licentious group of satirists forming the notorious Scriblerus Club. The group included Alexander Pope, John Gay, John Arbuthnot and Swift himself.

was able to excite and agitate contemporary readership as well as to convey sober and lasting philosophical messages to posterity. It is both complex and simple. Every facile reference to its plurality of perspectives is easily undercut by a reference to the solid, almost monolithic nature of the author's personal views and convictions, and to his clear political agenda. Conversely, reducing Swift to his anti-deism or anti-empiricism cannot account for the wealth of textual meaning that transcends and sometimes subverts the author's intentions.

Knowing the intentions helps at all times, however. Even when they are subverted, it results in new and rich meanings that can be appreciated only if awareness of these intentions exists. When they are consistently executed, ignorance of them inevitably results in missed interpretive opportunities. For instance, the Lilliputians' learning and epistemology are driven by ridiculous, dogmatic empiricism. Their bizarre exploits are not intended to fascinate a child in us, or to freshen our perception, make us see familiar things anew, and so on. It does happen, to be sure, but that is only the surface layer. Swift intends his depiction of the Lilliputians' intellectual culture to be an insidious and rude attack on, even a dismissal of the empiricist epistemology. It is a lampoon of the prevalent doctrine of the time, that was gaining in influence and prestige in the early eighteenth century. In particular, Francis Bacon's inductive method is satirized as short-sighted pedantry. The whole thing has an air of a brazen caricature, especially because the Lilliputians are in large part an offensive and distorted semblance of humans – homunculi.

This is best seen in the episode where the king of Lilliput orders that Gulliver be searched. The Lilliputians in charge of the task find mundane objects such as Gulliver's hat, tobacco box, and comb. But their description of these objects is fantastic, the more so the more they cling to the empirical rigor of observation and description.

“They are honest, truthful, in possession of all their senses, clearly accustomed to the empirical method, and masters of blunt prose. Nevertheless, nothing they describe is recognizable for what it is. The reader translates the data only because he has previous knowledge, and gradually figures out what they are actually talking about. That is more, of course, than the Lilliputians can do; they have disburdened themselves of accurate data which is totally meaningless to them.” What is more: “The method of their survey is Baconian, their style as spare as Sprat desired, but their results are gibberish” (Louis 151-2).

Absurd, painstaking descriptions of mundane objects that yield no awareness of their function or practical utility are represented as emblematic of the empiricist rigor and excess. The inductive Baconian method advances step by step, as it should, but does not lead to a verifiable discovery of a sensible fact. To the contrary, it results in an inane, surreal, and almost hallucinatory deviation from reality. It creates a de-realized domain no experience can account for. It is a realm in which another odd Irishman – Samuel Beckett – found inspiration and material for his own absurdist antics. In fact, the similarity of style and imagination is striking, and shows the far reach of Swift's verbal sorcery.

This distrustful, even dismissive attitude toward empiricism calls to mind a famous and beautiful Bacon's quote from the *Novum Organum*, in which Bacon pleads that every other method but the empirical is erroneous. The quote concerns the “idols of theater” and the falsehood of established perceptions: “Because in my judgment all the received systems are but so many stage-plays representing worlds of their own creation... which by tradition, credulity, and negligence have come to be received” (55). Swift's satire of the empirical method implies that even this method is but an “idol” and a “stage-play,” another delusive and reductive

representation of reality. Moreover, rather than requiring some rigorous and deft way to engage reality – a method of some sort – one is sometimes better off by simply relying on their credulous, negligent and lazy notions. It is simply a hat, a tobacco box, a comb. We already know what they are and how to use them. There is no need to complicate and conceptualize our path to reality. It is already there, and we more or less know what it is and how to make our way in it. Methods are taking us away from it by inventing worlds of their own creation. That is, at least, the provocation on Swift's part.

Objectively, of course, few ideas or methods stood the test of time as well as empiricism and its inductive method. In a sense, Swift's own approach could also be deemed inductive and rational, or reasonable and sober at the very least. He is mocking the methodological excess and “methodolatry” rather than the method itself. Similarly, Thomas Sprat's admirable articulation of strict and scientific writing has its own lasting merit unrelated to the mockery of the Lilliputians' pseudo-scientific descriptions of Gulliver's comb and hat. We will later see similar, “unfair” attacks on Leibniz in Voltaire, as well as Leskov's ridicule of many received notions and idols in Russian culture. Satire deploys polemical exaggeration, creating at times straw man arguments to convey a more subtle and measured points. Swift does not literally mean that the Baconian method inevitably leads to the Lilliputian folly, but he does imply that at its worst and most assured it can devolve into a farcical self-parody.

Yet, for all the grotesque pompousness and folly of the Lilliputians, their unquestioned dominance over Gulliver makes for an eerily comic aspect of Book I. From the opening scene, the homunculi trap Gulliver and keep him in check, tethered and tied to a spot. Gulliver can easily crush any individual Lilliputian, including the king and his ministers, but he has to

conform to an organized and capable unity of his masters, even when he is granted liberty to move freely at a later point. It is a humbling, even humiliating condition for the protagonist. The Lilliputians use him as they see fit, quite as humans use domestic animals. They even send Gulliver to war against the kingdom of Blefuscu, counting on his size and strength to destroy and subdue the entire enemy's kingdom. When Gulliver eventually refuses to needlessly annihilate what he realizes is a human-like culture, the Lilliputians take his disobedience seriously. They realize the danger of Gulliver's presence, and that his size and strength might turn against them at any point. They accuse him of treason and decide to blind him. Their unflinching cruelty is again reminiscent of human ways of dealing with threats. The brutality even makes sense in the context, however heartless it may objectively be. And so, what began as a wondrous awakening to the relativity and complexity of society and individual's existence in it, ends as an admonishing tale of inexorable destruction and malice. Were it not for Gulliver's fortunate escape, his travels would have been over before the book's second part.

Swift's taste for unexpected ironic twists is well explained by Kathleen Swaim. The purpose of these twists is to alternately guide and misguide the reader, before finishing with an unexpected but illuminating realization. "Swift's method of handling the character of Gulliver and of manipulating the reader's involvement, like so many of his methods, is to begin simply – as with the pleasant fantasy of Lilliput and its archetypal appeal to the child in all of us – to gain the reader's confidence and consent, and then to proceed through twists of irony and revolutions of action, thought, and form toward the lessons in value he wishes to inculcate" (206-7).

Swaim characterizes this approach as "laughter against the reader" (206), echoing Swift's own remark about "laughter against *vous autres*" (207). The almost capricious use of French by



Swift indicates a confrontational, defiant attitude of satire, as if it were written in a foreign, barely comprehensible language, such as the language we see at work in the often unpronounceable names of places and things in the *Travels*. The reader is ridiculed, “laughed against,” and has to find a way to respond and rise up to the challenge. The sour ending of Book I opens a sequence of twists, turns and “revolutions” that bend the readers' expectations in a way that is nothing short of acrobatic.

### **Book II: A Voyage to Brobdingnag**

Even after his adventurous escape from Lilliput and his safe return to England, Gulliver does not find peace in his homeland. Driven by insatiable desire to travel, he leaves his country as part of another crew. This is a significant pattern in the *Travels*. Each return to England is followed by restlessness and eventual departure. The final return in Book IV never brings about tranquility and never feels like a true homecoming. Incessant voyage in search of homeland plays an essential role in satire. It brings into question and subverts the very notion of homeland. This theme is prominent already in Swift, and it is widespread in satirical narratives ever since. It is remarkably developed by Domanović. I will discuss the question of patriotism in the fourth chapter and in the conclusion. However, it is apposite to make a general remark here about the relationship of the journey and homeland in satire. Arguably, the journey is a quest for homeland. Sometimes, as in Swift, the traveler leaves his place of birth in order to find a better place. At other times, as we will see in *Candide*, he is kicked around the planet before he finds an unexpected home, rather than a homeland. In Leskov, the “enchanted” wanderer (or pilgrim) roams through the vast Russian Empire only to find a refuge in a monastery and fulfill his

destiny that nevertheless does not feel like a true homecoming. Lastly, Domanović's characters seek their homeland from outside, as it were. They dream of it, yearn for it, but never really find it; or else, if they do, it is a disappointment. The journey in satire does not bring about a fortunate and “happy” resolution. If anything, it makes one wonder what homeland might be, and why does the yearning for it lead the protagonists to keep moving rather than settle.

So, upon leaving England for the second time, Gulliver ends up in Brobdingnag, presumably somewhere on the North American West Coast. In stark contrast to his status in Lilliput, he is now reduced to a condition of a curious, exotic and minuscule creature that inspires superficial fascination among the giant-like residents of the land. At one point, Gulliver compares himself to a “tame canary bird.” Such is the Brobdingnagian perception of him – he is treated fondly as a pet. Just as human perception of the Lilliputians elicits a sense of comic puzzlement – they are so like humans, yet their small size makes them too much unlike humans – so does Gulliver's minuscule size among the Brobdingnagians puzzle and amuse the giants. He is like them, but his small size, thin voice and inept use of language inspire laughter and bewilderment.

In Brobdingnag, everything entails a life-threatening danger for Gulliver. A salt cellar, a hazelnut as large as a pumpkin, gigantic wasps, and an immense monkey all put Gulliver in a new, alienating proportion and pose the same menace to him that he himself posed to the Lilliputians on account of his size.

What is even more bizarre, the Brobdingnagians consider themselves to be descendants of a “dwindled” human race whose ancestors were much larger and advanced than the “dwindled” forefathers of the Brobdingnagians. They claim their excavations show evidence of

this. Gulliver is but an insect to them.

Now, these circumstances invite comments about relativity of size, status and power, about parallel realities and dimensions that preclude definitive answers, fixed hierarchies and stable meanings. There is something to it. There is an element of mental gymnastics and mathematical games that is activated with each Gulliver's voyage. It makes us pause and wonder. Each new journey makes things more complicated, as if another parallel system or reality has been discovered and embedded into an increasingly complex and relativistic universe.

Frances Deutsch Louis observes that “Hobbes tried to convince an unwilling audience that man's limits were built-in, a standard feature of the homo sapiens model.” He adds that in *Gulliver's Travels* Swift attempts the same thing (39), and that “[t]he coloration of human knowledge by the human condition is a primary subject of the Travels” (150). However, relativization of anthropocentric norms is merely one aspect of Swift's two-pronged attack. This becomes evident during Gulliver's extended conversations with the king of Brobdingnag (once he has learned the language sufficiently well). A series of awe-inspiring escapades that forms the bulk of Book II adopts a rather serious shape toward the end. Rather than just estranging readers from their habitual image of humankind, or playfully refreshing our imagination, the voyage to Brobdingnag satirizes human vanity, and presents a scathing portrayal of England and Europe more broadly.

While in Book I the Lilliputians exhibit an unsettling similarity to humans, in Book II humans exhibit undeniable similarity to the Lilliputians, not only in terms of their pugnacity and conceit, but also in terms of their size. For all that, Louis notes that “[n]o group will willingly cede its greatness, its uniqueness, to any other, any more than Gulliver could bring himself to

face captivity by homunculi, or smallest-living-freak status among the giants” (150). There lies the ultimate folly, the ludicrous sense of pride of the species that Swift satirizes. Gulliver never once loses a sense of pride or self-importance. He exhibits it all the more as he experiences a humbling diminution of his status. He feels no shame “since the king of Great Britain himself, in my condition, must have undergone the same distress.”<sup>11</sup> (GT 101) He proudly defends humankind, Europe, and especially England and its rulers. Elsewhere, we could say there is irony in Gulliver's protestations of England's preeminence – especially during his conversations with the king of the Houyhnhnmland – but here irony rests only with the authorial point of view that merely lurks behind Gulliver's grandstanding. One could say Swift is ironic, but Gulliver is surprisingly, and comically, serious. That he boasts of his country and species while appearing in his master's eyes exactly the way the Lilliputians appeared to him makes the situation all the more grotesque.

In fact, the king of Brobdingnag openly shows his amusement. Addressing his first minister, whose staff, as Gulliver reports, was “near as tall as the mainmast of the Royal Sovereign,” the king reflects “how contemptible a thing was human [meaning Brobdingnagian] grandeur,” given that it can be “mimicked” by such “diminutive insects” as Gulliver. The king of Brobdingnag takes Gulliver's pompous display of patriotic fervor as an occasion for reflection on humility of his own (supposedly human) kind. He goes on to observe: “I dare engage these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honor; 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” (GT 114). He even takes Gulliver on his palm, strokes him

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<sup>11</sup> All the while, of course, an image of any British king in such a condition elicits laughter against the speaker's intentions.

gently and asks him while laughing heartily whether he is a Tory or a Whig. The importance Gulliver attaches to the question makes his condition all the more risible. He recounts: “And thus he continued on, while my color came and went several times with indignation to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honour, and truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated.” Gulliver admits he had been “a little too copious in talking of my own beloved country, of our trade and wars by sea and land, of our schisms in religion, and parties in the state,” but ascribes the king's views to “prejudices of his education,” presumably contrasting them to his own impartiality (GT 114). That he should call England – a country that lost the Hundred Years' War – a “scourge of France” and consider it some sort of accolade may be the most ludicrous testimony to the prejudices of his own, “English” education. Of course this sort of “education” could, by extension, be described as Eurocentric, ethnocentric, patriotic, or even jingoistic. Its falsehood, as well as its pettiness, cannot be missed. Yet, Gulliver undertakes to evaluate the Brobdingnagian education a little later. He considers it to be deeply flawed.

“The learning of this people is very defective, consisting only in morality, history, poetry, and mathematics, wherein they must be allowed to excel. But the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in life, to the improvement of agriculture, and all mechanical arts; so that among us it would be little esteemed. And as to ideas, entities, abstractions, and transcendentals, I could never drive the least conception into their heads” (GT 150).

In this section too we observe a similar “distribution” of irony. Gulliver is ostensibly dead-serious, while the author's sneering perspective lurks behind. It is another attack on the burgeoning English empiricism, or its speculative and doctrinal variety that, while espousing

experience as the foundation of knowledge remains divorced from it, proud of its conceptual and transcendental abstractions, and obstinately adverse to applied and practical knowledge.

Moreover, through Gulliver's inadequate critique of the education of the Brobdingnagians we see that Swift actually espouses empiricism as long as it yields practical, useful results. More than any philosophical position – pragmatism, utilitarianism, materialism, rationalism – it is a typical standpoint of a satirist. It is *satirical wisdom* that sees knowledge as a means to amelioration of living conditions, not as an end in itself. Such wisdom is especially wary of getting side-tracked by the abstractions of transcendentalism and by dabbling in metaphysics or abstruse theology. Ultimately, Swift deems real knowledge to be stable and verifiable. It is just that empiricism in his own view does not provide such knowledge. Wedel describes Swift as “a rationalist with no faith in reason” (20), and it is just as fair to say that he was an empiricist who believed *only* in experience and practice. Again, it is not about any -ism – empiricism, rationalism, least of all Anglicanism – it is above all about the satirical and skeptical wisdom that believes in the concrete alone.

Warren Montag is right to observe that “[i]t is only in the extremity of Swift's satire that a specific materialism (that is more a strategy than a doctrine) emerges” (84). He is not a materialist by conviction or endorsement, but by proclivity of mind. There are no tenets or theses to abide by, but only a certain orientation and “strategy,” quite intuitive at that, through which the satirist encounters the world.

The same thing can be said of Gulliver's critique of the Brobdingnagian laws. Here too, Swift practices what Marxists fondly call “dialectical materialism.” Where things and facts are obsessively accumulated, classified, systematized – the satirist finds an exception that makes the

whole system void. Where lies, half-truth, empty rhetoric and disorder hold the reins, the satirist responds by appeals to moral and cognitive solidity and permanence.

According to Gulliver, the laws of Brobdingnag are not good. They are not resilient and malleable. “Those people are not mercurial enough to discover above one interpretation [of a law]” (GT 150). “Their style is clear, masculine, and smooth, but not florid; for they avoid nothing more than multiplying unnecessary words, or using various expressions” (GT 151). As the portrayal of lawyers in Book IV will show, European practitioners take law to be a matter of clever words and abstruse, even “florid” expressions. Law is “mercurial.” This masterfully employed adjective, borrowed from alchemy, expresses the fickle, inconsistent relationship humans have with their laws. Lawyers, the alchemists of law, invent rules so they could twist, bend, distort and eventually pervert them. As he speaks about the customs and laws of Brobdingnag, Gulliver's tone alternates between that of bewilderment, disapproval and indifference. He fails to realize the superiority of that country's laws to those of England. The reader, however, cannot help but feel drawn to this conclusion. And so, by employing a dialectical strategy, the author pleads for legal transparency, and satirizes clever use of unnecessary words and “mercurial” interpretations of laws. This critique will be developed in my discussion of Book IV, but at this point, I will focus on the king of Brobdingnag's “verdict” on both England and diminished humankind embodied in Gulliver and his affection for “empirical” transcendentals and “mercurial” laws.

Arguably, the protagonist is at his most powerless during his conversation with the king. He is not only shrunk in size, but also intellectually disarmed. Earlier on, when a mischievous boy throws a pumpkin-sized hazelnut at him, or when a monkey snatches him and carries him

around for awhile, or when at the end of Book II he is taken in his cage-like box to the skies by an eagle, he experiences visceral fear, but not intellectual humiliation. As the king declares his opinion on Gulliver and his kind, however, he is physically helpless and intellectually defeated. His poor logic, linguistic ineptitude, and misguided pride are exposed and derided. His vainglorious account of life in Europe is taken as the best possible evidence against him and his species.

Humankind is held in low esteem by the king of Brobdingnag. It fares much worse than it did in comparison to the Lilliputians. The king's final judgment is merciless and incontrovertible: “But by what I have gathered from your own relation, and the answers I have with much pains wrung and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth” (GT 145). Everything that was meant to speak in favor of Gulliver's kind ends up working against it. Humankind comes off quite as the Lilliputians appear in Book I – it is vain, belligerent, destructive, prey to wastefulness and luxury, and ultimately “odious.”

Clearly, this does not belong to the genre of children's literature, but belongs only to satire, and a strand of satire that no longer has to cajole or appease authority of any sort. The long tradition of verse satire has never been able to accommodate such an unsparing and confrontational perspective on humanity. Horace obviously had to be careful with authorities, but even the Juvenalian tradition of vituperative satire could not allow for this kind of mind-frame that holds that humanity is not good and cannot be corrected. The leading English satirists such as Dryden, Johnson, and even Pope, appear comparably tame even in their sharpest moments, and they at any rate rely on some ultimately salvageable moral core. Swift's satire is a much



deeper and darker affair.

Ian Higgins remarks: “It needs to be frankly confronted that the radical project of much Swiftian satire is misanthropic.” He adds that “Swiftian satire attempts to persuade readers that men and women are utterly corrupt and fit only for extermination from the face of the earth. The satiric project is undoubtedly informed by an Augustinian conviction of fallen human nature” (22). Indeed, stern reflections of Saint Augustine were integral to Swift's worldview. This has nothing to do with endorsing a certain doctrine or faction with a conviction of a heretic, but it is primarily a matter of inclination and artistic sensibility. Satire was particularly conducive to Swift's temperament, and satire's quasi-anonymity allowed for a vitriolic perspective on society that was never as prominent before, and will hardly be detectable after. In the next chapter, we will see similar overtones in Voltaire's writings, but even there humorous relief serves to appease the judgmental ferocity of satire. In Swift's most poignant and somber moments – especially at the end of Book IV – laughter dies out and humor dissolves. What remains is a lingering visceral unease and even nausea. The reader hesitates between endorsing the judgment and condemning the judge. Who is Swift, or his narrator, to utter such a judgment without qualifying it in some way?

Louis writes that satire “is the art of bad examples and bad examples alone: it assumes men guilty until proven innocent, places the burden of disproof on the reader not the writer, sacrifices fairness for the attention that comes from shock, and assumes no obligation to put together anything it breaks down” (40). This is exactly the subtext of Swift's satire. *A Tale of a Tub* and especially the notorious short piece *A Modest Proposal* exhibit this low, distrustful, “Augustinian” view of fallen humanity. However, nowhere is Swift's satire as “ugly” as it is in

*Gulliver's Travels*, especially at the end of Books II and IV.

Book III, however, is very significant for the structure of the Travels. It is an odd book: disparate, asymmetrical, disorganized. It intercepts the parallelism of the first two books, and makes for a wild excursion into an unknown and unexpected universe. As surprising as the fairy-tale qualities of the first two books may be, Book III is even more uncanny and bizarre. It is quite disorienting. It is not a stretch to deem it a predecessor of science fiction. Even as science fiction, it is all the more outlandish as no space voyage is employed to reach the strange-yet-familiar kingdoms and lands described in it. Gulliver claims these lands are on Earth, reachable by ship and inhabited by real humans of “proper” size, so to speak. One of these kingdoms is explicitly recognized to be Japan, and the general geographical region is that of the Pacific islands. That being said, Book III is also decidedly the most local and particularistic part of the Travels. It is rife with (then obvious) political allusion and allegory. It is contemporary and concerned with the English oppression of Ireland. As such, it is an odd item in the larger structure, and one that serves as a great distraction before Book IV undertakes the effort of a synthesis.

Before proceeding to comment on it, it must be emphasized that Gulliver returns to England for the second time, right at the point when his captivity in Brobdingnag seemed to be definitive. In a farcical and abrupt denouement of Book II, his cage-box is snatched by a giant eagle and carried away from the ship on which he was transported. Gulliver is then dropped by the eagle and resuscitated by sailors who accidentally find him. He experiences immense fear but returns safely to England. Yet, even then, just as upon his return from Lilliput, England is not a home, and never feels like one. Gulliver is glad to be back for a short while, and then is overtaken by an irresistible urge to travel. It is a tendency in all satirical journeys. Home is never

found, and never what it was expected to be. Even if it is found (as we will see in Voltaire) it is not *where* it was anticipated to be. Gulliver's unwanted England, Candide's backward and embarrassing Prussia, Flyagin's dispersed, undefinable Russia, and the shocking, disappointing anti-homeland of Domanovic's Serbian protagonists are fine examples of the deeply problematic relationship of satire toward patriotism. Love of one's country is persistently (and often grotesquely) avowed, but justification for it is all the more difficult to find.

### **Book III: A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrib, and Japan**

In this section, I examine the dynamic crucial to Book III – one between the philosophical underpinnings of Swift, and his political and personal preoccupations with Ireland. It is the book that was written last, *after* Book IV had already been finished in 1724. Book III is framed by the preceding political events and other, non-creative writings by Swift related to these political events. In March of 1720 the British parliament issued a Declaratory Act proclaiming that the parliament may make laws binding on Ireland, putting Ireland in an even more subjugated position. In response to this event and the situation it brought about, Swift published (again under a pseudonym of Drapier) his *Letter to Whole People of Ireland*. Also known as the fourth *Drapier's Letter*, it provoked outrage with the English authorities, and led them to offer a 300 pounds reward for naming the author of the notorious letter.<sup>12</sup> This was in October 1724, just as Swift was beginning to work on Book III of the *Travels*.

In the light of this realization, a lot of episodes reminiscent of science fiction acquire a new and surprisingly contemporary taste. Book III is not about the narrator's imagination running

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<sup>12</sup> Here is an example of one of the sentences that infuriated the authorities: “As to Ireland, they know little more than they do of Mexico ; further than that it is a country subject to the King of England, full of bogs, inhabited by wild Irish Papists ; who are kept in awe by mercenary troops sent from thence: and their general opinion is, that it were better for England if this whole island were sunk into the sea . . .” (1903: 140)

wild. It is not even about parodying the genre of travel book. It really becomes a matter of subtle political allusion of lasting and disquieting relevance. This is most obvious in the fantasy of the Flying Island of Laputa. Laputa is a mighty and learned kingdom thriving in mathematical and astronomical knowledge. It is advanced to the point that it was able to base the kingdom on the Flying Island which circles over its dominion and easily controls its subjects. There is no need to establish full equivalence with the way England controlled its vast possessions, Ireland included, but the allusion is there, presented in a futuristic image of totalitarianism that would have to wait the twentieth century to discover its full resonance. This is how Gulliver, in quite a deadpan tone, describes the way the king of Laputa controls his subjects: “If any town should engage in rebellion or mutiny, fall into violent factions, or refuse to pay the usual tribute, the king has two methods of reducing them to obedience. The first and the mildest course is by keeping the island hovering over such a town, and the lands about it, whereby he can deprive them of the benefit of the sun and the rain, and consequently afflict the inhabitants with dearth and diseases and if the crime deserve it, they are at the same time pelted from above with great stones, against which they have no defense but by creeping into cellars or caves, while the roofs of their houses are beaten to pieces. But if they still continue obstinate, or offer to raise insurrections, he proceeds to the last remedy, by letting the island drop directly upon their heads, which makes a universal destruction both of houses and men” (GT 196).

Key features of “good” totalitarian control are all present here. The “mild course” of a latent threat embodied in the hovering presence of authority; the power to deprive the subjects of resources and livelihood; a possibility of resorting to crushing violence, reminiscent of bombardment in modern warfare, with accompanying cynical appeals to justice of such actions

(“if the crime deserve it”); finally, the option of annihilation, a demonstration of full, indomitable and total power always able to quell dissent. Of course, while these affairs are represented as taking place in a remote and different kingdom, the contemporary political subtext was easily discernible to the oppressed subjects of England, especially in Ireland.

The allusion is made all the more subversive as in the following paragraph Gulliver hints at an altogether different possibility that is nonetheless inextricably tied to totalitarianism, as well as imperialism. The bottom of the Flying Island is made of a monolithic, two hundred yards thick block of adamant. It is incredibly solid. Yet, its very solidity, its “adamantine” quality is its most vulnerable feature. Should the island happen to drop too heavily on the unruly territory below, and should it hit on an uneven terrain, where a rock or a summit of some sort might be jutting out, the adamantine bottom might crack, and the whole Flying Island could collapse. This description too is beautifully and subversively allusive to the revolutionary potential among the subjugated, and also a hint at the inevitable reversal of power – a revolution – at the end of each tyranny. Nothing such happens later in the book, but it is there, as a hint, and a thinly veiled political allegory, meant to encourage a sense of independence and pride among the Irish. Moreover, the hovering island is at peril not just because of the tall rocks, but also because it might “burst by approaching too near the fires from the houses below.” Small resistances of individual households add up to a powerful counter-threat. Gulliver adds: “Of all this the people are well apprised, and understand how far to carry their obstinacy, where their liberty or property is concerned.” In consequence, “the king, when he is highest provoked, and most determined to press a city to rubbish, orders the island to descend with great gentleness, out of a pretense of tenderness to his people, but indeed for fear of breaking the adamantine bottom” (GT 197).

This section makes for a beautiful subversive allegory and shows the capacity of satire to incorporate contemporary, “mundane” themes into the most fanciful and imaginative narrative excursions. In fact, the tension between the wild fantasy of the descriptions and their “banal,” quotidian implications is the driving force of Book III. As for the political significance of the book, C. H. Firth is right to note that “*Gulliver's Travels* show plainly that when Swift began to write them England and English politics filled his mind, and that when he completed them Ireland and Irish affairs were his absorbing interest. As he passed from one subject to another his tone altered, his satire ceased to be playful and became serious and bitter” (258). To be exact, the tone is most bitter at the end of Book IV (written before Book III). It is true, however, that Swift's political occupations shifted, and his allegiances became more defined as the writing process of the *Travels* went on. Most importantly, a sense of profound disillusionment became a dark companion, detrimental to the person, but beneficial to satire itself. As Firth documents, in his later letters Swift “spoke with some scorn of his own ‘foolish zeal in endeavouring to save this wretched island,’ and disclaimed any right to the title of patriot: ‘What I do is owing to perfect rage and resentment, and the mortifying sight of slavery, folly, and baseness.’ And again: ‘What I did for this country was from a perfect hatred at tyranny and oppression . . . . We are slaves and knaves and fools’” (cited in Firth 259).

The same disenchanting attitude supported by an understated but somewhat malevolent sarcasm persists throughout Book III. Descriptions of customs and learning of Laputa are precocious in their irony and lack of faith. The severity of tone seems impossible for the early eighteenth century culture. Swift describes a learned dystopia that would find its analog only two centuries later, in Hermann Hesse's chilling critique of learned folly in *The Glass Bead Game*

(1943).

It is a critique of false and incomplete knowledge in general, especially of abstract and impractical knowledge. However, it is also an extended critique of the contemporary epistemology whose empiricist zeal I discussed above, and whose administrative and symbolic embodiment was the Royal Society.<sup>13</sup> The learned man of Balnibarbi – one of the lands under Laputa's sovereign – are completely subject to authority. They serve it in an unblinking and unthinking manner. They are not even aware of the fact. Secondly, they are divorced from reality. They excel in mathematics that has no application whatsoever in the realms below the Flying Island. Their calculations lull them into a state of perpetual daydream. They cannot be talked to or even alerted to the real world, unless they are awakened by their accompanying servants who use a bizarre device to rattle beside their ears and make them aware of their surroundings. Finally, their knowledge is recondite to the point that it can yield no practical gain. They are trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, soften marble so it becomes handy for making pillows, or even unearth conspiracies of political suspects by examining their excrement. Nothing useful or wise comes out of their endeavors.

It is “pure science.” We have seen the folly of absurd, detailed descriptions of mundane objects employed by the Lilliputians. The learned man of Balnibarbi take false knowledge to another extreme. While the Lilliputians are excessively devoted to detailed description and material experience (“empiricism”), the scientists of Balnibarbi, basically the members of the Royal Society, are vowed to intangible categories and “transcendentals.” The smart, applicable knowledge of Brobdingnag gives way to a mystified, inconsequential concern for abstract harmony.

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<sup>13</sup> We will see a like-minded censure in Voltaire's satire of *Académie française* in the next chapter.

Louis writes that “Swift turned on a public ‘proud of its scientific attitude’ a masterpiece of false facts which intimated that the new learners were more enthusiastic than discriminating about what they learned and that they had been conditioned to a new form of gullibility” (39). The term “false facts” is vital here. What is implied is that the scientists of Balnibarbi attain some sort of truth, but it is useless, abstract, artificially perfect and ultimately false.<sup>14</sup> Truth, especially when bound to careful and faithful observation of reality, comes off as a complex and relative mixture of disparate elements and tendencies in Swift. Louis detects “Swift’s gleeful, almost mischievous vision of error which sprouts not merely from error, but from truth” (153-4). In other words, truth is attainable, but not reducible. The truer the description, the more ethereal a concept or abstraction, the greater the error.

Nigel Wood describes Swift’s attitude as an “attack on systematising moralists” of the time. When seen from this angle, Swift’s satire finds “comic capital in human mutability” (93). As opposed to Book II, where appeals to permanence of true morality subverted the legalistic relativism and opportunism, here real and profound knowledge has to integrate an awareness of an evasive and complicated environment in order to approach truth. It is a matter of good, resilient dialectics, and intelligence applied in a curious, observant and agile manner.

The approach comes to a culmination in the dark, sardonic section about “lineages.” Reactivating the plot-type of the trip to the underworld – treated with due solemnity in Virgil, Dante, and most importantly Milton – Swift exploits it for one of the most fanciful and vitriolic outbursts, especially targeting the greats of history and the contemporary reverence for them.

The episode makes for a journey within a journey, and draws from the Augustinian myth of decline and eternal vice that was dear to Swift, as we have seen. The episode itself is odd,

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<sup>14</sup> In the next chapter, I analyze Voltaire’s similar satirical attack on Leibniz.



incongruous. It reads like a failed attempt to “stage” greatness and undertake the voyage to the netherworld. In its intentional awkwardness, however, the episode fulfills its satirical aim.

The journey to the underworld is not physical, but mental, and by no means hallucinatory or hypnotic. It takes place thanks to a magician living at Glubbudrib, another fantastic island under Laputa's domination. The magician, who is the governor of the island, without inducing a trance in Gulliver, is simply able to bring the souls of various persons in front of Gulliver and serve as a medium of communication with them. The cavalcade of personages completely betrays the expectations and reads as a travesty of history. Far from a purposeful sequence of people and events leading to a noble ultimate aim, history is an embarrassing and ignoble cesspool of unseemly people and unworthy events. On the whole, it is quite a shame.

Gulliver says: “Having been always a great admirer of old illustrious families, I desired the governor would call up a dozen or two of kings, with their ancestors in order, for eight or nine generations. But my disappointment was grievous and unexpected. For, instead of a long train with royal diadems, I saw in one family two fiddlers, three spruce courtiers, and an Italian prelate. In another, a barber, an abbot, and two cardinals” (GT 229).

This impurity of royal lineages and royal blood is meant to divest the “illustrious families” of their prestige. The key argument of the highborn – their inherited nobility – is compromised in a way most offensive to such sensibility. There is nothing noble nor inherited in nobility.

Similarly, kings are not just or wise, and certainly not by birth. Instead of an idealized image of selfless, inherited and noble power, a harshly realistic view of it is introduced. Power is ugly and abject. It has to be fought for and maintained by corrupt, dishonest means. “Three kings

protested to me, that in their whole reigns they never did once prefer any person of merit, unless by mistake, or treachery of some minister in whom they confided; neither would they do it if they were to live again; and they showed, with great strength of reason, that the royal throne could not be supported without corruption, because that positive, confident, restive temper which virtue infused into a man, was a perpetual clog to public business” (GT 230-1).

This is a serious claim of lasting value. It appears it is easier to appreciate it nowadays than it was in the 1720s. The disenchantment is profound and borders on hopelessness. Yet, the image of power is by no means hyperbolic, and should be taken at face value. The epic aura of the past is shed – there is no dignity to power, nor justification for it. We will soon see an even nastier example of power wielding, but for now I emphasize another crucial point about which Gulliver does not equivocate – there is no real merit to power.

T. O. Wedel places Swift in an unusual, and at any rate under-appreciated and under-studied intellectual tradition – the French “lineage” of La Rochefoucauld, Bayle and Montaigne, who “see man without illusion” (19).<sup>15</sup> This tradition partly lives in Voltaire too. It is a tradition of disillusioned, often sardonic writers capable of delicate humor and unsettling skepticism. While they had to conform to power as persons, they developed a dark, scornful image of it. They see power as the key force of history, but as a force that never creates anything good, and in fact destroys and oppresses genuine merit. Gulliver elaborates on this with perspicacity that is all Swift's: “I had often read of some great services done to princes and states, and desired to see the persons by whom those services were performed. Upon inquiry I was told that their names were to be found on no record, except a few of them whom history has represented as the vilest of rogues and traitors. As to the rest, I had never once heard of them. They all appeared with

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<sup>15</sup> Swift himself was fluent and well-read in French.

dejected looks, and in the meanest habit, most of them telling me they died in poverty and disgrace, and the rest on a scaffold or a gibbet” (GT 231-2). By contrast, “the whole praise as well as pillage has been engrossed by the chief commander, who perhaps had the least title to either” (GT 233).

Lack of irony is quite remarkable in these quotes. Lack of hyperbole is less conspicuous, but it is essential to detect it. These are truth claims, not polemical exaggerations. It is a literal, dry description of how history “advances,” and how power works. The only ironic blip is the narrator's usual refrain about how England is much different: “I hope the reader need not be told, that I do not in the least intend my own country in what I say upon this occasion” (GT 231).

But Gulliver's journey into deep time is a serious and disappointing affair. It is a sobering venture, and everything but a playful hallucinatory excursion. The dispiriting takeaway is that rogues are the winners of history who are fondly remembered ever after, whereas the modest and the worthy are obliterated with indifference. In consequence, humankind does not progress. It declines and is inherently sinful. It is impure and degenerate, and marked by eternal proclivity to power and vice.

This perspective comes into focus in another significant scene that was again squarely aimed to criticize the European authorities under the guise of a report from an exotic and barbaric kingdom. The scene is also significant as it is reworked and arguably improved by Voltaire in *Candide* – it shows that the satirical “lineage” exists and is held together by feeble but essential ties. Voltaire has read Swift, as the two episodes and their striking similarities evidence.

I am referring to the well-known “dust licking” scene that takes place at yet another “exotic” and remote island whose customs are too close to home. It is the island of Luggnagg,

where Gulliver is granted a reception at the king's court. The ritual requires visitors to lick the dust in front of the king's footstool. They are commanded to crawl on their bellies, while licking the floor. As a stranger, Gulliver was shown a “peculiar grace” to have the floor cleaned before him. The floor may be intentionally strewn with dust if a political enemy is to be admitted in front of the king. It is not allowed to spit out the dust or wipe one's mouth in front of the king. On top of that, “[t]here is indeed another custom, which I cannot altogether approve of: When the king has a mind to put any of his nobles to death in a gentle indulgent manner, he commands the floor to be strewed with a certain brown powder of a deadly composition, which being licked up, infallibly kills him in twenty-four hours” (GT 236-7).

So far, this is an ugly image of abusive, desensitized power, such was to be associated with unenlightened kingdoms of the far East. However, Swift makes a sharp turn and enhances the irony, which is again powerfully intertwined with Gulliver's “naive,” deadpan delivery. While praising the king's “great clemency” and the “gentle indulgent” manner of executing opponents, Gulliver makes an “innocent” parenthetical remark that there is “much to be wished that the monarchs of Europe would imitate him.” It is the Europe of fading absolutist monarchs he proscribes, and the European, rather than Eastern customs he depicts. These are ugly, capricious examples of power wielding. The king of Luggnagg makes sure to have the floor thoroughly washed after the execution. Poisoning and impeccable hygiene follow one another. Impulsive cruelty is followed by incongruous and false generosity. When one page intentionally forgot to clean the floor so that a “young lord of great hopes” had died upon reception at the court, the king first commands that the page be whipped. This disproportionally mild punishment is then replaced by a “generous” forgiving, as the “poor page” merely has to promise he will not leave

the floor unclean unless specifically ordered to do so. Barbaric brutality is mixed with ill-conceived generosity, making a perverse cocktail of random abuse and “clemency” so characteristic of absolutism. In consequence, nobody wants to “incur” the king's “royal displeasure” (GT 237). Fear reigns.

So, Swift portrays authority as power abused. Power itself is poisonous and abusive. It is marked by an absurd, arbitrary, self-serving sadism one cannot altogether approve of. Human relationship to power is shown as deeply and irreparably irrational.

This allows for a smooth transition into the final book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Once back in England, Gulliver is overtaken again by desire to travel. He visits the kingdom of horses, the famous Houyhnhnmland. Book IV makes a final move away from anthropocentrism, but also undertakes a journey to the very core of human “nature.” What are humans like when measured by their own definitions of themselves? Since they claim to be sapient, does the claim hold up?

The final part offers a resolute answer.

#### **Book IV: A Voyage to Houyhnhnmland**

Far from describing yet another exotic realm, a voyage to the Houyhnhnmland represents a recapitulation of *Gulliver's Travels* as a whole. It is not just a voyage into an unknown, impossible land, but a discovery of one's own nature. England in particular, and human societal order in general are eventually brought to light and denounced. The journey serves as a narrative means of self-discovery and self-knowledge, and has the same satirical purpose the mirror or glass has in *The Battle of the Books*. This is the gist of satirical wisdom: “Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own” (Swift 1908: lxv).

Except that, as Gulliver's conversation with the master horse proceeds, readers gradually behold their own image in what is being represented.

Under the guise of an innocent and truthful report, the narrator resorts to a scathing, merciless attack against the pillars of civilization. Law, medicine, commerce, and warfare undergo severe scrutiny, and are exposed as misguided inventions of ultimately irrational creatures. At no point before has satire cast a cold eye at all human affairs to such a degree. The master horse's remark that he “saw no occasion for this thing called law” already introduces the subject of disenchantment and distrust of human institutions. Lawyers are represented as a “society of men” who “supply that by artifice and cunning which could not be procured by just and honest methods” (GT 293).

Law was feared by many satirists, and the very enterprise of satire represented a challenge to law, or even subversion of it. Conversely, in mocking the misuse of law, satire reminds of us of their fundamental usefulness and importance for humans. However, Gulliver resolutely represents the law as a misuse, or even abuse. By employing characteristically arcane-yet-plain language, the narrator explains that “it is a maxim among these men that whatever has been done before may legally be done again,” and represents lawyers as men who “endeavor to justify the most iniquitous opinions” (GT 295-6). Of course, the maxim referred to is the fundamental principle of the Anglo-Saxon law – precedent. Instead of serving as a warrant of justice and fair judgment, precedent appears to be no more than an occasion that legitimizes iniquity. The confusion with which the master horse grapples to understand the workings of the law, coupled with his unshakable proclamations of the lack of need of it in the presence of sound, rational behavior, further enhances the denunciatory nature of the narrator's supposedly neutral

and disinterested account. Reason and law are divorced, and represented as mutually exclusive. The peculiar challenge of this part lies in the fact that it is hard to say to what extent the satirist resorts to his usual tool – hyperbole – and to what extent a profound and subversive proposition is laid out in a serious fashion. Is law needed in a community of rational creatures? In Laputa, the law was warranted by an immediate threat of absolute and irrevocable violence – that is, by the threat of the Flying Island immediately dropping on its subjects below. But that sort of imposition of the law does not inspire reason, but submission. Laputa's king's subjects are not reasonable or loyal, but merely subjugated. Yet in the land of the Houyhnhnms, the reasonable bearing of the horses eliminates the need for law. If anything, it is the yahoos who may be capable of inventing it at some point, much to the detriment of reason. The very workings of the law are depicted as irrational and illogical. Lawyers “studiously avoid entering into the merits of the cause; but are loud, violent, and tedious in dwelling upon all circumstances which are not to the purpose.” This “society” has a “peculiar cant and jargon of their own, that no other mortal can understand, and wherein all their laws are written.” In so doing, English lawyers “have gone near to confound the very essence of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong” (GT 296). This mistrust of the law, and its decoupling from reason entails another surprising and thought-provoking distinction. While lamenting the lack of reason in the comportment of the English lawyers as described by Gulliver, the horse master acknowledges their “prodigious abilities of mind.” The lawyers are not seen as stupid, but as quite intelligent. It is the misuse of their capacities that produces “stupid” effects, but what is at work in law is, in fact, profound intelligence.

I have already discussed the propensity of satire to question the power of intelligence, or

even its desirability in a virtuous life. It is especially the types of intelligence that are cherished by rulers or otherwise bestowed with social prestige that are deemed suspect. The “anti-philosophical” wisdom of satire seeks to think in practical and simple-minded terms. Not surprisingly, in *Gulliver's Travels* intelligence does not guarantee reason, and is also divorced from it. More often than not, and throughout Gulliver's journey, intelligence is misused and put to destructive and deleterious ends. Ultimately, the master's “verdict” that humans (whom he sees as *yahoos*, of course) are “animals to whose share . . . some small pittance of reason had fallen” and who use reason to “aggravate” their “natural corruptions” as well as to acquire new ones, comes as no surprise (GT 307-8). However, unlike in previous parts of *Gulliver's Travels*, or in *A Tale of a Tub*, satirical hyperbole is replaced by a cold and serious discourse contesting the rationality of humans. The rationality is not merely questioned. It is denied.

Yet another cornerstone of civilized life is viewed as a source of irrationality and injustice. In spite of its purpose to facilitate economy and trade, or even to allow for its existence in the first place, money breeds corruption and vice, and nothing else. Gulliver is at pains to explain the very concept and use of money to his master, but it transpires that its principle effect is that of exploitative and wasteful social hierarchy. Money can buy everything, and so “our *yahoos* thought they could never have enough of it to spend or save, as they found themselves inclined from their natural bent either to profusion or avarice.” This wild urge to accumulate money leads to a frenzied society in which rich men enjoy “the fruit of the poor men's labor,” and the poor are “a thousand to one in proportion to the former.” Furthermore, and in spite of the fact that England was “computed” to produce “three times the quantity of food more than its inhabitants are able to consume,” the bulk of “our people were forced to live miserably, by



laboring every day for small wages to make a few live plentifully” (GT 298-9).

Here too, hyperbolic distortion is supplanted by a small-scale economic theory that is proposed quite seriously. The final discovery of Gulliver's long travels is a realization of human fecklessness. Humans cannot found and sustain a just, reasonable society, and they cannot establish a proper economy, as it entails a rational use of resources. They cannot overcome their follies and vices. No rational model or theory can work with human *yahoos*, as they are not rational creatures. This equation of *yahoos* and humans is conveyed through a particularly subtle narrative strategy. At some point in his conversations with the horse master, and in spite of his initial protests, Gulliver eventually reconciles himself with his status of a *yahoo* in the land of the Houyhnhnms. Therefore, he gradually starts to adopt the language of his master, and begins to refer to humans as “our *yahoos*,” and eventually simply as *yahoos*. What may seem as a mere habit, or a courtesy to his interlocutor, turns out to be one of the most delicate and unsettling satirical moves by Swift. The debasement of humans to the level of the lowly *yahoos* is the most fierce censure and “message” of *Gulliver's Travels*. It is not abated to any degree by the end of the book. Moreover, it is intensified to the point of outright misanthropy.<sup>16</sup> Gulliver's alienation from his family, and his love for his horses highlight the brutal closure of the narrative. The resulting laughter is of a chilling and serious variety, not a cheerful smile. Upon Gulliver's return to England, it is suspended altogether.

James Nichols claims that “laughter is not absolutely necessary to all satire,” and that “few fully perceptive readers are likely to laugh at Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*” (130). Philip Pinkus adds that, unlike most other well-established genres, satire forgoes respectability and

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<sup>16</sup> Swift wrote to Pope that he envisaged *Gulliver's Travels* as “a great foundation of Misanthropy” (Correspondence, Vol. II: 607)

seeks to engage the darkest of possibilities, especially to acknowledge the power and prevalence of evil. “It not only declares the triumph of evil,” Pinkus writes, “but rubs its literary nose in the evil and sniffs out the consequence. We may object to this as nasty work, yet it is honest. It is the only literary mode that faces the consequences of evil in this world without the usual anaesthetics” (7). This dark predilection of satire is manifest in its treatment of war and violence. In *Gulliver's Travels*, violence runs wild and unhindered, albeit somewhat alleviated with the anesthetic of irony.

Warfare is described in ridiculous terms, and completely divested of any dignity. Nevertheless, Swift's treatment of war, especially of colonial enterprises, is one of the humoristic pinnacles of his oeuvre. We will see similar stylistic gestures, and echoes of Swiftian satire in the French tradition, especially in Voltaire, but already in *Gulliver's Travels* the use of irony reaches the level of sharpness and censure that is unimaginable in Pope or Dryden, for instance. While keeping a calm tone and maintaining a tranquil, even affable bearing, the narrator employs what Northrop Frye in his classic definition of satire described as “militant irony” (223-4). Such ironization of war and violence is by no means new, and we have it in Aristophanes already, but the intensity of vituperation may be unprecedented in both accomplishment and daring.

This calls for an important clarification of the notion of irony in Swift, and in satire more broadly. To define Swift's technique through conventional definitions of irony is not enough. To say that he or his narrator relies on irony, and therefore says things he does not mean, or that his satirical attacks expose human vice and folly is accurate, but does not account for a specific use of irony as an instrument of satirical censure. Nichols designated insinuation as the principal tactic of English satire (1971). Similarly, Erich Auerbach gave a particularly subtle description of

Voltaire's use of irony, which he likewise calls “insinuation” (135). Auerbach explains how in Voltaire's prose there is always an undertow of more direct, and often malicious and intentionally simplistic implied meaning. This implied meaning, often crude and provocative, is always insinuated through more convoluted and indirect language. Auerbach argues that it is always possible to paraphrase the exact words employed by Voltaire in a more direct fashion. The paraphrased meaning would be the actual, “insinuated” one. Insinuation is a vehicle of propagandistic discourse, and so for Auerbach Voltaire's style does not aim to convey a subtle allusion, but rather a consciously simplified insinuation that supports the antithetical position to that which seems to be espoused.

This is exactly the case in Swift's mockery of war and warfare. Gulliver's ridiculous, though seriously delivered, list of the “usual causes or motives that [make] one country go to war with another,” his claim that “it is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine,” or that a “prince” may send “forces into a nation where the people are poor and ignorant” and “may lawfully put half of them to death, and make slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous way of living,” are fine examples of insinuation in Auerbach's terms. Characterization of such practices as “kingly” and “honorable,” and a definition of a soldier as “a *yahoo* hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can” (GT 289-90) are particularly revealing of the implied, understated antithesis at the heart of Swift's pugnacious irony.

These are also examples of adoxography, a figure of speech in which the speaker praises that which is in reality reprehensible. The most famous use of this rhetorical mode can be found in Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, where the anonymous speaker calmly proposes that the flesh of

poor Irish infants be seasoned and used as nourishment by the more affluent and advantaged citizens, presumably English. Far from a brief rhetorical escapade, the proposal is elaborated on several pages – hence it is a mode, not just a figure of speech – and rendered one of the most punishing satirical devices.

Relying on the same device, Gulliver's "praise" of the British colonial conquests may be of an even greater interest to a modern critic. It is the final onslaught of *Gulliver's Travels*, before the book concludes with the protagonist's morose withdrawal from society. The extended segment could be seen as an example of postcolonial critique *avant la lettre*, as "racism reviled," as Elaine Robinson puts it (2006), but also as a discovery of the unenlightened barbarism of one's own country.<sup>17</sup> England emerges as the ultimate villain who, in the name of reason and Christian faith, destroys other cultures.

First, Gulliver gives a mock-explanation for why he, as a subject of England, and driven by the principle that "whatever lands are discovered by a subject, belong to the crown," did not "take formal possession" of the lands through which he traveled. He deems the Lilliputians not worth the effort. Attacking the Brobdingnagians is not "prudent or safe." As for Laputa, he wonders whether "an English army would be much at their ease with Flying Island over their heads" (GT 351). He refuses to even consider attacking the Houyhnhnms, and even wishes they were "in capacity, or disposition, to send a sufficient number of their inhabitants for civilizing Europe" (GT 352).

Still, the key reason is that Gulliver has "conceived a few scruples with relation to the distributive justice of princess upon these occasions." A comically exaggerated description of a

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<sup>17</sup> Or, in Swift's case, of his frequent place of dwelling. Although Swift was Irish and supportive of Ireland, he was, after all, a subject of the English crown as well.

colonial conquest follows. A typical conquest is represented as a random plundering of a crew of pirates who are met with kindness by a peaceful local inhabitants. The pirates murder dozens of natives and enslave the others. They set up “a rotten plank, or a stone, for a memorial,” and at that point and place “commences a new dominion” (GT 352). The conquerors are characterized as an “execrable crew of butchers” employed in “so pious an expedition” and sent to “civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people” (GT 353). That is a new, “modern colony,” and the way it is established. The comic mixture of legalese, elevated language, and crass realism performs the task of demystification of colonialism. Colonialism is divested of its purported nobleness, and its official and propagandistic justifications revealed as morally base.

This was not a usual or welcome thing to say in the early eighteenth-century England. Of course, people knew what was going on, but preferred not to talk about it. As Higgins remarks, “an euphemistic avoidance of the subject of colonial slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, rather than ignorance of it, seems characteristic of much early eighteenth-century writing.” In such a context, *Gulliver's Travels* “reflects the linguistic habit of silence, occlusion, and euphemism on the subject of the slave trade” (79-80).

Moreover, the sly narrator exempts “the British nation” from his unflattering account of colonialism. In a passage rivaling the fervor and wit of *A Modest Proposal*, the narrator praises the British “wisdom, care, and justice in planting colonies” (GT 353). Their choice of “devout and able pastors to propagate Christianity,” and “their caution in stocking their provinces with people of sober lives and conversations” are also commended. Gulliver comically lauds the “strict regard to distribution of justice” practiced by “the most vigilant and virtuous governors, who have no other views than the happiness of the people over whom they preside” (GT 353). Of

course, such use of adoxography and rhetorical fireworks, far from exempting the British, implicate them all the more. As disappointing as certain racially prejudiced moments in Swift may be, here we discover a genuine triumph of an unsparing and self-critical spirit of satire. The long journey approaches its closure, and the satirist implicates his own homeland, proscribes its own shortcomings and gross hypocrisies, before concluding that the original *yahoos* “for anything I know, may have been English” (GT 354).<sup>18</sup>

In the following chapters, I will show that this sort of harsh, censorious self-criticism is widespread in all the satirical narratives that rely on the journey as a plot-generating device. In addition, I will show the critique of military cowardice and senseless violence figured as a particularly attractive target for the East European satirists. Finally, I will highlight the fact that the journey never ends with a rewarding outcome in the works I analyze. To the contrary, a destabilizing and often “unhappy” ending is prevalent in the journey-based plots.

On that note, it is worth pointing out that Gulliver's own journey ends not only in alienation from his place of birth, but also in an exile from his desired homeland. While Gulliver strove to leave Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Laputa, he desperately wanted to stay in the land of the Houyhnhnms, but was exiled as dangerous. He wanted his journey to end there, and so his ultimate return to Europe and the British Isles is a form of banishment. Much like Swift, an Irish pastor living in England for a substantial portion of his life, Gulliver, and satirical narrators more broadly, find their identity in the very split of their personal and collective self. Always a liminal figure, the satirist can only operate through the journey and interplay of different perspectives. The satirist belongs to the community from which he or she is expelled, gravitates toward it, is

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<sup>18</sup> It is reasonable to deem Swift an Englishman in this context. For all intents and purposes, he is a member of “the British nation” he satirizes.

fascinated by it, but still is thrown out by a centrifugal force from within. Best and truly patriotic intentions led the satirist to perpetual predicament, because true patriotism is self-critical. There is a brutal but irresistible dynamic to this ambivalent position of the satirist as someone who possesses great knowledge about their culture, and is urged and compelled to return and settle in it, but cannot help falling further away from it. The obsession of satire with its own place of “origin” is experienced at the social fringes and cultural periphery.

It is no wonder that the journey becomes the principal mode of representation, and a way of thinking. Expeditions, explorations, voyages and conquests always lead to some sort of self-discovery, to a recognition of one's own image in the unforgiving glass of satire. As David Damrosch notes, “over the centuries, writers have usually written for audiences at home, even if they sent their characters around the world. Jonathan Swift located Lilliput off the coast of Sumatra, but his satire was squarely aimed at the British Isles. Even a French or German readership was beyond his immediate concern, and he would no more have expected to be read by actual Indonesians than by Lilliputians or Houyhnhnms” (105).

In fact, a voyage to the Houyhnhnms can be read as an episode of satirical utopia, or a pseudo-utopia, to use Leonard Feinberg's term. Feinberg asserts that satirical pseudo-utopia, as opposed to conventional utopia, ridicules that which is harmful and undesirable in a society, rather than presenting an idealized and positive vision of a perfect society (55-56). A voyage to the Houyhnhnms is indeed a perfect example of this capacity of satire to transform the utopia proper, and transmute fanciful and idealistic reverie into a self-critical endeavor. Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is by no means a celebration of a perfect society inhabited by horses. It is a demonstration of human inefficacy and irrationality.

### **Conclusion: Satirical Indignation and the Journey As Self-Discovery**

T. O. Wedel writes that Swift was one of few bold enough to squarely oppose the rationalist and optimistic views of the rising and dominant – in both France and Britain – Deism and Cartesianism. He opposed the Deists with an “appeal to the weakness of human reason” (19). If observed in action and through actual experience, and not through concepts, humans exhibit little reason and behave unreasonably most of the time. As we have seen, Book IV not only makes a polemical caricature of humankind by equating it to the *yahoos*, but makes a philosophically serious and responsible contention about the prevailing irrationality of humans. Thus, insofar as it is a rhetorical strategy, Swift's satire works to “conflate human with Yahoo” (Higgins 22).

But insofar as it reflects the author's convictions and personal philosophical and anthropological views, this conflation takes a literal and impudent note. Swift always conceals his views behind a character or a pseudonym, but at a certain point disassociation of the artistic persona and the person himself becomes inadequate, even mechanical. Swift means these unpleasant things. For instance, in an appendix to the 1735 edition of *Gulliver's Travels* – a mock-preface titled *A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson* – Swift routinely refers to humans as “*yahoos*.” He writes that *yahoos* were a “Species of Animals utterly incapable of Amendment by Precepts or Examples,” and adds: “I should have never have attempted so absurd a Project as that of reforming the *Yahoo* Race in this Kingdom.” To say that this is just a fictional character's perspective is not plausible, especially if we keep in mind the convention and necessity of satire to conceal its real author from the authorities and even the general public. And



while sometimes concealing the authorship could be lifesaving, as was the case with Swift's fourth Drapier's Letter, or it can provide grounding for legal defense in case of libel charges, more often than not it is a satirical convention that achieves a peculiar effect of mock-mystery, and enhances a sense of a banal, scandalous exposure of a dangerous truth. Anonymity in satire is often exhibitionist. Satirists could not always hide or deny their authorship – we will soon see a prominent example in Voltaire – they simply used mock-anonymity to openly say what they really mean. This rhetorical ruse is beautifully described by Alexander Pope in his 1733 letter to Swift. Pope writes: “[Y]our Method of concealing yourself puts me in mind of the *Indian* bird I have read of, who hides his Head in a Hole, while all his Feathers and Tail stick out” (Swift 1741: 184). Like an ostrich, or the Indian bird, the satirist does not really hide. Everything is out there and false hiding is meant to annoy all the more.

Wedel is right to say that *Gulliver's Travels* encapsulates a “savage indignation of a lifetime” (9). Normal, civic constraints of an artist are replaced by a resentful confrontation with society at large. In fact, Wedel describes Swift as a “[s]ceptic and misanthrope” who “fell back upon *saeva indignatio* and the established religion of his country” (20). The phrase *saeva indignatio* is very significant. It was coined by Swift for his epitaph. First written down in the writer's will, the epitaph was eventually reproduced as a marble inscription and placed in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, where Swift was a dean and where he was buried. It was composed in Latin. In plain English prose it reads: “Here is laid the body of Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Sacred Theology, Dean of this Cathedral Church, where savage indignation can no longer lacerate his heart. Go, traveller, and imitate, if you can, this strong defender, to the utmost of his powers, of liberty” (Tréguer). *Saeva indignatio* expresses a “feeling of contemptuous rage

at human folly” and it is crucial for satire (ibid). It is its tone, its attitude, its temperament and its artistic sensibility. It cannot be divorced from the satirist and deflected to a “mere” narrator or “voice” in the narrative. Savage indignation is thus closely related to the laughter against *vous autre*, and it is meant to provoke the reader's indignation as well. What begins as a confrontation may become an experience of complicity and solidarity between the reader and the writer. But the reader may also be outraged and alienated, as many Swift's readers are, even today.

Still, upon inspection, one can see that Swift did not merely wallow in unproductive indignation and resentment. His misanthropic worldview often led him to deeds of philanthropy. Already in 1714 he served as the governor of the Bethlehem hospital (the famous Bedlam) for four months. His sensitivity and empathy for the downtrodden developed to a very high degree. Although by no means a secularist or a progressive, he also had a relatively advanced views on the condition and education of women. In 1730 he established an intellectual relationship with three Dublin Bluestockings: Mary Barber, Constantia Grierson, and Ms Sican. He jocularly dubbed this friendship a “triumfeminate.” Rather late in his life, in 1740, he purchased land for St. Patrick's Hospital, and made a bequest to Martha Dingley, who served him in his old age. Dingley was also a lifelong companion of Swift's best friend Stella (Esther Johnson).<sup>19</sup> In short, Swift's artistic and intellectual legacy – one that is bound to paralyze and make a person impassive – was accompanied by a fair number of philanthropic deeds that testify to an empathetic person behind contemptuous words.

This pertains to the question of madness in particular. Of course, all of the work related to the relativity of sanity and madness in English literature has been done by Shakespeare beforehand. In that sense, Swift could offer nothing new, but build on Shakespeare. The key

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<sup>19</sup> See *Chronology* in Swift 2010.

“advancement” is that for Swift madness becomes a legitimate and ultimate form of logic, an outcome of a sentient and sapient response to reality. Conrad Suits explains this very well. The first three books are easily digested by most readers, but most readers “choke” at Book IV. Suits asks: “[W]hy should Gulliver be branded as insane when he simply arrives at conclusions about his own kind which any intelligent reader will have made long before” (121). Thus, even if we were to say that Gulliver goes mad, it does not diminish the quality and consistency of reasoning in Book IV.

Rational logic remains and prevails in the *Travels* throughout. It is desirable, productive and powerful, but unattainable to humans who are not rational, or at least not rational enough. Only Houyhnhnms can attain logic and be immune to folly and vice. The more rational a human being is, the more likely it is to go “mad” and assume madness as logic.<sup>20</sup> This reversal is a step further from Shakespeare. The dramatic tension between sanity and insanity so essential for Shakespeare's plays is dissolved in Swift in the form of a serious and definitive acceptance of madness. There is no tension or interplay at the end of the *Travels*. There is only a recognition of inability to attain true logic, and a spiteful rejection of human falsehood by an irredeemable outcast.

This act of departure and defiance defines the position of the satirist. It is peripheral, marginal, liminal, but quintessential. Writing of Byron's satires, James Sutherland observes that “the most penetrating satire of national habits or national character often comes from an intelligent renegade. The expatriate can see more clearly than the foreigner the good and the bad in what he has left behind him; if he has unpleasant memories of the country of his origin, he is

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<sup>20</sup> Let us not forget that Swift's own condition in the last years of his life could be, and frequently is, described as that of madness.

now detached from it, and if his satire comes from an overflow of painful emotions recollected in Italy, what was once painful will become unpleasurable. Every satirist to some extent separates himself spiritually from the community in which he lives” (76-7). This insightful quote is easily applicable to Swift as well. What needs to be added is that distancing from one's culture is inevitably achieved by means of, and as a consequence of the journey, and the journey alone (whether voluntary or involuntary).

In *Gulliver's Travels* in particular, the journey not only activates different narrative functions and effects, but it is also the very structure of the book. Ian Higgins notes that “voyage literature was in great vogue in the early eighteenth century and Swift has hijacked the popular genre, parodying the travel book and converting it into a vehicle for satire” (55). But more than just a parody, Swift's book is a journey. It does not merely employ the journey as a device. Its recondite and meandering narration charged with irony, hyperbole and astute insinuations brings a kind of whirlwind that gradually morphs into a – both firmly and loosely – structured itinerary. The itinerary is firm in the sense that it strives to provide grounds for a fair, although unsparing judgment. It is trying to give the reader the experience of the whole world, of remote lands, familiar countries, utopias and dreaded places (primarily from the standpoint of European readers). It is loose, however, in the sense that it does not show signs of premeditation or deliberation. The only thing framing Gulliver's wild travels are his regular returns to his home in England. As Kathleen Swaim points out, “through the introduction and reminders of the European factual world at the beginnings and ends of the four voyages, Swift provides the reader with an important base of the continuity of *Gulliver's Travels* and its ostensible design” (13). Still, the protagonist's restlessness pushes and generates the plot, and allows the journey to

continue.

Satire strives to understand the world through experience, and what better experience of it than the journey. Physical travel broadens the horizons and brings about mental challenges and changes, while leaving one without recourse to their own metaphorical castle or ivory tower. Satire talks about the whole world by means of talking about different places encountered through voyage. It is not prone to aesthetically pleasing and morally appeasing propositions about pre-established harmony or fundamental purpose of the world. It is more likely to inspire reasonable and skeptical distrust of it, as well as of any generalized accounts of it. In other words, instead of proposing an all-encompassing model or philosophy, satire slowly insinuates a sagacious outlook on reality, a world-wise and skeptical wisdom that is at odds with the abstract logical universalism.

Here, a broader methodological reflection may be welcome. It is worth noting that this kind of narration poses peculiar challenges to the audience as well. It is not only Gulliver who embarks on a journey. The reader is taken on it too. The meandering narration structures both the text and its reception. Criticism on Swift and narrative satire more broadly is particularly effective when it strives to replicate a similar agility of thought and perspective, all the while recognizing just how provocative and unsettling *Gulliver's Travels* were in the day and remain to be so if its premises and implications are followed consequentially. F. P. Lock is right to observe that a true understanding of the book's politics “requires a delicate balancing of [the] elements of pessimism and playfulness” (4).

Along the way, many of the central occupations of the epoch are addressed, and always with the same emphasis on the insufficiency of general answers, and the falsehood of optimistic

ones. Furthermore, it is only through taking an exhaustive the journey that these views could be proposed and grounded. The significance of the journey is thus not merely a matter of device, but of a structural principle. The satirist thinks through the journey and movement. Satire's stylistic and narrative demands, its clever codes that require and stimulate interpretive discernment and the savvy “low realism” make satire a *modus vivendi*, a humoristic and creative response to an underwhelming environment. Satire fulfills its political purpose through its fostering of this kind of imaginative response, much more so than through explicit political agitation.

Finally, the question of destination is of utmost significance. For quite a while, the journey in satire seems to be an end in itself, a way to move, think and narrate. Some characters wander aimlessly – Gulliver, for instance – but others seek a destination, however vague it may be. In any case, the journey at some point inevitably comes to a halt, and calls the reader to reflect on its outcome. Lemuel Gulliver, like so many times before, returns from Houyhnhnmland to his house at Redriff, where his wife and children live. This time he decides to stay in complete isolation, keeping distance from his own family and especially other people, spending time with horses in his stable whom he considers persons and “degenerate” Houyhnhnms, and exhibiting behavior that externally looks like madness or sociopathy.

Gulliver himself says he eventually returned to “enjoy my own speculations in my little garden at Redriff; to apply those excellent lessons of virtue which I learned among the Houyhnhnms; to instruct the yahoos of my own family, as far as I shall find them docile animals; to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus, if possible, habituate myself by time to tolerate the sight of a human creature” (GT 354). This disquieting quote encapsulates two fundamental features of narrative satire. On the one hand, space and spatial organization become transparent.

While the journey lasts, satire exhibits insatiably expansive tendency – it opens, broadens and widens the world. The traveler will not stop at any one destination and seems to be forever bound to move, explore and expand. Yet, long travels typically come to an abrupt, unexpected, and narratively unprepared halt. There is no proper, gratifying epilogue – the story simply stops and everything is suddenly over. Characters typically end in an isolated, self-contained space or community, and satire shows a sudden centripetal tendency and implodes spatially. The whole wide world is no longer needed, and answers, if there are any to be found, are discovered in a humble, limited and intimate domain. In the following chapter, we will see how Gulliver's garden at Redriff is developed into a more conclusive final episode in Voltaire's *Candide*, including the famous final words “we need to cultivate our garden.”

At the end of this chapter, the second key feature of narrative satire needs to be emphasized. “To behold my figure often in a glass” echoes the 1704 quote from *The Battle of the Books*. Again: “Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own” (1908: lxv). If, as I argue, the journey in satire serves as a vehicle of self-discovery, it is ultimately meant to brace the reader to behold their own “figure,” and “often.” This is especially important when it comes to the collective self-image. *Gulliver's Travels* shows an unflattering image of England, Britain, Europe, and even human species. In so doing it fulfills the self-critical and noble purpose of satire.

As the long and winding narrative suddenly closes, the self-image comes into focus. We will see these two cardinal characteristics at work in each satirical piece analyzed in this study. The narrative technique of continuous expansion followed by a sudden contraction and discontinuation of the plot leads to a self-discovery or even self-realization of some sort. A

peculiar narrative style is conducive to narrative satire's distinctive view of the world, as well as its skeptical and practical wisdom.

Voltaire's masterpiece *Candide* is perhaps the clearest and neatest example of the genre.



## CHAPTER II

### *Candide's Journey Around the Globe*

#### Publication and Context

*Candide* was first published anonymously in 1759 in Geneva. Even this is not certain, as the clandestine appearance of this provocative pamphlet precludes the establishment of the exact date. *Candide* was disseminated, circulated, and passed around like a gossip, rather than being published in a strict sense. It was thrown like a bomb after being smuggled like illicit merchandise. In January 1759 a batch of 1000 copies was sent from Geneva to Paris, where the book caused instant outrage among the authorities. They immediately (and correctly) assumed that it was Voltaire who had authored the pamphlet. According to Haydn Mason, the police officer responsible for investigating clandestine literature described the book as “a bad joke on all countries and their customs” (13; see also Pomeau 57). A police operation ensued with the goal of confiscating all the copies available. It was to no avail, however, as a myriad of illicit editions appeared, six by April 1759 and at least seventeen by the end of that year, including three translations into English and one into Italian. According to Mason, “Voltaire and his publisher had evidently intended the appearance of *Candide* to be a European phenomenon, not just an event for the French capital alone” (14). Pomeau estimates a best-seller figure of about 20000 copies for 1759 (cited in Mason 14).

This is a very different context from the one in which *Candide* is usually read nowadays. Often characterized as a classic, and read as a light, safe humoristic piece, the novella seems to have lost its edge for a contemporary readership. Or rather, the readership has lost the critical edge and sensitivity needed to realize the high, albeit playful, stakes of Voltaire's satire. Often carelessly characterized as a "philosophical novel" in Anglophone criticism, the book has been less appreciated in the last couple of decades. And yet, *Candide* did not become a standard school text in France until 1968, and even then in an "abridged" (that is, censored) version (Mason 15).

In fact, if observed on its own terms, free from a somewhat superficial association with the mainstream Enlightenment and the dusty shelves of the classics, *Candide* remains an unsettling, quite provocative book. The lightness of the tone in fact remains its most caustic device, and the worldview proposed is nothing that adolescents in schools or humanistic professors in academia should easily endorse. Save for the ending, Voltaire's narrator comes off as intentionally and daringly flippant. The images and events represented would be unbearable if it were not for the easygoing tone, which makes them "merely" outrageous. In it, wars, rapes, violence, persecution, intolerance are normal, even natural. Countries and customs the world over are represented as deeply irrational and dysfunctional, dangerous to anyone possessing a modicum of reason. It is indeed "a bad joke on all countries and their customs," as the French police officer knew too well. To be sure, nowhere in the novella is it said that things should be as they are. It is, however, clearly implied that they *are* that way, and that, things being as they are, human creative and restorative powers are demoralizingly limited. A case could be made for a quietist, apolitical message in a work that is supposed to be central to the oeuvre of a philosopher

espousing enlightened progress.

This underestimation of the harshness of *Candide* is also evident in its generic status. All too often *Candide* has been described as a *conte*, meaning “an account of an anecdote or adventure, marvelous or otherwise, told for purposes of amusement” that comes to be regarded as a novella (*nouvelle*) as it grows longer, more substantial and serious in its moral tonality (Adams 129). For this more advanced variety of *conte* the French have the name of *conte philosophique* that can evolve into a novel. Anglophone scholarship sometimes translates the French term misleadingly as a “philosophical novel,” and sometimes it retains the italicized term “*conte*,” which almost makes it sound like a poetic, dignified version of short story, very different from the decidedly frivolous sense of the French *conte*. At any rate, among the scholars who see *Candide* as a *conte philosophique* few are those who underscore the severity of the philosophy proposed, the controversial nature of both the views presented and the remedies offered. As I show in this chapter, this tendency to tame and generically restrict *Candide* blunts the work's critical edge and limits its interpretation in a peculiar way. What is usually lost is the appreciation of the satirical qualities of this *conte*, and the negative, near hopeless appraisal of the human condition around the globe. I argue that these are the crucial aspects of *Candide*, and the aspects that make the work relevant today.

Simply put, *Candide* is not a book in which one comes to learn that, after a lot of calamities have been endured, it is best to cultivate one's own garden. It is not a book that gives a moderate middle solution that rejects both naive optimism and excessive pessimism in the name of enlightened progress. It is rather a scathing satire of human nature and institutions that implies that cultivating one's garden is the *only* recourse in an otherwise miserable condition. Cultivating

one's garden is primarily a comfort, then a modest reward. As such, its wisdom and message is not so tame and predictable, as it is often taken to be. It is far more complicated and gritty. Thinking of *Candide* as a satire and a narrative journey, or more precisely, as a *satirical journey* allows an interpretation that revives the polemical harshness of the story that made the unseemly pamphlet such a scandal to begin with.

In this chapter I will analyze the key issues in and around *Candide* through a commentary of select episodes. These episodes bring to the fore the main themes of the satirical novella. These themes are: 1) the problem of evil and violence. This includes human caused violence, such as war, murder, and rape, and the closely related issue of natural disasters with deleterious consequences, such as floods, earthquake, and plague. 2) the problem of authority and power in human society. *Candide* satirizes and incites deep distrust of both religious and secular, but also cultural authority. 3) the problem of collective and cultural narcissism (ethnocentrism, nationalism, patriotism) as a manifestation of excessive and unjustified pride of one's own people and country, as well as of dangerous ignorance about the world at large. 4) the problem of human error and folly (stupidity, greed, prejudice, boredom, vice, lust...), these being the traditional chief targets of satirical censure.

The analysis of these problems through a close reading of select episodes will allow me to make my main claims and propositions about the genre of narrative satire. I will describe some of the main characteristics of this type of satire that relies on meandering prose style, use of strong and persistent irony and hyperbole, and various techniques and devices such as caricature (more specifically, mechanization), allusion (more specifically, insinuation, as described by Erich Auerbach), and realism ("low realism" described by Mikhail Bakhtin, and "basic realism"

described by Pol Gaillard).

I will also show close connection of devices and techniques to a particular type of artistic sensibility and view of the world. I will shed light on the sources of Voltaire's artistic temperament as we encounter them in his satires. I will point to such elements of his sensibility as essentialist reductivism (the tendency to reduce things to a simple, bare, but truthful core), antithetical thinking (persistent opposing of entrenched ideas), and the so called “esprit gaulois” (the Gallic spirit), a playful, earthy and self-consciously vulgar form of humor.

These considerations will set the stage for the introduction of some of my own contributions and claims about narrative satire. I will argue that this type of satire supplants serious-minded philosophy with a minimalist form of skeptical counter-philosophy, which I dub “satirical wisdom.” Resulting from satire's propensity to streamline and simplify, this skeptical wisdom presents itself in the form of astute and purposeful questioning of the prevalent concepts and ideas, and presents a humorous and earthy perspective on life as a way of counteracting difficult and unfavorable existential circumstances. In doing so, satire also propounds a particular *worldview* that needs to be shared by readers in order for satirical works to be understood and appreciated. The worldview is meant here in the sense of a particular – and inevitably mundane and humbling – understanding of the social, historical and natural reality, as well as of the human role in it. It is a simple, transparent, disenchanted, and often underwhelming world that satire presents to its readers and lays it out as a sort of contract or grounds for interaction through which wisdom is to be attained.

*Candide* is a satire that ridicules the (polemically reduced) optimistic metaphysical philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, as Voltaire came to know it through echoes of

Leibniz's *Théodiceé* (written in French, and published in 1710). The plot of *Candide* is very intricate. I will have to give a streamlined account of it here, and concentrate only on select episodes so that I approach the numerous issues raised by the work concisely. I will primarily talk about episodes involving the “Bulgarians” (i. e. Prussians) (chapter 2), the earthquake in Lisbon (chapter 6), the journey to the land of El Dorado (chapters 17 and 18), the Parisian and Venetian episodes (especially chapters 21 and 25), and the concluding episode that takes place in Constantinople (chapter 30).

As can be seen, the plot of *Candide* involves a lot movement; in fact, it is a perpetual the journey. The main thing to be observed is that the incessant activity in and of the plot is possible thanks to the permanent movement of the protagonists. The plot is possible because a journey, both literal and narrative, takes place at every stage of the work.

### **Theoretical Considerations: Discussion of Plot, Irony, Mechanization, and the *Esprit***

#### ***Gaulois***

It is not easy to characterize the plot in satire. Some scholars, such as Kernan (1965), emphasized the incessant but seemingly aimless activity of the satirical plot, which would imply the notion of its static nature. Behind the ceaseless activity of the plot hides the actual stagnation of the represented world and condition. This is in agreement with Dryden's classical description which proposes that satire offers “no Series of Action.” Its purpose is not to recount a sequence of events and string them coherently.

On the other hand, Seidel argues that the plot in satire tends toward a progressive degeneration which constantly impedes the development of continuous action (198-212). Rather

than not proposing a concrete “Series of Action,” satire actively prevents it, works against it, undermines it. Entropy becomes the main narrative force in satire. Rather than wallowing in perpetual stagnation, the plot in satire is marked by continuous deterioration, comparable to the entropic narration of Samuel Beckett, for example.

Still, in spite of these “negative” definitions and descriptions of the plot in satire, Griffin contends that the plot always finds a way to move on, to continue its development (197). Emphasizing the linguistic and rhetorical dynamic of satire, Griffin proposes to substitute the notion of “satirical discourse” for that of the plot. Narration in satire is a discourse that moves without pause, that always advances in spite of the seeming stasis or entropy. The point is then in the activity of the language, not in the events constituting the plot, and also in the persona of the satirist who causes, controls and manipulates the work of that language.

Hence, it is easy to see from these plausible but contradictory propositions that no single and coherent theory of the satirical plot exists, nor is one more compelling than the other. I would argue, however, that whatever might be the case with the plot – whether it is stagnant, regressive or in continuous motion – the unity and coherence of satire need to be achieved at another level, that of the sense, of the view of the world proposed. It is the cohesion of the artistic vision that gives the disparate elements of the plot a sense of purpose and unity. Behind each satirical plot lurks the consciousness of the artist espousing a certain (typically morally rigorous) view of the world, and presupposing a shared sense of reality among readers. Without this particular sense of reality, which I will call the worldview, the narrative meandering would indeed remain incoherent, even haphazard. However, because of this point of fixity, because of the implied and consistent worldview, the satirical plot can be freely and wildly employed for all

sorts of purposes. The most effective way to communicate this worldview is, of course, the journey.

It is worth invoking here a classic and penetrating definition of satire by Northrop Frye, according to whom satire is – quite simply – a militant irony (223-24). Irony in satire is more incisive, more acerbic than in other genres. Satire's worldview, and the accompanying image of humanity, is less favorable, less forgiving. For Frye, satire always implies a firm and clear moral norm – an inextricable component of the worldview of the satirist. The moral norm of satire exposes the discrepancy between appearances and the actual state of things. It is an implied standard against which the shortcomings of human behavior are measured. It allows us to see the grotesque and often absurd reality of the world, in spite of appearances to the contrary. The contrast, the discrepancy between the “être” and “paraître,” between the being and mere appearances laid bare by satire produces a moral outrage, and renders the satirical irony more trenchant. The choice of the absurdities is a moral act, according to Frye, an act through which the satirist chooses the targets of the satirical attack. The “militant” irony is then a sign of moral outrage provoked by the failure of reality to live up to the standard of moral decency, as well as a sign of humoristic response to the grotesquely inadequate reality.

The irony is also a vitally important signal to the reader. The irony in satire does not only have a censorious role, but it establishes a code of mutual understanding between the satirist and the audience. The irony signals to the reader that the events presented are not to be understood in earnest, at face value, and that there is a point being made at a more subtle level.

The first half of *Candide* is virtually a carnival of violence. The violence is perpetuated, and even narrated, with ironic negligence, almost with joy. The effect, however, is comic rather



than horrifying. The irony, therefore, provides a philosophical comfort and comic relief, while signaling to the reader (who is otherwise likely to be lost) the grotesque discrepancy between reality and ideal. The irony also assuages the rawness and brutality of the plot content, giving a surprising *intelligent* meaning to the mindless and frantic events.

In *Candide*, the plot is typical of the satirical sub-genre dubbed “adventures of a simpleton” (Feinberg),<sup>21</sup> and the adventures narrated assume meaning exclusively thanks to the constantly ironic attitude of the narrator. This irony is the only fixed point in the chaotic world of the novella; it is the axis of meaning in a disorderly, wicked and meaningless universe.

As for the brutality, it is worth recalling Henri Bergson's fine formulation according to which only that which is human is comic (1940). In other words, we attribute human qualities to things or animals with a view to producing a humorous effect. The unexpected humanity of the behavior and relations between objects or animals is surprising and brings about laughter. Then again, when it comes to human behavior and human affairs, an inverse attribution of non-human characteristics is necessary for a comic effect. Feinberg notes that everything that is reprehensible in human behavior has to be mechanized, dehumanized in order to be comic and tolerable to our moral senses (49). Satire, as Feinberg remarks, often presents the world in the form of a puppet show (46-48). For the purposes of this chapter, it is right to say that satire's particular view of the world is that of a puppet show. If the human world was not mechanized in this fashion, the disgust brought about by human corruption and wickedness would be insufferable, and sublimation through humor as well as a sense of moral superiority would be impeded. Readers would be desperate and lost, or encouraged in their worst and most malignant

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<sup>21</sup> A prominent and comparable example would be Grimmelshausen's picaresque novel *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, whose plot is the paragon of the “adventures of a simpleton” sub-genre.

tendencies.

And so it is precisely this mechanical, caricatural and non-human quality that Voltaire attributes to the violent events and their perpetrators. This alleviates, or ideally suspends, the visceral disgust altogether, and so *intelligent* insight is possible. The mechanized violence emerges in all its stupidity and absurdity. The stupidity and absurdity become more important and more remarkable than the effects they produce. Normally, we have to fear violence: it shapes the real world, and gives it a horrible aspect. Frequently it is the most crude form of violence physical violence, the violence of arms – that imposes injustice and suffices for injustice to prevail. It certainly does so more often than not in *Candide*, and it is again implied to be regular and “normal.” Bearing this in mind, a sudden discovery of the absurdity and stupidity of violence provides a philosophical and spiritual solace. It brings about a reversal of the (usually unacknowledged, or even denied) “normal” state of affairs. Suddenly, the reader feels superior to violence, and *is* in fact superior to it, at least morally and intellectually.

Still, it is not just devices such as irony or mechanization that render Voltaire's humor purposeful and morally sound. There is a particular form of spirited wit, traditional and peculiar to France, that is a secret foundation of Voltaire's artistic sensibility. This sensibility has its roots in the French tradition of ribald humor known as “l'esprit gaulois.” *L'esprit gaulois* with its earthy and daring jokes is a disreputable and yet proud predecessor of Voltaire's own satirical sensibility. Prominent already in Villon, but also in the less celebrated tradition of ribald songs (the called *chanson paillard*), *l'esprit gaulois* flaunts its banality and vulgarity from the first pages of *Candide*. In accepting and celebrating the earthiness and “low” image of humankind it acquires an extraordinary capacity to subvert all mystification, as well as everything that presents

itself in an elevated or overly dignified manner.

*L'esprit gaulois* brings things down to earth by giving them a simple and raw aspect. As such, it serves Voltaire's purposes extraordinarily well. It takes away the air of mystery and profundity from idealist metaphysics, and dethrones the elevated but facile optimism of his rivals. It also gives him a humorous angle on his subject, but above all, grants him the right of the satirist to refuse to battle anywhere else but on earth, in the real and tangible, albeit horrible world.

Importantly, *l'esprit gaulois*, as Bottiglia rightly points out, appears in Voltaire's satires in an “enlightened” form that finds an upright and aesthetically valid purpose for its playful excesses. It always serves Voltaire's “bonne cause” (Bottiglia 31). It also underscores the earthly humility and, again, proposes a sort of counter-philosophical and counter-metaphysical wisdom, a wisdom that stands in stark contrast to that of Leibniz.

All these theoretical considerations need to be taken into account when discussing narrative satire and its techniques. The meandering narration, the fierce, “militant” but ultimately virtuous irony, the persistent and mechanized violence, the polemically exaggerated worldview, and severe, intentionally unbridled prejudice (sexism, racism, national stereotypes) – all of these are indispensable elements and aspects of the genre of narrative satire.

The goal of this chapter is to show why it is profitable to read Voltaire's work as a literary work above all else, and as a work of trenchant, provocative, deeply problematic narrative satire, whose specific compositional techniques, stylistic features, thematic scope and particular worldview and attitude are crucial elements of any informed and thoughtful interpretation. I will relate these elements to the particular context in which Voltaire's satire appeared, and try to

account for the work's lasting import. I will do so by emphasizing what I describe as *satirical wisdom*, that is, as a particular view of the world that is proposed by the satirical work, and that is characterized by critical skepticism, philosophical pragmatism and humoristic detachment from the authoritative religious and political views of the church and the monarchy. I will also suggest that the “wisdom” proposed in this work closely corresponds in its main characteristics and means to one proposed in the works analyzed in other chapters. I will argue that this wisdom, the *savoir* of satire, as Wood puts it, is one of the unifying and defining features of the genre of narrative satire.

My interpretation will be informed by understanding that particular problems that the works of each satirical writer pose must be situated and understood in the rich and contradictory context of their time. As Dustin Griffin puts it, “to assess the satirist's purpose and strategy, we need to know for whom and against whom the satire is written.” Griffin rightly points out that “historical context must be understood not just as inert background but as that milieu which produced the satire, the historical world it conjures up, and (rhetorically speaking) the various historical audiences for which it was originally intended” (188).

While I have argued that the genre of *Candide* is best described as satire, its simultaneous belonging to the genre of *conte philosophique* calls for some remarks on the specific status of philosophy in Voltaire's literary and satirical works. The overarching argument that I make in this dissertation is that philosophy in satire needs to be clearly distinguished and often understood in sharp contrast to the philosophy of elaborate and serious philosophical systems, such as those of Leibniz or Descartes, for example. Satirical philosophy amounts to a sort of anti-philosophy that is wary of both systematicity and metaphysical abstraction with its elaborate and daunting

language. Philosophy in satire is skeptical, minimalist and decidedly pragmatic. It is along these lines that I describe philosophy in satire as *wisdom*. Satire is trying to present a distilled, boiled down knowledge that is stripped to its essentials and unburdened by methodological or argumentative clutter. It flinches from elaborate argumentation and transcendental foundationalism. It refrains from making great and definite claims. It nonetheless feels compelled to propose answers and inspire productive interrogation and doubt. As such, satirical wisdom *is* philosophical, but not in the ambitious and dignified way of full-fledged philosophy. Like such philosophy, it meets its responsibility to proffer answers and not just fruitless doubts, but does so by different means.

Morris Weitz describes this sense of responsibility in *Candide* as the “burden of philosophy,” and argues quite convincingly that literature generally, and satire specifically, encounter this “burden” in different ways. The means of philosophy is argumentation. The means of literature is “dramatization” and literary devices. Philosophy in literature is therefore different from hard core philosophy and epistemology. The key distinction is that defining properties of literature (or satire) do not have to be irrefutably demonstrated for us to make meaningful assertions about them (Weitz 9). Appeals to truth in (traditionally understood) philosophy have to be made through strict logical and argumentative procedures. Philosophy is defined and verified by the extent to which it accomplishes these standards. Appeals to truth in literature are made through more or less compelling illustration, or “dramatization” of its assertions that (as Auerbach has shown with regard to Voltaire) do not have to be logically airtight in order to have truth value. With regard to *Candide* more specifically, Weitz claims that Voltaire had to meet his “burden” by throwing it off, by jettisoning the abstract doctrine of optimism (to which he was in

no way immune before) and supplanting it with a “counter-philosophy” of humble work and simple life that refrained from excessive reasoning (16-17).

“Travaillons sans raisonner” (*let us work without reasoning*), says the anti-philosopher Martin toward the end. That sententious retort summarizes the wisdom of *Candide* better than the much discussed “il faut cultiver notre jardin” (*let us cultivate our garden*). In it is the simple, distilled, “minimal” wisdom of satire. In it we see the fine line of distinction between the two types of philosophy. Of course, it is not an evaluative distinction, but a descriptive one. It is important to distinguish the two different approaches without necessarily preferring any one in particular. It is also important to understand that one approach is far more prominent and essential for satirical literature, and that excessive indulgence in high flying philosophy can stand in the way of the purposeful literary criticism of satire. Too much theoretical abstraction will not suffocate satire; it will just not explain it. Satire will keep cultivating a different garden, and criticism will “labor under misapprehension,” as the English idiom says.

### **Violence and Evil in *Candide*: Human Violence and the “Bulgarian” Episode**

One of the central topics of *Candide* is violence. Voltaire, like Leibniz, attempts to counter the question of evil in the world. Evil exists in two main forms – natural disasters and human-perpetuated evil. Evil manifests itself in excessive, uncontrollable and overwhelming violence.

When it comes to evil perpetrated by humans, its chief forms are war, murder and rape. Voltaire's manner of representing this evil is unique and shocking. War, murder and rape are represented as normal, natural and routine. At their basis is overpowering stupidity, which is also

normal, natural and widespread. In such circumstances, it is difficult to maintain one's faith in the benevolent and omnipotent creator, or in Providence as a purposeful design made by such a creator. It is also difficult to maintain the position of deism, of rational, socially productive faith in God as a benevolent, balanced and rational force providing the moral and natural laws of the universe, while abstaining from intervening in it. Voltaire's position was that of a deist. He now has to collapse his own reassuring postulates, not just those of naive optimists. For how come the natural laws of the benevolent God are rational, if earthquakes and floods claim thousands of lives at random? Worse yet, how come the social and moral laws ordained by such a God are even existent, let alone *comprehensible* (which was the deist tenet), if war, murder and rape seem to be the only universal custom of humankind?

These are the questions driving the narration, as the journey of the protagonist bears witness to crushing violence at every step of the way. Crucially, however, there is no moral outrage or regret in the narration itself. Not a trace of pain or disappointment – if anything, a sense of reckless exultation marks the first half of the book.

Violence in *Candide* appears in an exaggerated, mechanized form. It is caricatural, grotesque and darkly humorous. Narrative irony is persistent, and often sharpens to the point of sarcasm, but the most important figure of speech is hyperbole. Violence is hyperbolic, as is the capacity of the characters to endure it. The characters perpetrate and suffer violence with mind-boggling ease, almost indifference. All nations perpetuate violence and enjoy it. Again, it is “natural” in the same way the goodness of human nature is “natural” to Rousseau. Rape seems to be the most “natural” manifestation of male behavior, as amorous feelings are reduced crassly to a savage, mechanical (rather than animalistic) instinct. It is all natural and normal, all under the

auspices of Providence.

One of the wittiest and rhetorically most successful episodes in *Candide* is the one with the protagonists and the Bulgarians. The thirty six gauntlets that Candide suffers at the hands of the Bulgarians are a remarkable example of Voltaire at his most concise and caustic.

But first, why Bulgarians, why do they appear so early on in the story and all of a sudden, while Candide is still presumably in Westphalia, having been expelled from the baron's castle? The allusion being made is certainly satirical, but it is hard to spell out its exact terms and connotations. While a number of guesses could be made – perhaps there was a perception of Bulgarians as particularly cruel, or at least ruthless, given that Bulgarian soldiers often served as mercenaries in the Ottoman army – Merveaud and Deloffre argue convincingly that Voltaire employs “Bulgarians” as a misnomer. He alludes to the Frederick the Great's Prussians, and the crass allusion was clear to the contemporaries, according to Merveaud and Deloffre (259). These authors suggest that Voltaire is wittily alluding to his own suffering at the hands of this ruler, but the biographical parallels are not consistent with the story and they read too much analogy into it.<sup>22</sup>

Still, the parallel remains pertinent, but in the narrative it is employed for other ends. The militant and military spirit of the Prussians was well known, and deftly alluded to through a comparison with the Bulgarians (or the prejudiced notion of the Bulgarians). The absurd, exaggerated and unsolicited violence of the caning of Candide serves the purpose of showcasing Voltaire's provocative notion of the omnipresence, and even omnipotence, of blind, mindless violence. Crude force thrashes decency and reason at every step of the way in the first half of the

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<sup>22</sup> Voltaire was forcefully held for a full month in a sort of custody by Frederick's regiment after Frederick decided to rescind his protection to Voltaire at his court. However, the scene in *Candide* only shows a vague resemblance, not equivalence, to these biographical circumstances. After all, it is the king of the Bulgarians who saves and spares Candide, rather than mistreating him.



novella. And so here, the militant and violent Prussians, masked as savage “Bulgarians,” beat every notion of optimism out of Candide. A grotesque coupling of the abstract and optimistic metaphysical teachings of Pangloss (and Leibniz) with the merciless, mindless and mechanical beating committed by the soldiers produces a comic effect. Here, then, we see Leibniz's “best of all worlds” by Leibniz, the world just outside the safe castle of Thunder-ten-Tronckh. Crass violence reigns, and imposes a strict order by the unblinking use of force.

Still, the episode is wittily presented as an exercise of freedom of choice and free will. It is all up to Candide to choose how he wishes to enjoy his liberties, as he is seduced, shackled and put through the military drill in the second chapter. Having spent some time in the “Bulgarian” army, and having obtained some success and skill in his exercises, as he is flattered by the officers who tell him he is a “hero,” he simply ventures one day to take a walk, thinking that it is a privilege of the human, just like the animal, species to use its own legs freely (“croiant que c’était un privilège de l’espèce humaine, comme de l’espèce animale, de se servir de ses jambes à son plaisir”) (C 11).<sup>23</sup> The analogy is clear, but the irony is subtle. Suddenly, the human species appears endowed with less privilege than the animals. Indeed, the animals can walk about freely, but for a young, strong person such as Candide it is necessary to renounce the privilege of using one's own legs as one pleases. The French reflexive verb “se servir” entails precisely this notion of one disposing of their limbs fully. Yet, having traveled only two leagues, Candide is arrested and tied up by four other “heroes” and taken to a dungeon. To exercise the basic privilege of moving freely amounts to desertion, as it turns out.

Still, Candide is given full liberty to choose a more convenient punishment for his

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<sup>23</sup> For citations of the French original I to use André Morize's authoritative edition from 1957, and abbreviate references as “C” followed by a page number. For the English translation, I use Norton's critical edition from 1991, translated by Robert M. Adams, and abbreviate references to it as “V” followed by a page number. Translations from French secondary sources referenced in this chapter are mine.

desertion. He can choose between being flogged thirty six times by the entire regiment (amounting to about four thousand blows) or “receiving” a dozen lead bullets in the brain.

The narrator resorts to an ironic turn of phrase to explain Candide's decision: “Il se déterminâ en vertu du don de Dieu, qu'on nomme liberté, à passer trente-six fois par les baguettes” (C 12). The irony of this wording is almost malicious. Candide's choice to run the gauntlet 36 times (*passer trente-six fois par les baguettes*) supposedly being made “by virtue of the gift of God called liberty” (*en vertu du don de Dieu, qu'on nomme liberté*) is an obvious jibe at the notion of free will. To be sure, Candide did make his decision (*il se déterminâ*) – and here again a reflexive verb suggests a sense of one's possession of one's capacities – but that is not much of a privilege. The excess and disproportion of the punishment, as well as the sense of good measure and habitual ease exhibited by the Bulgarian soldiers, evoke a comic effect. The narrator's use of the epithet “young metaphysician” (*un jeune Métaphysicien*) to describe Candide amidst his ensuing calamity suggests a grotesque discrepancy between the rhetorical dignity of abstract logical principles and the barbarous callousness of the military regime. The implication is clear, as well as provocative, as to which constitutes a more real and prominent force in the universe. The blunt stupidity of the soldiers prevails by far.

And so Candide is able to endure only two rounds of flogging before begging to be shot instead. He is granted this “favor.” All the way through, the wording aims for a rich humoristic effect. At the very basic level, the crudeness of the scene either inspires vulgar, sadistic laughter, or provokes revulsion. The scene is either funny in a horrible way, or not funny at all. Yet, in a more subtle way, the scene and language are undeniably witty, *upon reflection*. The reader may not laugh at first at that which will be recognized as witty later on. One has to pause and think

for a while in order to recognize the humorous nature of the sense of the scene, rather than of its raw content (which might be deemed to be funny as well). This delayed laughter is very significant in all satire and will be discussed at length in the chapter on Leskov, where it is most significant and most prominent. For now, let it be noted that what is either repugnant or crudely funny in Voltaire becomes subtly and intellectually funny *upon reflection*, with a delay.

Let us take a look at several subtle details of the episode of caning. First the description of Candide after the first two rounds of flogging. He is described as having his nerves and muscles uncovered from nape to butt from all the beating. The body is violated to the point that surpasses mere realism and its ability to appall and shock. It is a grotesque hyperbole. Imagining Candide flogged to such an extent is meant to be funny. Coupling such a crude image to the epithet of the “young metaphysician” inspires a more subtle effect. It also implies that, oddly enough, the punishment is deserved in some sense. The “young metaphysician” deserves to be flogged, not for his desertion, but for his culpable naivety. The language employed by the narrator to suggest the stupid, routine execution of the punishment by the soldiers adds another layer of humor.

It is hard to translate the French construction “comme on allait procéder” (meaning that the soldiers were about to proceed with another round of flogging) because the “on” construction does not have an equivalent in English, but here the construction implies complicity, routine, habitual and unquestioned mechanics, as well as impersonal *procedure* that comes with it. The “on” construction supposes that the subject might be an unspecified group of people, or people present on the spot, or people in general, or an unspecified person, *some* person (much like the English “one”), or it might even be translated by “they,” as is appropriate here, because it is the

soldiers who are just about to continue their action. At any rate, the emphasis is on impersonality and an unquestionable automatism in the action. That is just how things are done. Again, to contrast that sense of routine with the notion of nuanced and open-ended free will elicits laughter. Finally, the untranslatable pun of the narrator that the regiment was “composed” (*le Régiment était composé*) of two thousand soldiers, which “composed” four thousand blows to Candide (*cela lui composa quatre mille coups de baguettes*) yields a delicately playful effect that reinforces the mechanical, “natural,” or even mathematical, *arithmetic* sense of the procedure. Suddenly, everything appears to be methodical, arranged according to the rules and order akin to those of Leibniz's metaphysics. It is just that the resulting world is horrible, not harmonious.

Even when Candide is spared further beating, he is placed on his knees with his eyes blindfolded as part of the procedure of execution by shooting. Presenting this as a “favor” is particularly ironic, as is Candide's plea that his oppressors (again referred to through the impersonal and general “on” construction) be so kind as to smash his head. “Candide... demanda... qu'on voulût bien avoir la bonté de lui casser la tête” (C 13). “Vouloir bien avoir la bonté” is a surprising polite formulation – and verbal formula – in the most sadistic of surroundings. The ultimate irony is in Candide's plea for evil to have the goodness to smash his head. One would expect that “vouloir bien avoir la bonté” is followed by a positive expression of somebody doing a favor of some sort, but here it is comically followed by an inadequate and unexpected coarse expression. Such grotesque use of irony is widespread in *Candide*.

When at long last the soldiers move on to execute Candide, the narration switches to the present tense: “on lui bande les yeux, on lui fait mettre à genoux” (C 13). Passive, so called “causative” construction with a “lazy subject” (“on lui *fait mettre* à genoux” – he was made to go

on his knees) is particularly effective here. So much for free will, and about for the best choice in the best possible world. Here too the “on” construction reinforces a sense of Candide being delivered to the mercy of a blind, indomitable force that acts immediately and indiscriminately. Thus, the military “heroes” turn out to be the most powerful force of the dreadful universe. In it reign the brute force and military patriotic propaganda that calls its victims and tools “heroes.”

When, eventually, the Bulgarian king happens to come by and spare Candide's life, he is presented as merciful and it is ironically said that he had great genius. Why would seeing such brutality as excessive or wrong require great genius? Why would it be merciful to spare a life, while having such customs that prescribe running through the gauntlet or shooting in the head? As already said, this moment is a possible reference to Frederick the Great and his peculiar mixture of enlightenment and military cruelty. At any rate, it is another example of Voltaire's mockery of war and violence, as well as of the mercy and “genius” of kings and leaders. It is a small stylistic *tour de force* which in the original 1759 manuscript is composed of only four long sentences broken into many subordinate clauses, with the *passé simple* (narrative past tense standard in French literature) freely, and uncommonly, mixed with the regular present tense and present participle, which allows for a “dramatizing” effect, and enhances the vertiginous narrative pace. This fast finish of the “Bulgarian” chapter almost precludes reflection as it exposes the reader to a sensual assault of a sort. It is only when the reader takes a break and reflects on the episode that the scene of caning might change from being mildly and lightly (or else intensely but crudely) funny, to being profoundly witty, and thoughtfully humorous, *wise*. However, the carnal and bloody orgy continues in the narrative itself, and so the merciful and ingenious king of Bulgaria starts a war with the nation alluded to by means of another misnomer

– it is a war with the French referred to as “Abares.”

The reference to “Abares,” as Adams explains, is another playful, theoretically offensive trick, as it again alludes to the cruelty and savagery of “a tribe of semicivilized Scythians, who might be supposed at war with the Bulgars” (V 5). *Candide* is a realm of wild, unapologetic, prejudiced notions and conceptions about different nations and races. However, Voltaire is not reaffirming these risky preconceptions as much as relying on them to paint a bigger and willfully hectic picture. He is certainly not refuting the negative images of anyone, including his own French people (the “Abares”), but through their use he is reaching for a universal vision of humanity – a vision that is disenchanted and “misanthropic” in an assuredly cosmopolitan way. And so, the “enlightened” French and Prussians (and their respective allies, Austria and Britain), who at the time of the publication of *Candide* were in the middle of what we call today the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) are brought to the same low level as the “semicivilized” Abares and Bulgarians.

Such is the irresponsible, libertine context of the satirical journey. Wrong and controversial ideas are freely taken and tried with curiosity and without fear of possible inadvertent effects. The satirist plays with prejudice as a child plays with fire, curiously and recklessly. The satirist plays with prejudice in order eventually to dispel it. There is something to be said in the defense of this positive unaccountability of satire, which teases out the wicked notions hidden behind the “good” customs and norms of proper comportment. Appearances notwithstanding, these customs and norms are often the very premises of violence and folly rather than a defense against them. Voltaire's satire does not shrink respectfully in front of the Other. In modern terms, its language is politically incorrect. It exposes and insists on the

sameness (rather than respectable difference) of the other. It de-exoticizes difference, but also abolishes the sense of superiority of the Self. Humanity is reduced to its lowest common denominator of war and violence. Customs are there to protect, not prevent it, and as such, are not treated with deference.

Voltaire admired English culture and thought it to have the most liberal and enlightened laws and customs. Still, he did not hide his disillusionment with it on the occasion of the affair of admiral Byng that served as an inspiration for the episode in *Candide*. The English too are stupid and ruthless when they ceremoniously execute the admiral on the grounds that he was not killing enough, that he was not belligerent and merciless enough. Candide is so appalled by such a “custom” and by the voyeuristic curiosity of the onlookers that he refuses to set foot in the port of Portsmouth. Elsewhere, in countries and cultures for which Voltaire had less admiration and which he at times perceived under the influence of his own prejudices, the image is the same. Customs and laws bring tyranny and needless suffering.

But for once we are not laughing at the incidents themselves, or imagining them to be something else and something outside of our societal laws, but rather laughing at the stupidity of these customs and laws, at long last realizing that they are a problem to be solved, not an unquestioned routine to be tolerated unthinkingly.

Similarly, in describing the satirical interpretation of the philosophy of Leibniz in *Candide*, one should not assume an incontestable truthfulness to Voltaire’s critique, as if somehow time has proven him right, and Leibniz’s views are obsolete and comic in their pretentiousness. Voltaire provides a mere caricature, a simplified version of the complex philosophy of the German polymath.<sup>24</sup> Voltaire knew about Leibniz primarily through the work

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed account of the philosophy of Leibniz, see Cresson, 1958. Cresson explains the complex system of

of Leibniz's epigones, such as Christian Wolff, and through accounts of one of Leibniz's most competent supporters, Madame du Châtelet, a great mathematician and scientist, Voltaire's close friend and possibly lover. For the purposes of *Candide*, however, while otherwise indebted to Madame du Châtelet, whose work on Newton heavily informed Voltaire's own treatises on Newtonian physics, Voltaire chose to reduce Leibniz's teachings to a simplified caricature of an overly optimistic philosophy. Hence, what is important in the context of this analysis is that it is only from a certain perspective that Voltaire's mocking and at times hostile attitude toward "optimism" becomes legitimate. It was not the falsehood of Leibniz's philosophy that outraged Voltaire; it was its moral insouciance, the irresponsible ease with which its optimism refused to concede a less propitious but more realistic explanation of evil and suffering.

As for Voltaire, his own status and privileges did not impeach him from arriving at a philosophy far less agreeable, and by extension, much more "pessimistic." As Jean Sarrailh points out, the fact that he found himself in a privileged position did not diminish Voltaire's outrage at the suffering of others who were not more culpable than he, or his horror at the evil "suffered patiently by the non-philosophers and eloquently justified by the metaphysicians" (30).

To the contrary, such contrast allowed him better to grasp the injustice, according to Sarrailh. If he himself got away, he could not tell pretty lies to others. Voltaire's own efforts to propose, if only provisionally, optimistic answers did not satisfy him, and that pushed his reason toward the most extreme and subversive conclusions. There lies the source of his daring and fierce satire, of satire of the sober-minded and disenchanted anti-philosopher.

Certainly, with regard to Leibniz, such a position sufficed only for critical and humoristic

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Leibniz who grounds his philosophy on the classical atomistic teachings and proposes a vision of the world as harmonious and optimistic, with the benevolent and omnipotent creator at the origin of all existence.



purposes, and it would be a mistake to take it as a faithful representation of its target. Therefore, it is important to retain a sense of respect for the noble and ambitious efforts of the German thinker, even if Voltaire's sober and dry criticism exposes the scholastic and dogmatic, as well as illusory, nature of its tenets.

### **Natural Disasters and Violence: The Episode of the Earthquake of Lisbon**

There is something to be said about evil and suffering brought about by nature. Nature too is blind, careless, purely mechanical and devoid of design or Providence. While the idea still played a prominent role in *Zadig*, and was so important to a whole range of philosophers of the epoch, from Leibniz to Rousseau, in *Candide* Voltaire gives up on Providence, and ridicules the concept too. Natural disasters abound and have nothing to do with the benevolent creator. They come randomly, frequently and destroy everything in their way. Storms, floods, plagues and earthquakes wreak havoc comparable to that of universal war, rape and murder. The central natural disaster of the novella, the earthquake of Lisbon of 1755, so recent and so shocking for the European imagination, destroys three quarters of the city, and that is also presented as normal and common.

Ira Wade's chapter gives a helpful overview of competing theories of the causes of the earthquake at the time (93-104). The two main theories were that the earthquake was a divine punishment for the sinful Portuguese, and, as was widespread among the Portuguese themselves, that the earthquake was divine recognition of their extreme piety and devotion, an acknowledgment of the exceptionalism and martyrdom of this people, of the holiness of Portugal. Furthermore, various scientific theories emerged that, taken together, reflected the

confusion and ambiguity of the epoch, its inability to find a rational explanation that would justify a larger providential design.

In addition to implicitly acknowledging the disheartening aimlessness and indifference of nature,<sup>25</sup> the Lisbon chapter also, and above all else, highlights the inadequacy of the human response to natural disasters.

In chapter six again we have a gruesomely humorous account of how people engage this disaster. In Portugal, the Inquisition is in full swing, and so the authorities organize “un bel Auto-da-fê,” a nice act of faith, in which people are ritualistically burned, beaten, hanged or otherwise executed with the goal of appeasing divine wrath and bringing about the betterment of humankind. In his historical account of the practice in *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV* (Short history of the Age of Louis XV) Voltaire remarks that the Portuguese believed they could obtain God's clemency by burning Jews and other people in the acts of faith which, he adds, other nations regarded as acts of barbarism (cited in C 39).

Description of the *auto-da-fê* (the burning of a “heretic” by the Inquisition) in chapter six is of a different kind from the one analyzed before. Here Voltaire's narrator resorts to a detached perspective and less transparent irony. The description is decorous and almost solemn. As such it is inadequate to the content, and serves the same satirical purpose, but in a more understated fashion.

Firstly, the group of people selected to be sacrificed is indicative of the confused state of affairs. There is a Biscayan man who married his godmother, two persons who refused to eat lard, which indicated to the authorities that they might be Jewish, and then there is Pangloss who

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<sup>25</sup> And nobody else would have done that except for Voltaire. It suffices to take a look at Jean-Jacques Rousseau's letter to Voltaire in which Rousseau refuses Voltaire's views on evil, confessing his need for hope and faith in goodness of the creator, in spite of disquieting evidence to the contrary (in Voltaire 2000: 108-123).

is sentenced for talking, and Candide who is sentenced for listening to him with approval. All of the deeds are seen as breaking one taboo or another, and as such they are punishable. The inconsistent and superficial “logic” of the Inquisition's persecution does not preclude it from staging a dignified and solemn ritual of the expiation of sins.

An elevating sermon with beautiful music accompanies the act of faith in which Candide is flogged again, in cadence with the chants (C 42). The Biscayan and the two men who did not want to eat lard are burned, and Pangloss is hanged, this time contrary to custom. Again, the narrator does not explain anything, nor are there any obvious signs of shock or outrage in the stark descriptions of the events. Only the irony of certain turns of phrase reveals that something abnormal is taking place, and that under the imperturbable surface of the description a profound moral outrage is hidden. This moment in the Lisbon episode would be an example of tacit satire, where the narrator intentionally assumes an air of lofty coolheadedness and detachment, as if nothing scandalous is to be observed in their words. We have seen that this same technique is very prominent in Swift's satires, and we will encounter a particularly subtle example of this composed, invisible irony in Domanović.

Only certain moments and word choices subtly hint at the narrator's awareness of the real nature of the events. When Voltaire employs the word custom, “la coutume,” readers are meant to draw on their knowledge from previous (or even later chapters) to be reminded that the word is used rather irreverently by the author throughout the work. The reader must make an interpretative effort after all the pieces are known in order to make a consistent picture of the whole. As in the example of the word “coutume” here, sometimes the irony is detectable only at a later stage, or during the second reading. Similarly, when Voltaire tones down the irony in his

satires, it will be the figures of speech that rely on traces of subtle irony that will be the only clues to irony to begin with. Such are euphemism and litotes. So instead of describing the horrible condition of Candide's and Pangloss' prison cells, the narrator remarks that they were taken to the extremely cool apartments (*des appartemens d'une extrême fraîcheur*) (C 40) in which they were never bothered by the sun (*dans lesquels on n'était jamais incommodé du Soleil*) (41). This embellishing of the dismal condition of the characters is an example of Voltairean satire at its most restrained. It is a soft, subtle satire marked by the use of an understated irony (opposite from the intense irony bordering on sarcasm in the Bulgarian episode). When such tame descriptions are calmly followed by information about burning, hanging and flogging, the grotesque effect is redoubled, and the reader cannot ignore the contrast between the pious appearances of the auto-da-fè and the gruesome reality of the Inquisition.

“Si c’est ici le meilleur des Mondes possibles, que sont donc les autres ?” (C 42), asks Candide after going through the flogging. “If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?” (V 12). The irony becomes transparent at long last, as does the satirical jab at the optimistic philosophy. And while it might appear as a facile and simplistic attack on the optimism of Leibniz, the actual implication is controversial and serious. Voltaire is implying here that the syllogistic abstraction and moral optimism that justify catastrophic events in the name of a higher good is allied with the irrational ways of the Inquisition. The accusation is far fetched, but it is there. Moreover, it is the Portuguese university of Coimbra that comes up with the auto-da-fè as the “infallible secret” (*un secret infaillible*) to prevent another earthquake. The problem is thus not only with Leibniz and his followers, but with the learned culture at large, even with deism, to whose notion of a benevolent and comprehensible creator Voltaire himself clung

obstinately. It is in this far reaching and accusatory insinuation that the real radicalism of satire is stored. Suddenly, knowledge and prejudice appear dangerously mixed and conflated. And then, when on the same day (in the story) another earthquake happens, all facile explanations are discredited, all efforts at comprehension defeated. The inadequacy of the human response to evil and disaster is exposed, but also the powerlessness, even of reason, as scientific and rational understanding does not and cannot help either, even when it explains the “sufficient causes” and the “mechanics” of an earthquake. There is no moral comfort in the face of an indomitable disaster.

The implication is thus rather unsettling, but the caustic irony is triumphant yet again at the end of the chapter. The narrator does not drop the mischievous attitude, and the intensity of irony is not abated by the demoralizing experiences and lessons. On the contrary, the strong willed humor overpowers any impulse to feel saddened by the disturbing sequence of dreary episodes in these early chapters.

### **Insinuation and Irony**

This calls for an important clarification and elaboration of the notion of irony in Voltaire, and in narrative satire more broadly. To define Voltaire's technique through conventional definitions of irony is not enough. To say that he or his narrator relies on irony, and therefore says things he does not mean, or that his satirical attacks expose human vice and folly, is accurate, but does not account for a specific and unprecedented use of irony as an instrument of satirical censure. Erich Auerbach gave a particularly subtle description of Voltaire's irony, which he calls “insinuation.” Auerbach explains wonderfully how in Voltaire's prose there is always an

undertow of more direct, and often malicious and intentionally simplistic, implied meaning. This implied meaning, often crude and provocative, is always insinuated through more convoluted and indirect language. Auerbach argues that it is always possible to paraphrase the exact words employed by Voltaire in a more direct fashion. The paraphrased meaning would be the actual, “insinuated” one. Insinuation is a vehicle of propagandistic discourse, and so for Auerbach Voltaire's style aims to convey not a subtle allusion, but rather a consciously simplified insinuation that supports the antithetical position from that which seems to be espoused.

For example, while the narrator often pretends to endorse the notions of the benevolent creator, divine providence, pre-established harmony and this world being the best possible, his actual standpoint is exactly the opposite. The antithetical viewpoint is being argued for, but in such a way that a consciously simplified and flattened version of the thesis is presented before a fair debate can begin in the first place. The reader is therefore not supposed to notice that Leibniz's philosophy is not being addressed in its complexity and difficulty, or that it cannot be reduced to the clichés and catch phrases that the narrator ironically recites. In consequence, the effect is a particularly malicious and sneaky implication, indeed insinuation, that the original argument is utterly misguided and flawed, and that the world represented is the worst possible. In the long run, Voltaire tames this extreme viewpoint and boils it down to a more moderate synthesis, but in the first half of the book, the reader encounters an intentionally antithetic and contrarian attitude, which renders the irony particularly sharp, in fact “militant,” to use Frye's adjective again.

Auerbach describes various Voltaire's prose fragments as “realist propaganda pieces for the Enlightenment” (139), thus highlighting the element of rhetorical ruse, or trickery, as

essential features of the writer's style. The other crucial technique is the narrative tempo, a fast-paced and witty delivery that conceals the swift simplifications made by the author. The meandering and quick narration is a prominent feature of satire, and the plot based on a rapid paced journey is particularly favorable for the purposes of persuasion. Still, while Auerbach is right to point out the manipulative method of Voltaire's prose, it should be noted that without a kernel of fairness and rational solidity, these techniques would be both disingenuous and insidious.

However, to paraphrase Paul Gaillard's formulation, overall, Voltaire does not lie. Gaillard gives an insightful account of Voltaire's penchant for a philosophical realism that refuses to be seduced and that forms the rational basis which is the only one capable of absorbing the burlesque and even malign exaggerations of his satires. The madness of the descriptions of the auto-da-fê or of the numerous rapes that take place after "each heroic battle," or of the crimes committed "in the name of human and public rights" (*au nom du droit des gens et du droit public*), this madness is possible, and justified in a way, only because of the authenticity of the described events. It is not imagination, but historical reality whose facts are rearranged and tweaked for the purposes of storytelling, but not distorted in their essence.

Gaillard claims that at the heart of these exaggerated descriptions lies the "basic realism" (*réalisme de base*), whose historical reality and authenticity were well known to the reader of the time. The episode of the earthquake in Lisbon, or the one with the schemes of the Jesuits in Paraguay, or the references to the Seven Years' War, or even the allusions to the castrati in Italy – all of these episodes and references had their basis in the contemporary historical events, and this was well known to readers of *Candide*. That would be the "basic realism," so distinct from the

transcendental optimism of Leibniz. That is the foundation of the intentionally shocking and disgusting aesthetic of satire. It is rooted in the banality and earthly, historical reality of the “real” (and presumably only) life.

So, “for the most part, Voltaire does not invent, and all of his readers know it,” concludes Gaillard (54). Behind the meandering narration and seemingly aimless journey, behind all of the seeming relativism and circumlocution of the plot and rhetoric, emerges the direct and prosaic truth of the world emptied of the metaphysical phantasmagoria.

In the final analysis, Voltaire's criticism is trenchant and righteous. Its extreme methods so well described by Auerbach invite a more thoughtful reflection leading to reexamination of the default argument. In gradually becoming aware of the exaggerated, grotesque and caricatural nature of the satirist's insinuations, the reader also realizes the comparably simplistic nature of the attacked assumptions and viewpoints. Voltaire's satire makes the reader aware that there *is* something vapid and unsupported about the murky ways of metaphysical philosophy. Not all of it is flawed, but its ambition to give an all encompassing account of the world, its over-reaching strains and overly optimistic conclusions do bring about their own simplifications and rely on faith rather than evidence. Therefore, Voltaire's purposes are not sophistic, but dialectic. His goals are to incite to sound skepticism, and to caution against credulity, as good dialectics do. As such, they are ultimately enlightened and enlightening, rather than propagandistic.

In fact, Auerbach recognizes that, notwithstanding the author's boldness and almost unscrupulousness in moral matters and “sophistic surprise attacks,” his swift tempo never becomes unaesthetic and “his unmaskings in the spirit of the Enlightenment are never crude or clumsy; on the contrary, they are light, agile, and as it were appetizing” (137). So, the means are



crude and simplistic, the ends and results are subtle and ennobling. It is yet another significant feature of satire.

### **The Role of the Reader in Satire**

Particularly significant is the question of the role of the reader in satire. This question will be taken up later, especially in the chapter on Leskov, but here it is important to introduce the subject and anticipate further discussion. More recently, it has been very fruitfully revised by Martha Jurkiewicz, whose book on the philosophical novel introduces the theory of reception into the discussion of French satire (2012). Jurkiewicz argues that philosophical writers such as Rousseau or Voltaire invite readers' participation, or, more precisely, that their texts are so encoded as to require the reader to reach the conclusions and resolve the dilemmas of the works. Rather than being plainly didactic and “instructing” the reader, such works count on the intelligence and wit of their readers. From the standpoint of reception theory, the literary act is an act of communication, and so for successful communication to take place, a successful, proactive reception must take place as well. Jurkiewicz thus re-contextualizes the broadly conceived genre of *roman philosophique*, and pleads for the prominent role of the reader. She conceives the reader as the protagonist (“le lecteur comme protagoniste”) (2012).

While the argument conforms to a general dictum of modern literary theory that the reader has to assume some sort of agency, its particular shape indeed fits very well into the process of reception of satirical art. For instance, some great poetry can hypnotize the reader, as it were, and its success may lie in its capacity to inspire trance like surrender and respite from tedious agency, to inspire positive, inebriating forgetfulness of the “real world.” In such a case,

the lack of readerly agency is by no means an aesthetic failure or moral scandal. The reader might remain tranquil, passive, disengaged. In satire, however, and especially in satire with serious philosophical underpinnings, the work will only be misinterpreted, and reception unsuccessful, if the reader simply follows along the journey in an unthinking manner. We will see some particularly illustrative examples of this in the case of Leskov, but the same applies to Voltaire. As “appetizing” as Voltaire's pandering to the readers' lower instincts may be at times, incapacity or refusal to think about or reflect morally on the events represented would ultimately lead to superficial reading that misses the point of the work. Hence, the frenzy of the plot and the swiftness of the journey are not supposed to suspend reflection. Indeed, without the participatory attitude of the reader, the work remains incomplete, morally and cognitively hollow. By engaging with satire, readers learn and interact. They acquire the sagacity needed to assume a practical and pragmatic, “no nonsense” attitude to life. Conversely, satire itself fulfills its purpose. It establishes communication, instills knowledge, and allows readers to partake in its wisdom.

Thus, there is both purpose and merit to conceiving the role of the reader in satire as that of the protagonist. Certainly, in *Candide*, the protagonist of the narrative never overcomes its cartoonish, sketch-like quality. It is because the point of the “novel,” its actual philosophy or wisdom, lies elsewhere, and is only fully realized through the reader's acknowledgment, and perhaps adoption of it. I will reiterate this point in my discussion of the denouement of *Candide* – the outcome and the message of the work is indeed primarily addressed to the reader and it is altogether dependent on some sort of active response and decision on the reader's part.

### **Satire and Pseudo-Utopia: The Episode of El Dorado**

Thus we arrive at the episode where all of the absurd, exaggerated and mechanical violence, and the almost carnivalesque orgy of insinuating irony begins to adopt the traits of a moral philosophy, of a wisdom obtained through gradual maturation of thought and experience. The famous episode of El Dorado, which comprises the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters, gives a good example of this important development. The episode of El Dorado can be read as an episode of the satirical utopia, or a *pseudo-utopia*, to use Leonard Feinberg's term. Feinberg asserts that satirical pseudo-utopia, as opposed to conventional utopia, ridicules that which is harmful and undesirable in a society, rather than presenting an idealized and positive vision of a perfect society (55-56). The El Dorado episode is indeed a perfect example of this capacity of satire to transform conventional utopia.

The description of El Dorado is not a hypothetical speculation or imaginative flourish striving to depict an ideal life, life as it should be. It is rather a depiction of the impossibility of such a life (as if it were an impossible world), of the absurdity of an artificially “perfect” existence, whose predictability is unbearable to humans. It is in this sense that the utopia of El Dorado is satirical. It reveals the idleness and frivolity of vain fantasies on the subject of a perfect life or perfect society.

Let us take a look at the particular developments in the two chapters. First, El Dorado is a land surrounded by inaccessible mountains. The land is cultivated equally for pleasure and out of need. The pleasant and the useful are combined. Luxury is common in El Dorado, where even the roads are covered with jewels and precious stones. The richness of the land is so excessive as to be absurd. Even the food of El Dorado is a too bizarre and exotic for a serious utopian fantasy. Voltaire is in fact mocking his own sources.<sup>26</sup> The parrots, the roasted monkeys, the colibri, and

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<sup>26</sup> André Morize refers to several sources and utopian travelogues which Voltaire used for his parodic purposes.

even the boiled condor weighing two hundred pounds (C 109) are a little too much to fancy. These gargantuan exaggerations suggest that the description does not aim to give a vision of a truly perfect life, but to show the ridiculousness of such utopian reveries.

What we see, then, is neither a perfect nor a real life. Moreover, it is precisely those who indulge into such fantasies who have proven to be most capable of destroying the very riches they dream of. In fact, the only reason El Dorado – the land of ancient Incas, according to the narrator – was not destroyed by the Spaniards or the British is its isolated position which prevented the greedy invaders from conquering it. The words of the old man who receives Candide and Cacambo make for a particularly incisive satirical jab at European colonialism: “we have managed so far to remain hidden from the rapacity of the European nations, who have an inconceivable rage... and who... would butcher us all to the last man” (V 36). (*Nous avons toujours été jusqu’à présent à l’abri de la rapacité des nations de l’Europe, qui ont une fureur inconvenable... et qui... nous tueraient tous jusqu’au dernier*) (C 114-5).

So, for those who dream about the perfect land of El Dorado, the place is an anti-utopia indeed. It does exist – so it is not “utopian” strictly speaking, but it is best if left in peace by those who fantasize about it. They simply would not be able to dispose of its riches and its beauty. The only thing they would really profit from is the one that is free and readily available: the rational customs and institutions of El Dorado (and not its material opulence). That is, however, exactly the opposite from what Candide and Cacambo do in the end.

In this sense only can the El Dorado episode be deemed utopian in a serious way. The religious and political customs of El Dorado form an integral part of Voltaire's proper philosophy.

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Among others, Morize mentions the books by Garcilasso de la Vega, W. Raleigh, and l'*Histoire des Sévarambes* de Denis Vairasse, all of which provided fanciful and exotic utopian tales (Voltaire 103-11).

Behind the extravagant exoticism resides a sober and enlightened message of Voltairean deism. The inhabitants of El Dorado observe a peaceful and reasonable religion. They have no dogmas, and they do not have any religious authorities. They do not even pray, as they have nothing to ask of their God. “Everything we need has already been granted; we thank God continually” (V 36). (*Il nous a donné tout ce qu’il nous faut, nous le remercions sans cesse*) (C 117).

And when it comes to the secular authority, they do not have the need for rigid rituals through which authority usually imposes itself on its subjects. When Cacambo asks an officer what is the appropriate manner to greet the king of El Dorado, that is, if one should go down on their knees, or belly, or put the hands on the head or rear, or worse yet, lick the dust off the ground, the officials of the state gives a simple answer that reveals the comic absurdity and even repugnance of such rituals.<sup>27</sup>

“The ceremony is to embrace the king and kiss him on both cheeks” (V 37). (*L’usage est d’embrasser le Roi et de le baiser des deux côtés*) (C 120). So, Voltaire implies, instead of snatching as many jewels as possible from those who are better off, it is more profitable to reform the attitude toward power, and to change the *usage* (“custom,” rather than “ceremony”). Instead of a cruel deity or an abusive tyrant, Voltaire proposes a dummy ruler, a mere functionary, or better yet, a friend who, apart from his role of the dignitary, is otherwise equal to his (hardly hers, still) subjects. Crucially, Voltaire envisages a humble society that is unburdened by the excess of authority. There emerges the subtle and enlightened message of the whole episode. The power is, it turns out, strict and abusive precisely because it has nothing to offer. It is hiding behind its own powerlessness. One had better demystify and reject it.

Candide unfortunately does not learn anything from all of this, and his journey continues

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<sup>27</sup> There is a similar scene in *Gulliver's Travels* in book 4, which will be compared to the one discussed here.

without him apprehending the advantages of the reasonable and prosperous life of El Dorado. Quite to the contrary, the same rapacity of the European conquerors, the same impulse to brag and boast about what they have seen and obtained on their voyage, prods him and Cacambo to leave. After only one month in El Dorado, they chose no longer to be happy and to depart. Instead of absorbing the precious wisdom of the Incas, they get hold of their precious stones, thinking that material riches will lead them to happiness. It is the naivete, the stupidity and the blind ambition of a simpleton that inspires Candide in his “reasoning”: “If we stay here, we shall be just like everybody else, whereas if we go back to our own world... loaded with El Dorado pebbles, we shall be richer than all the kings put together” (V 38). (Si nous restons ici, nous n’y serons que comme les autres, au lieu que si nous retournons dans notre monde... chargés de cailloux d’Eldorado, nous serons plus riches que tous les Rois ensemble) (C 122-23).

The use of the restrictive “ne... que” construction in the first sentence emphasizes the dreaded commonness associated with the prospect of staying in El Dorado – literally, “we will not be *but* like the others.” To this commonness a promise of an easy and instant glory is contrasted if the two companions leave. Candide even uses a conditional sentence with present tense in the “si” clause (the conditional clause) and future tense in the main clause, which is used to express a likely outcome on which the speaker places their full hope. This is nicely conveyed with the “shall be” in the translation. The contrast between the wishful and facile hopefulness of Candide's projections, and the merely speculative actuality of his suppositions is charmingly comic, more so knowing how easily and foolishly Candide is going to squander his treasures soon after.

Still, the journey continues, in high spirits, and with high expectations, with Venice as the

main destination (for Cunégonde is supposed to be there), but through Paris along the way.

### **The Journey and Patriotism: the Parisian Episode**

The Parisian episode has left certain critics disappointed, and indeed it is among the less thrilling stops in Candide's exciting journey. Gaillard complains about the relative frivolity of the Parisian chapters, and regrets their lack of rhythm and even of violence (52-53). It is as if the very point of the episode was to show this frivolity of the city and its inhabitants, for Parisians appear as low, given to vice, stupid, and, as such, comic. They scheme and plot, they conspire, they indulge into vice, but that is all. It becomes clear by the end of the episode that Paris is not any better than other places Candide goes through on his journey.

This is an important judgment, nonetheless, from the standpoint of the interests of the present study. Voltaire's blunt satire on Paris and France is a significant anti-patriotic gesture as well as a provocative critique of his own country, from which he was banned at the time, but whose advantages he praised all too easily in some of his other writings. In *Candide*, however, we encounter Voltaire who is disabused and experienced, and whose current views are not far removed from the pessimism and Manichaeism of Martin. Evil is all around, and it reigns in Paris.

With regard to anti-patriotism, let us take a look at the beginning of the twenty first chapter only. As Candide and Martin are approaching France (now without Cacambo who is supposed to reach Venice on his own), Candide asks his companion if he has ever visited that country. Martin responds that he has passed through several provinces and affirms that the half of the inhabitants are crazy, crafty or else mild and stupid. He goes on about widespread gossiping,

slandering, and flirting. When Candide asks if he has seen Paris, Martin replies with acerbity and perspicacity that presage those of Balzac: “Yes, I've been in Paris; it contains specimens of all these types; it is a chaos, a mob, in which everyone is seeking pleasure and where hardly anyone finds it” (V 45). (*Oui, j'ai vu Paris ; il tient de toutes ces espèces-là, c'est un chaos, c'est une presse dans laquelle tout le monde cherche le plaisir, et où presque personne ne le trouve*) (C 142).

Still, there is no Balzacian ambiguity that mixes derision with fascination. Martin's judgment is sober and morally imperturbable. He does not find anything appealing in France's capital (which still did not develop the charms that enthused Balzac, however). Martin's skepticism and faithlessness do not except any place on the globe, including Paris and Venice. Resigned and disillusioned, convinced of the prevalence of evil in this world, and therefore Manichaeian by conviction (rather than creed), Martin is the satirist of, or rather *within*, the novella. A perpetual traveler, he is a figure most distinctly critical of the world he crosses (like Candide) without finding refuge anywhere, and to which he has developed a stoic detachment. Voltaire partly speaks through Martin, and through him sends a message to France. At some points, there is no need to distinguish between the narrator and the author or his characters. Thus, Martin voices some of Voltaire's own disenchantment, without ever becoming a bearer of the author's voice or anything of the sort. Martin functions as an exquisitely handy puppet through which the author utters some of his most cutting criticisms. His views are similarly reductive, sharpened, and square, but powerful and truthful in some way. It is only appropriate that the satirical piece was packaged as a pamphlet sent from Geneva to Paris. Its anti-nationalist messages, as well as their author were easy to discern, even if they were “concealed” behind the



fictional character.

### **Satire and Ennui: the Venetian Episode and the Senator Pococuranté**

The same applies to yet another character whose denunciations take Voltairean satire to its disgruntled extremes. It is of course the central figure of the Venetian chapters, the “senator” Pococuranté. It is one of the most comic and successful episodes in the book. It takes Candide's apprenticeship to a point of culmination in a sense. What is it that he learns at its end?

Pococuranté is a Venetian nobleman who enjoyed life in the past but became tired of it and also of art and culture. Through this character Voltaire plays a subtle game, pushing his provocations to extreme to a dialectical effect. Like Martin, Pococuranté has nothing positive to say about subjects that invite customary admiration. He receives Candide and Martin in his luxurious palace. They take a walk together. But to every expression of admiration Candide makes, Pococuranté responds with indifference and insouciance of a superior person, of one who knows better. “J’ai beaucoup de tableaux, mais je ne les regarde plus,” he says to Candide when he expresses his admiration for a painting of Raphael in Pococuranté's personal collection. Raphael fails to impress the experienced nobleman.

The other “greats” of classical art do not fare better. When Candide shows his enthusiasm for Pococuranté's collection of classical books, Pococuranté preserves his haughty attitude and shows nothing but “noble” scorn for the works of greatest reputation. “Anyone who likes bad tragedies set to music is welcome to them; in these performances the scenes serve only to introduce, inappropriately, two or three ridiculous songs designed to show off the actress's sound box” (V 60). (*Ira voir qui voudra de mauvaises Tragédies en musique, où les scènes ne sont*

*faites que pour amener très-mal à propos deux ou trois chansons ridicules qui font valoir le gosier d'une Actrice*) (C 186). That is the senator's verdict on opera. The intentional vulgarity of his standpoint is manifest in the coarse use of the verb “faire valoir,” “to assert” or “to emphasize,” but with the implication of materialism and ostentation, and even physicality, as Pococuranté uses the word “gosier,” meaning “throat,” in place of a more subtle or dignified noun expected to describe the fine art of the operatic singer, such as “voice.”

Even Homer is dismissed with comically unfair and opinionated disrespect. Pococuranté proclaims his indignation with the “constant recital of fights which are all alike,” “those gods who are always interfering but never decisively,” and even of “that Helen who is the cause of the war and the scarcely takes any part in the story” – literally: “who is hardly an actress in the play” (*qui à peine est une Actrice de la pièce*) (V 60; C 188). He admits eventually that all that caused him a “deadly boredom”: “tout cela me causait le plus mortel ennui” (C 188).

Oddly, however, one cannot dismiss these glib judgments as mere arrogance. There is truthfulness and honesty in their defiance of the conventional judgments and ideas about the fine arts. Having enjoyed in art for many years, why would not Pococuranté become indifferent to its charms? Moreover, is it not possible, in fact inevitable, that such indifference should develop at some point, so much so that one forgets ever having found pleasure in art?

As a matter of fact, as André Morize documents (in C 188 et passim), it is Voltaire himself who, through Pococuranté's grumbling, confesses his own fatigue and satiety. There is a degree of provocative honesty and irreverence in these words, and a lack of respect for the prescribed falsity of customary admiration for the classics. Voltaire knew all too well that these “confessions” had to resonate with the hidden part of his readers, with the unavowed boredom

that they must have experienced in front of many works that ought to have inspired admiration, but left them without reaction, opinion or joy. Pococuranté does not conceal that embarrassing indifference and presents it as a – perhaps even appropriate – destination of the spiritual journey of a nobleman endowed with all the gifts of culture and luxury.

Philosophy is dealt with in the same dismissive and carefree spirit in line with Pococuranté's playful name.<sup>28</sup> The noble Venetian is skeptical even toward skepticism. With regard to Cicero, he says: “when I saw that he had doubts about everything, I concluded that I knew as much as he did, and that I needed no help to be ignorant” (V 61). Or more accurately: “that I didn't need anyone to be ignorant” (*que je n'avais besoin de personne pour être ignorant*) (C 191). His words are not just a convenient joke. They also bear witness to the discovery of the void in which all of the spiritual efforts end, to the sad truth of such quests. We are equally ignorant at the end as we were at the beginning.

In spite of all this – and this is where the wisdom of satire comes in again, and rescues the episode from falling into shortsighted defeatism or pessimism – Pococuranté's dismissiveness does not lead him to spiritual “superiority” or ultimate knowledge of any kind. He merely ends in a state of deplorable deprivation, devoid of joy of life. There is nothing “noble” after all about the senator's contemptuousness. Candide's naive conclusion is all the more false and comic for that. “Oh what a superior man,” whispers Candide at the end of his visit. “What a great genius this Pococurante must be! Nothing can please him” (V 63). (*Quel grand génie que ce Pococurantè! Rien ne peut lui plaire*) (C 194).

Evidently, there is nothing new in the fact that this lack of pleasure or generosity

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<sup>28</sup> Pococuranté is a pun in Italian that means “one who cares little” (i.e. does not care at all). Pococuranté is thus the “carefree one.”

exhibited by Pococuranté should be taken as a mark of genius. It is always this type of disinterested cruelty that prevails over generosity or curiosity deemed “naive,” and that hides its aridity and its profound boredom behind the imposture of superiority. Candide asks simpleheartedly, “isn't there a pleasure in criticizing everything, in seeing faults where other people think they see beauties?” (*n'y a-t-il pas du plaisir à tout critiquer ? à sentir des défauts où les autres hommes croient voir des beautés?*) (C 195-6). In the original the verb “sentir,” “to feel,” is used instead of “see,” which enhances the irony: Pococuranté is desensitized to the point that the faults of others is the only thing he is able to feel. So, Martin's counter-question gives the best answer to Candide's own query: “That is to say, that there's pleasure in having no pleasure?” (V 63). (*C'est-à-dire, qu'il y a du plaisir à n'avoir pas de plaisir?*) (C 196).

There is the failure of Pococuranté's disdainful insouciance.

### **Apolitical Satire?**

I have already suggested in the introduction that a case can be made for an apolitical message of *Candide*, more precisely, for the work's implication that withdrawal, disengagement, and retreat from the political realm are the only way toward spiritual peace and accomplishment. In this sense (and not in the sense of preaching disorder or disobedience) *Candide* advises anarchy, that is, an absence of political authority in the life of an individual. This attitude is a consequence of the ultimate “low estimate of wisdom of the rulers,” as Leslie Stephen says in his classic essay on Swift (in Bloom 182), and testifies to a mature disappointment with regard to human capacity to organize a just society.

At any rate, refusal to adopt an explicit political stance is on the one hand normal for a

literary work, but on the other characteristic of satire. In his discussion of the “power of satire,” Snyder makes another distinction between the novel and satire. The novel operates within a certain official social and political paradigm. It may not explicitly embrace it, but as the epic reflected the goals, ideals and values of the community, so does the novel strive to achieve both aesthetic unity and coherence and totality of the worldview. I would add that there are novels that do not strive to do that, and the deeper we go into the twentieth century the less the novel holds onto its aspiration to be the modern epic in prose, but the distinction is nonetheless pertinent and gives us a sense of tendency, if not a strict rule. Satire, on the other hand, operates at the fringes, or even outside of the mainstream societal paradigms. Snyder too ascribes to it an apolitical, anarchist nature. Satire is too protean, too fluid and in a way too destructive to stay within any consistent and “organic” paradigm or view of reality. It remains a genre propitious for more marginal and subversive, as well as self-critical, ventures.

This is not to say that satire is in any way better than the novel. It is simply a matter of making a remark on the general, principal tendency and capacity of the genre. When it comes to Voltaire, a distinction might be more pertinent between his satires and the “official,” most elevated and revered genre of his age, tragedy. Voltaire perceived himself as a writer of tragedies first and foremost, and considered his satirical and other prose writings to be less serious and significant. It is in his satires, therefore, that Voltaire finds respite from the seriousness and pathos of his tragedies, and from vehement argumentation of his philosophical writings. It is Voltaire the exile, however, that writes the satires, not the Voltaire the philosopher or the tragedian who enjoys the protection of the political luminaries such as Frederick the Great or Catherine the Great. From them, and for the time being he is hiding his “trivial” satires. This

lowly reputation of satire is worth noticing. At first glance, the satirists I am dealing with are all endeavoring something lowly, disreputable, not quite worthy of a respectable writer. Their works will not get them into the courts or palaces. They are more likely to be exiled, imprisoned or banned.

Still, for the sake of retaining a more traditional perspective on *Candide*, it is also possible to say that the work ultimately defends the idea of small scale and enlightened political progress. Generally speaking, and putting aside the particular perspective of Voltaire as a satirist, Voltaire's philosophical and theoretical – and even ideological – position is best characterized as that of a *meliorist*. This is particularly well argued by Bottiglia, according to whom Voltaire is neither a pessimist nor (quite obviously) a naive optimist. While Voltaire shared the belief in progress immanent to the Enlightenment, his adherence to it is not of a doctrinal or dogmatic, and even less of abstract type.

It is rather a question of practical and enlightened meliorism, of a measured faith in the possibility of gradual amelioration of the human condition, in spite of unfavorable circumstances. Voltaire, therefore, as a philosopher, strives to find a medium and moderate path, one opposite to the excess of his satirical escapades (Bottiglia 13-4). In order to achieve his ends, he resorts to many different means, but always with a sense of measure. As Bottiglia puts it, he accepts “many not any means” (254).

This approach finds its equilibrium at the end of *Candide*. The journey finishes by a dearly paid discovery of a moderate and modest philosophy, or, better yet, wisdom. The acerbity of satire dissolves in the surprising tones of resignation and mildness. Where does this unexpected acquiescence of a perpetual rebel that was Voltaire come from? Why does the

journey of Candide and his suite end in Constantinople? “We need to cultivate our garden” – why content oneself with so little?

The ending of *Candide*, with its closing motto that is so frequently cited out of context, is complex, even complicated.

### **The Wisdom of Satire: The Journey Ends in Constantinople**

At the beginning of the final chapter, Candide and his troupe have met together in Constantinople and are tormented by immense boredom. Candide is there, as are Pangloss, Cacambo, Martin, the Old Woman, Paquette, friar Giroflé and Cunégonde. They do not know what to do. Nothing pleases them. In their despair they decide to pay a visit to a famous dervish in the hope that he might give them some advice. His advice is enigmatic and specific at the same time. Silence.

One better stay quiet, says the dervish, but his words are veiled in mystery. “What does it matter, said the dervish, whether there's good or evil? When his highness sends a ship to Egypt, does he worry whether the mice on board are comfortable or not?” (V 73). (*Qu'importe qu'il y ait du mal ou du bien ? Quand Sa Hautesse envoie un vaisseau en Egypte, s'embarrasse-t-elle si les souris qui sont dans le vaisseau sont à leur aise ou non?*) (C 219). It is an interesting image that seems to have something “oriental” in its ambiguity and its relativism. Man (*l'homme*) is but a small thing, a mouse on a great vessel who had better stay quiet. The problem, however, is that the image is not related neither to Sufism nor is it “oriental” in any way. Even Morize is incapable of finding its source, but presumes a proverbial expression at its origin. Morize does document several examples of the image in Voltaire's correspondence (see C 219). The

attribution of the image to the dervish is interesting and rather efficient, but the image remains somewhat mysterious. When Pangloss tries to reason about its meaning, the dervish closes the door and refuses to discuss further. His silence is exclusive and absolute.

On the outside, it is the earthly noise that prevails. News has been spread that several state officials (viziers, the mufti) were strangled, impaled. The narrator remarks that “this catastrophe made a great and general sensation for several hours” (V 74). Surely, it is the noise of the mice on the dervish's vessel, and it lasts for only a few moments, but it is another possible answer to the problem of the insufferable boredom of life. Perhaps it is better to surrender to the lowly power struggles, better to forget oneself in the vain combat without genuine purpose? It is *only then* that Candide and his suite meet the “good Muslim” (*le bon Musulman*) from whom they learn the wisdom of simplicity which, according to him, holds off the three great evils: boredom (*l'ennui*), vice (*le vice*) and need (*le besoin*) (C 221).

It is only when he sees the Turk in his tranquil work with his family that Candide comes up with his famous motto. And it is still the golden mean, the equilibrium that Voltaire strives to reach here. The proposition to “cultivate our garden” is equally removed from the passive, detached and mystical silence of the dervish, as it is from the transitory and violent noise of the power struggle, or even from the incessant reasoning of Pangloss. It is the matter of finding the golden mean, of “working without speculating,” as Martin says (*travaillons sans raisonner*), but without effacing oneself in silence either. There lies the small and humble answer to the great question of evil. Wisdom lies in activity devoid of dangerous ambition, but also wary of self-effacing quietism.

Thus, it is possible to observe a certain implosive tendency at the end of *Candide*. The



metaphor of cultivating the garden appears as a surprising compromise for such a combative satirist as Voltaire. The extremes of the quietist silence and the belligerent frenzy are not reconciled but simply rejected in favor of a more simple and rather unexpected resolution. This resolution is as sudden as it is surprising, but at the same time, it is in agreement with the abrupt nature of satirical endings (we will see this in other works too) and with the improvisational character of *Candide* itself.

Sareil has explained this “improvisational character” (*le caractère de l'improvisation*) of Voltaire's satire very well. He recounts a legend originated by Anatole France who remarked once that *Candide* was “botched in three days for immortality” (*bâclé en trois jours pour l'immortalité*) (in Sareil 13). But according to Sareil, that appealing legend that has misled many critics has a more reasonable and less mystifying explanation. Sareil argues that the whole of the preparatory labor Voltaire undertook for an unspecified philosophical work is transmuted and sublimated – I would add specifically through a work of satire and satirical spirit – and used anew in this toned down and distilled form in Voltaire's best novellas (*Candide*, *Zadig*, *Micromégas*). The indefinite mass of diligently accumulated ideas is lightened, sharpened by the humor and satire, while remaining solid. (*allégée, aiguisée par l'humour et la satire, mais toujours solide*) (Sareil 16).

Sareil's is certainly one of the finest descriptions of the satirical method in any writer. It accounts precisely for the way in which a certain “formal” approach yields its corresponding type of knowledge – satirical wisdom in this case, which too is “allégée,” “aiguisée par l'humour” and all the more consistent and “solid” for it. It also highlights the direct connection between the formal method and the artistic sensibility. One thing leads to another, and in

Voltaire's particular case, results in the sharp, succinct, daringly witty and improvised style of his finest *contes*.

I would add that it also yields a certain minimalism – both aesthetic and philosophical – which comes to prominence in the “implosion” of the final chapter. The meandering narration, the constant voyage and wandering have flattened the world in a way. After all the complications and intricacies of the plot, a sudden halt takes place, rather than an eventful denouement. Even the diversity of the world is reduced to a slightly disappointing monotony at long last. There is not much to be said, and the satirist retreats, all of a sudden.

Still, why Constantinople, is there any symbolism in that circumstance? Or is it another improvisation whose potential symbolic effects did not concern the writer? Malise Ruthven claims that one of the Enlightenment's central values, so important to Voltaire as well, namely the idea of religious tolerance, finds its apology at the end of the book (2013). Is an attempt to ensure reconciliation, or at least a promise of reconciliation and tolerance, based on reason and reasonable spirituality. Ruthven even suggests that at the end of *Candide* there is an “implicit endorsement” of the beauty of Islam of which Voltaire was quite ignorant during a large part of his life. Therefore, if El Dorado did not satisfy because of the boredom and the overly calm regularity of life there; if Paris is a chaos where people never stop seeking pleasure and yet never find it; if Venice “is only good for the Venetian nobles” in words of Martin (V 45); Constantinople, then, might hold the promise of reconciliation by virtue of being a major cultural and historical crossroad.

Nevertheless, even this seems to be a far-fetched interpretation, a sort of allegorical compulsion to find an excess of meaning where it does not truly exist. Finally, we have already

described the general disorder reigning in Constantinople (with political assassinations, struggles, and so forth), as in all the other places covered during Candide's journey. It would appear, then, that a more moderate conclusion would be more just.

The only message – a “message” that is clearly relatable to the critical notion of the authorial intention – the only message that can be discerned with certainty is the valorization of honest and simple work devoid of any rhetoric. The good Turk is wise because (he alone, it would seem) understands this. He has withdrawn from the external world so as to enjoy his life and family. He does not know the names of the viziers, or muftis, and does not even care for the sultan. There is no allegory or excessive profundity in this, nothing that would call for philosophical exposition. There is no irony in it either. Its subversive potential has been exhausted, and it serves no purpose. The ending of the *conte* is light, but serious.

In the same fashion, it turns out that the narrative function of the journey is not to serve as an occasion to send an elaborate and expansive message of serious philosophy – what the French would call “la grande philosophie.” In fact, the satirist recoils in front of that daunting task. The satirist's skeptical and reticent wisdom implodes rather than expanding. Consequently, the journey allows the satirist to interrogate liberally all of the ideas, to experiment with logic and to push it to extremes, as well as to demystify the great philosophy by proposing in its stead a simple and sober wisdom, a wisdom that is the dry but wholesome fruit of satire.

## CHAPTER III

### The Silent Satire of Nikolai Leskov

#### The *Skaz* and “Reduced” Humor in Leskov's Satire

In this chapter I argue that Leskov's peculiar use of the journey and wandering as a narrative device is an original and innovative satire. More precisely, my argument is that the deepest layers of his major works, such as *The Enchanted Wanderer* that I will discuss here, can only be reached if the story is interpreted as an original and innovative blend of the *skaz* and satire. The *skaz* and the journey are used to create a literary universe which is simultaneously seen as an open and enigmatic miracle, and a space filled with brutal cultural reality, and blank neglect of soul and sentiments. A mixture of variegated and unexpected elements emerges through movement and incessant change. This chapter will move away slightly from the conventional commentary on satire, and highlight the refined artistry that relies on the same fundamental tools – the journey, story-telling concision, self-exploration and questioning, and subversive critique – to deliver an understated and subdued interrogation of culture. As such, this chapter aims to broaden and expand the ways in which we think of satire, and perceive its power. I argue that the evolution of satire and novella opened up new possibilities and avenues of creative sophistication. Satire does not have to jab, or openly confront. It can also equivocate and insinuate, while preserving its subversive and independent spirit. Indeed, I describe Leskov's satire in his famous novella *The Enchanted Wanderer* as the “silent” satire, and refer to Bakhtin's

notion of “reduced” humor as a particularly significant technique Leskov employs to deliver his satirical critique. Finally, I explain the importance and “quiet” power of a narrative genre essential to the Russian story-telling – the so-called *skaz* a mode of narration that mimics the oral and common speech.

The *skaz* dimension is particularly innovative in Leskov. In Voltaire, for instance, we have an omniscient and sarcastic narrator dominating the story, and rendering *Candide's* satire trenchant and obvious. In *Gulliver's Travels* discussed in the first chapter, the first-person narration allows for more ruse and subtlety, but satire remains prominent, easy to recognize and morose in its mood and tone. In case of Leskov's unorthodox and unusual satire, we experience something else. Leskov employs a quiet, silent, understated satire that brings under scrutiny the core cultural values and myths, rather than condemning them.

We encounter a less obvious type of satire, but a kind of satire that can be just as subversive as the more vitriolic satire in the Juvenalian vein that we encounter in Swift and Voltaire. There is no precise target. No malice or misanthropy. Ambivalence overrides disdain and admonishment. Everything is pervaded with sound, witty skepticism and spiritual warmth and benevolence. It is a rare and special artistic sensibility marked by the most unusual emotional mixtures.

This outlook yields a particularly diverse and layered strain of satire bound with the powerful quasi-oral narration of the *skaz* and its resilient point-of-view techniques. *Skaz* is a stylized, first person narrative emulating *oral* speech, typically of the common people.<sup>29</sup> Boris Eichenbaum, a Russian Formalist who was the first scholar to describe the *skaz* in his analysis of Nikolai Gogol's *The Overcoat*, emphasized that the “comical effects are achieved by the manner

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<sup>29</sup> The noun is derived from the verb *рассказать*, to tell.

of narration,” and that the structure of a short story rests on the author's personal tone that focuses not on the theme but on the narrative devices, and the very act of telling (377).

Adding to this, Boris Mikhailovich Drugov (1961) describes Leskov's method as “satire by means of *skaz*” (*camyра пpeдcтвaмu cкaзa*).<sup>30</sup> This scholar sees the two narrative modes as complementary and cooperative in Leskov. Leskov employs the *skaz* not just to “imitate” or emulate the power of the spoken word, but to chastise in a subtle fashion the problems he sees in the society and history of his culture.

At any rate, the *skaz* preserves, and even enhances the folk speech and the conversational style. The meandering and digressive narration, the spontaneous and unapologetic expression of the protagonist's views and values that are rife with ignorance, prejudice, and mistakes are all essential for the *skaz*. Still, a mere sympathetic portrayal of a common man's speech and view of the world would not have accounted for Leskov's subversive and satirical use of the *skaz*. Innocently and lightly humorous imitation of the oral speech would have simply laid bare the charming or disturbing aspects of the common people – the *narod* – but would have remained deprived of the subversive power of satire. Therefore, Leskov's advanced and sophisticated use of the *skaz* depends on the dynamic of the oral narration of the protagonist and the use of the dry, detached, and observational tone of the anonymous introductory narrator. In *The Enchanted Wanderer*, on which I focus here as an epitome of Leskov “silent” satire, we do not encounter just the “storyteller” from Walter Benjamin's seminal essay on Leskov. Benjamin's notion of the *erzähler* covers only half the ground – the archaic and profound aspect of storytelling, its oral and communal power.

However, Leskov's storytelling is entirely dependent on the reticent but constant presence

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<sup>30</sup> Translations from Russian secondary sources referenced in this chapter are mine.

of yet another narrator. There is a narrator behind the narrator, a Socratic *eiron* who, without explicit commentary, cleverly reframes the main and dominant narrative voice of Flyagin. The masterfully employed “neutral” and “dull” basic framing casts a different light on every Flyagin's word. His clueless, blissful ignorance is tightly bound with the calculated composure of the introductory narrator. He is concealed, restrained, nameless and only visible at times. Still, his silence and acquiescence are indicative of a deep underlying intelligence. He sets the stage, and then Flyagin performs a spectacle. It is exactly the same recipe Pushkin devised half a century earlier in his *Tales of Belkin* or *The Captain's Daughter*. At all times, there is a hidden, underlying intelligence of an ironic and bemused observer. The ultimate *eiron* is the playful author – in providing his neutral, bland beginning, and the lightly ironic hagiographic ending he shapes the *skaz* into a particularly powerful, double-edged sword and a vehicle of satire. He speaks together with Ivan without uttering a word. It is this dynamic and friction between the foolhardy enthusiasm of the *teller* of the *skaz* and the clever, disapproving silence of its *maker* (Leskov) that produces the farcical, undermining effect that evades and defies the orthodoxy of the narrative proper. Something is happening behind the scenes all the time. Some sort of narrative “rustle” disrupts, however gently, the pompous and seemingly straightforward narration of the main narrator and protagonist.

This chapter focuses on *The Enchanted Wanderer* (“Очарованный странник”), the author's major work published in 1873. This important and curiously popular work still poses a puzzle, even to a “modern” reader. As in the satirical works previously discussed, the lack of interpretative key leaves the reader confused and challenged, at times even outraged. It appears as if a “crazy” and at any rate irresponsible person wrote the story. In reality, it is precisely the

main narrator's (Flyagin's) savageness and unthinking cruelty that the satirist behind the narrator aims to problematize, and make transparent.

Before delving into deeper analysis, it is important to make several observations about the specific cultural position and context which made Leskov's fascinatingly outlandish narratives possible to begin with. Leskov's brand of humor is at first perplexing, and funny *only* in the aftermath, by virtue of the afterthoughts it produces. The carefree narration incites reflection in the reader. In general, only the second reading yields a direct, immersive humorous effect. Bakhtin called this "reduced humor," in the sense that its effect is delayed and premised on the reader's reflection upon narrated segments that are hardly funny at first glance. Bakhtin deemed reduced humor characteristic of the subversive literature in general, and Dostoevsky's understated humor in particular. This type of humor is certainly a vital feature of the satirical literature. But in case of Leskov, it comes in quantities that far exceed the sporadic presence it has in Dostoevsky and most Russian writers after whom Leskov writes.

Leskov does not apply humor for the comic "relief," but rather makes it the lifeline of his stories. This constitutes a departure from an otherwise serious, and even self-serious, literary tradition. For instance, the horrible depictions of horse beating in one of Raskolnikov's dreams, or Turgenev's heart-rending tale *Mumu* in which soulless cruelty to a dog is thematized, invite and expect the reader's empathy. There is no other way to interpret and read such stories. However, the inevitable response is emotional and tearful. No reflection and self-searching is elicited. The violence appears profound and metaphysical, and it seems to be a "given," as if a higher force is commanding it. By contrast, Leskov's "late," postrealist sensibility is only possible as an ironic and often prosaic reaction to the predominantly serious and elevated



conventions of Russia's golden literary age.

By relying heavily on the caricaturist humor that suspends empathy and elicits thought and self-reflection, the writer seeks to revise the core cultural sentiments and myths, especially one of the tormented peasantry and lower classes, and the myth of the Russian/Slavic soul. It is as if to say “this is you Russian soul, or your poor peasant, or else your glorious *bogatyr* at work.” This is the “real” Russia the intelligentsia refuses to see. It is a brutal culture in which violence is devoid of profundity and the metaphysical, Greco-tragic “inevitability.” Its only cause and perpetrator is the human culture itself. The God or “destiny” have no role in any of it. And so, the sheer overflow of “reduced” humor enforces a much more reflective and human-centered reflection about culture and its proclaimed values.

### **Background, Critical Reception and Context of *The Enchanted Wanderer***

This is a literature and style of a literary outcast – a satirist. It is no wonder, then, that Leskov's work – and *The Enchanted Wanderer* in particular – was met with little understanding by the critics of the time. Many interpreted the novella flatly, and responded sentimentally to Flyagin's noble endeavors, while remaining baffled by his crass words and deeds. V. P. Meshchersky, the editor of the journal *The Citizen*, rejected the story, possibly after consulting with Dostoevsky. Editors of *Russian Messenger*, N. A. Lyubimov and M. N. Katkov found the story disrespectful to the clergy, and objected to its unfinished and raw composition (McLean 254-5). Similarly, the popular critic N. K. Mikhailovsky, noted the “absence of any center” and objected to the novella's loose, “string of beads” structure – a “flaw” that may be deemed the story's main virtue.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the literary output of Nikolai Semyonovich Leskov (1831-1895) is remarkable for its capacity to surprise and explore the uncharted territories through unusual optics. It is rare to encounter a writer of such an unorthodox cultural position, a “classic in a non-classic lighting” (Fetisenko), a literary nonconformist (Edgerton 1954), and a “Ukrainian” in terms of a decidedly liminal status (Edgerton 1967).<sup>31</sup> Although his publishing career was marked by constant predicaments, his mere existence on the Russian literary scene would be hardly possible without the liberal post-Crimean War climate of the rule of Alexander II (1855-1881).<sup>32</sup> Russia abolished serfdom in 1861, and early years of Alexander II's rule – the so called Great Reforms – were marked by an inconsistent, but increased permissiveness that proved conducive to refined literary production of the second half of the nineteenth century. In this period, the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church was weakened, yet remained all-important. At the same time, open atheism and refusal of the old pious ways became possible and even prominent, as evidenced by the works of Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) and Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1889). In such an environment, an “oddball” writer such as Leskov was able to find his own place at the cultural margins from which to represent his “liminal” and thought-provoking vision of Russia. Leskov's different outlook on Russia is depicted by Mirsky as “free from that attitude of condescending and sentimental pity for the peasant which is typical of the liberal and educated serf-owner” (326). Thus, without familiarity with the tricks the writer is up to, and the narrative conventions and techniques he relies on – or else subverts – the reader is at a risk of misunderstanding Leskov's stories.

A good grasp of the historical context is equally important. The post-serfdom “liberal”

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<sup>31</sup> “Украина” means “borderland” in Russian.

<sup>32</sup> The repressive rule of Alexander's father, Nicholas I (1825-1855), ended in a disastrous defeat in the Crimean War the Russian Empire waged against The Ottoman Empire, France, Sardinia and Britain (1853-56).

Russia was a large, ambitious empire, confused and ambiguous in its affinities and values, torn between its progressive ideals and its harsh social realities and contradictions. The serfs were freed, but there were no human rights in the modern sense. No animal rights existed. Nobody was sheltered from the savage and unbridled Russian *yahoos*. In the almost cacophonous cultural atmosphere, in which pro-western and traditional voices often clashed and mixed, Leskov's mercurial stance turned out to be too permissive and idiosyncratic to fit in any established literary or religious circle of the Russian intelligentsia. He could not quite adapt to the anti-tsarist *narodniks* or the devotees of spirituality and the old Orthodox ways, nor to the anti-western Slavophiles, nor to any strand of pro-western and liberal progressives. In fact, for all his mischievousness, Leskov quickly fell out of favor with the most radical and progressive “nihilist” movement.

His outlaw position in the Russian culture was additionally influenced by his exposure to the English language and culture. He left the civil service and was employed by an English steward of the rich noblemen's estates, Mr. Scott, who himself was a nonconformist. As Mirsky notes, “Leskov acquired a far wider outlook of Russian life, and one very different from that of those Russian writers whose knowledge was not founded on the possession of serfs, to be later modified by university theories of French or German origin” (325-6). But even this aspect of the writer's upbringing was somewhat accidental and corollary. It never morphed into “Anglophile” or any other sort of self-serious standpoint. If anything, his exposure to the English language and culture made him all the more eccentric and unusual. Neither secular (let alone atheist), nor Orthodox, he remains a writer whose position is not classifiable.

Indeed, everything seemed curious and appealing to him; yet he was an alien in every

sphere. I will make a case that the writer's deep-seated tendencies were problematizing and playing with the hard identitarian and cultural positions. In this sense, I interpret Leskov as a quite “modern”, even “postmodern” voice. Leskov is a type of artist that on the surface “doesn't care,” and certainly does not commit, but looks around with a penchant for spotting incongruity and contradiction.

The scholarship on Leskov has not fully appreciated the subversive and satirical aspect of the novella, especially with regard to the protagonist's stay in the “Russian Asia.” Recent studies, however, have opened up new interpretative avenues. Hugh McLean's study (1977) points to a different direction that illustrates the non-nationalist nature of the work, and the comic dimension of its “superman” hero. Olga Maiorova juxtaposes the deceptive lyric mood established by Flyagin's comparison to Ilya Muromets with the betrayed expectations of the “Tatar” chapters. According to Maiorova, *The Enchanted Wanderer* “confronts the influential tradition of the nationalist thought that has seen in the creation of an empire the highest achievement and a proof of power of the Russian people.” In this scholar's view, Leskov approaches the anti-imperialist position that will be fully articulated by late Tolstoy (363).

However, *The Enchanted Wanderer* is predominantly interpreted as a benign and playful tale of the Russian lore. The broader public in the “mainland” Russia sees the novella as quite patriotic. The satirical and critical dimension has not been brought to prominence. This may be because satire of the novella comes with a dose of warmth – there is sympathy for all sorts of Russian follies in Leskov. *The Wanderer* does allow for a degree of affirmative and empathetic self-irony. It provides a particularly irreverent, free-wheeling take on the late nineteenth century Russia. Leskov's iconoclasm remains satirical, however, even heretic. William Edgerton (1953)

and L. A. Anninsky (1988) describe Leskov as a literary “heretic.”<sup>33</sup>

The framing of the story is strange, detailed, and confusing to a reader without thorough knowledge of its context. However, it is crucial as it provides a key to the story, and – as I argue – frames the extended narrative as a subtle and sophisticated satire.

*The Wanderer* begins by an obscure narrator's statement that some unspecified “we” were sailing over Lake Ladoga to the archipelago of Valaam (known for its monastery), and stopped at a shipyard for a short break. This is all in the region of Korela, where Russians would fight for centuries with the Finns for dominance over the Gulf of Finland. It is close to Saint Petersburg – the capital of Russia in those days. Lake Ladoga is the largest lake in Europe that drains through the swift and short (only 74 km) Neva river into the Gulf of Finland. The latent presence of the fourteenth century Valaam Monastery endows the atmosphere of holiness and piety. Yet, it is all very close to the center of the Russian Empire, and a sense of imperial and ecclesiastical grandeur is assumed and expected.

Nonetheless, the dry and detached narrator provides a rather bleak portrayal of the environment. The mysterious “we” would appear to be a diverse group of modest people traveling and looking after their own business. Given the perceived prestige, the whole area looks grim and depressing. The narrator gives a dull description and conveys a sense of oppressive and hopeless boredom. It appears that the Korela region, so cherished by the Russians and so important for the imperial nationalist discourse, is worse than Siberia even. The morose

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the conservative and reactionary regime of Alexander III (1881-1894) banned many Leskov's works. The *Enchanted Wanderer* was not among them as it was able to pass as tolerable – Leskov's oeuvre, while composed of works too strange to be absorbed by the official culture, was also cleverly benign, as Leskov could not afford the obvious rebellion and “sacrilege” of the late aristocratic Tolstoy. Unlike Tolstoy, who was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church, Leskov was able to “get away” with his literary shenanigans. Only his works were banned, but not his person. It is indicative of a strategic approach this writer had to take, and another sign of a clever, resilient satirist, comparable to Swift and profoundly different from the uncompromising and self-destructive Domanović whom I will discuss in the final chapter.

narrator is quick to wonder “why it was customary that people objectionable in Petersburg<sup>34</sup> should be sent to some more or less remote place or other” to expiate their sins, when they could be quickly and cheaply transferred to Korela to die in boredom, isolation and vice (Leskov 2016: 109).<sup>35</sup> The specific expression in Russian reads: “отправлять куда-нибудь в более или менее отдаленные места от стола удалены” (73). Translated, as literally as possible: “(re)directed no matter where, to places more or less remote/distant from the desk.”<sup>36</sup> This is a short code for Siberia – the place where any number of Russian artists and intellectuals were “redirected” to expiate their sins.

The main implication here is that what seems boring and overly detailed at first glance is actually dark and confrontational. A place that is supposed to be holy and central to Russia's self-image, and that is so close to Saint Petersburg – the undeniable fulcrum of the Russian glory – is represented as a bleak and boring provincial den. It is portrayed as a dejected province from any other place eastward from Saint Petersburg. The “objectionable” depiction stands in stark contrast to how many learned and leading Petersburg intellectuals imagined Korela, without visiting it or spending time there. These anti-Petersburg sentiments from the quarrelsome opening mark the story that is about to unfold as an understated and subtle satire of the elite intellectual culture that lingered in Petersburg and created and imagined a version of Russia all their own. With this framing, Leskov starts a skirmish with the Petersburg establishment, and provides the first and unflattering *real* image of Russia before moving eastward. Like Siberia, Korela is tedious, endless and bleak. The seemingly dull and belabored opening suddenly

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<sup>34</sup> One of them being Leskov himself.

<sup>35</sup> All Russian quotes from *The Enchanted Wanderer* are from the 2016 edition published in Moscow. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to this publication by simply putting a page number in the parentheses.

<sup>36</sup> “Desk” in the metonymic sense of the bureaucratic “center” or “core,” that is, Saint Petersburg. While I will rely on William Edgerton's outstanding English translation as much as possible, I will resort to self-translation whenever it is crucial to preserve the literal meaning and nuances of the original.

provides a frame to the main story – the “central” Russia is as abject as its places “remote from the desk.”

Importantly, this is the only instance where this sort of intellectualized irony is present in the story. It gives the reader an interpretative key and opens up a unique perspective on a wild, erratic narrative that follows. The main story will be told by a radically different narrator – a common man devoid of any intellectual aspirations. A “typical,” “real” Russian man named Ivan Flyagin presents an honest, unspoiled and candid account of the real and holy Russia. To do so, he will have to travel a lot and eventually reach the remotest parts of the empire. His journey will take him beyond the Ural and the Caucasus mountains. The point of the story is to weave a complex comparison of the west-most Russia and its supposed “Asiatic,” “Tatar” antipode from the east, all the while being “buried” in the precious but hopeless Korela.

### **The Journey and Culture of Violence in Leskov**

Ivan Severanich Flyagin is born as a promised son (*обещанный сын*) to a mother who died while giving birth. Ivan is destined to go to the monastery and serve God, but not before getting on the verge of death several times. He is introduced as resembling an old Russian *bogatyр* – a kind of heroic medieval knight-errant in constant travel and action celebrated in Russian folk poetry. Ivan is likened to Ilya Muromets, the principal Russian epic *bogatyр*, as represented in an important large scale painting by Vasily Vereshchagin. The opening establishes an epic and monastic aura – an unsuspecting reader is led to expect a medieval legend or a hagiography.

However, the sanctimonious and reverent atmosphere is soon interrupted with a shock.

The saintly Russia of the intellectual and church imaginary is contrasted to the real life experience and attitudes of a rather worldly *bogatyr*. Previously unnoticed, Flyagin chimes in a conversation concerning a contested topic in Russia: praying for the souls of the suicides, and its appropriateness from the religious standpoint. In contrast to the official church stance that suicides will not be pardoned and cannot be prayed for, Flyagin takes their side, showing empathy and forbearance that suggest he is a generous and saintly priest of a new, untraditional kind. Ivan manages to elicit interest in his personality from the other passengers and he is asked to give a detailed account of his life and past. A bizarre and meandering narrative immediately begins, as the protagonist takes over the narration and the introductory narrator withdraws in observation and silence.

Importantly, the introductory narrator calls Ivan a “rasskazchik” – meaning, the teller of the *skaz* (132). His values, views, and linguistic prowess (or lack thereof) are worlds apart from those of Leskov. Still, they are used by Leskov to achieve a specific end of his own. While Leskov is never really present in the stories, as some sort of guiding voice or moral authority to provide a fulcrum for the interpretation, the artist is decidedly pulling the strings behind the scene, shaping his outlandish universe. This is important to understand and keep in mind in order to respond to the story to begin with. In a “normal” short story that would include a first person, unreliable narrator speaking in the vernacular, we would still not have a *skaz*. The *skaz* does not utilize the first person narration to provide an “adornment” of some sort to the story. It relies on the dynamic relationship of the first person narrator with the seemingly absent, but lurking intelligence of the author to achieve special semantic and linguistic effects. Hence, the stylized oral narration of a layman is not just a “setting”, context, or a “folky” backdrop, it is the point of



the story, and its key device. It is a *skaz*. The very act of narration *is* the story, and takes center stage. At the same time, the perplexing mix of truthful spontaneity of the narrator and his hopeless error and prejudice account for the understated, “silent” satire of the novella. Ivan is not only charming and entertaining, but also misguided and foolish, and “typical” as such. In focusing on the character's flaws and employing the *skaz* to lay these flaws bare, as if present them in their “naive,” “folky” state, Leskov, I argue, produces a particularly intelligent and refined strain of satire.

*The Enchanted Wanderer* proceeds with a staggering account of Ivan's youth. One of the main topics in Leskov's work immediately takes center stage. It is the fundamental satirical topic of extreme and unsolicited violence. In *The Enchanted Wanderer* this topic is treated to spectacular effect. The randomness and absurdity of violence, as well as its omnipresence, are without a precedent. The ironic tone and caricatural representation are nothing like serious and thoughtful ruminations on violence we encounter in Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. Leskov certainly does not celebrate violence, but indulges in representations of it that are provocatively at odds with the realist canon of the century. For instance, Raskolnikov of *The Crime and Punishment* thinks about his deeds, he premeditates his violent acts, endowing them with philosophical and psychological profundity. Leskov's protagonist, on the other hand, commits violence in a comically unthinking and whimsical fashion. Violence is superficial, easy and entertaining. Very much like various thugs in *Candide*, Flyagin deals blows with unthinking fatuity. Even a modern reader who is used to an even broader palette of unconventional narrative escapades needs significant processing time before discovering the philosophical undercurrent of the puzzling scenes and depictions.

Leskov's prose is of a cloudy substance. At times, it is lazily floating at a slow pace. At other times it is dispelling its content – and even characters – and changing them for something else. There is no real structure, even if the stories are not quite amorphous. Mikhailovsky was correct in observing the absence of any center and the “string of beads” technique. This technique reflects Leskov's worldview, his complex, dialectic and near-chaotic vision of the existence. Things change in life, and things change in prose. It is this “organic worldview,” in words of I. C. Sperrle – the one that is “not interested in what people profess as their beliefs but in whether their beliefs are dogmatic or can be put aside and be flexible when the situation calls for it” – that is underlying the Leskovian iconoclasm (72). Sperrle remarks that “devices such as wordplay, generic experimentations, multiple narrators, or the use of questionable narrators, seemingly formless narratives or narratives without `proper` endings are used to educate the reader to make peace with the distortion, with deviations of the norm” (200). So, for a long while in this story, the author is quiet – if not quite absent – he is letting the “questionable narrator” say what he has, and only accompanies his words with what I describe as disapproving silence.

This approach inevitably exudes humor. The examples overflow the limits of this chapter. I only focus on the most delightful and revealing episodes. In the very first chapter, right after the above mentioned considerations about pray and suicide, Flyagin tells of his horse taming methods that he employed while working as a *конэсер* – an awkward adaptation of a French word, translated by Edgerton as “conosoor,”<sup>37</sup> possibly implying the epic word “конь,” and its elevated connotations as opposed to the common Russian word for a horse – *лошадь*. Roughly translated: Flyagin is a “horse-knower.” In any case, Leskov's English upbringing plays a subtle comic role in the episode. It starts with a story of a particularly recalcitrant horse at the count's

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<sup>37</sup> Instead of the word “connoisseur.”

estate. The horse was so unruly and unnameable that it would bite off a rider's knee with swift sideways moves of the neck. There was no way of taming such a wild horse. Yet, rather than letting it go, the count invites an English horse tamer, Mister Rarey. His methods are assumed to be educated, refined, almost psychological. He approaches the horse with premeditation, applies patience, but fails all the same. When Flyagin eventually steps in the role of the tamer, he asks that the horse not be held by ropes by the four footmen standing around. He needs no relief or "learned" approach. He simply sits on the horse while holding a "Tatar" whip and a pot of liquid batter, and hitting the horse on the top of the head with all his might. The "taming" is so harsh that the horse quickly dies of mistreatment. However, Flyagin apparently shows no awareness of the direct connection of his brutality and the horse's death. He ascribes the death not to his violence, but to the horse's excessive "pride."

Later on, in the third chapter, Flyagin has a duel of sorts with a domestic cat named Zozinka. The playful and endearing name evokes the diminutive charm of a pet, and reflects the expected fondness of its owner. It stands in stark contrast to the cat's own nature, as well as Flyagin's treatment of it. The white cat with a black spot on its head perhaps evokes the famous E. A. Poe's black cat, but there is no mystery or metaphysics attached to it. It is a simple, Darwinian carnivore that devours all the food available with an instinct of a hunter and predator. So, the cat preys on several of Flyagin's domestic pigeons and eats them one by one for several nights in a row.

Flyagin becomes angry about this and impulsively starts preying on the cat himself. He is comically over-invested, as if he were combating a formidable foe and his intellectual equal. In fact, later on he will describe his struggles with human "enemies" in less serious terms. The

element of an intelligent game and Flyagin's naive seriousness elicit a surprising, and eventually humorous effect. The fact that these “duels” take place by night would seem to add mystery, but their banality creates a grotesque discrepancy between the protagonist's perception and the crass reality. Eventually, in a chess-like manner, Flyagin employs a ruse to physically trap the cat at the window of his stable. He then employs mindless force to “teach” his foe a lesson.

As in the case of the horse episode, the events described can appear shocking to the modern sensibility. They are certainly provocative. However, the comic and satirical undercurrent is essential for “decoding” and interpreting these episodes. Thus, when Ivan thrashes the cat with naive and “natural” malice, the automatism and mechanical routine of his actions contrast with the humane appeals he makes elsewhere, such as in his plea for merciful treatment of the suicides. His ability to show generousness and spiritual breadth on some accounts while never sparing a single thought – let alone a second thought – to many of his flagrant misdeeds is the core problem *The Enchanted Wanderer* explores.

The same narrator that previously expressed belief in and empathy for the souls of the suicides, now applies egregious violence with a sentiment of entitlement and appropriateness. The description is again overdone and grotesque. There is an imaginative and bizarre side to it that mollifies the shock that would otherwise be unbearable for a sentient reader. Ivan takes the cat from the trap and pushes it headlong into his boot, with its front legs and head shoved to prevent the cat from resisting and scratching. At the same time, Flyagin holds the cat's hind legs with his left hand, and reaches for a whip with his freed right arm. He hits the cat 150 times, and persists to the point when the cat stops to budge altogether. Only then a thought that the cat might be dead occurs to the protagonist. But his “intelligent” way of testing its state is the most

ludicrous point of the episode. Flyagin takes the cat and places its tail on the doorstep. Then he cuts off the tail with a strong blow of his ax. The cat suddenly jumps, spins around in frenzy and escapes. Still, the final touch of ludicrousness is added by Flyagin's attempt to “teach” the cat a lesson by nailing the severed tail right above the window. That is meant to have an edifying purpose so that the cat “learns” not to prey on his pigeons any more. Here too, the protagonist's brain-dead tone is both the subject of laughter and the very problem of a cultural disposition and attitude Leskov is addressing. Oddly enough, the reader is expected to suspend empathy too. It is impossible to appreciate, or even understand, the episode without the ability to “block” one's emotions and partake in the reckless cruelty of the narrative. A shared sensibility of just how shallow and stupid the action is is integral to the aforementioned “decoding” of the narrative undertones and its deeper satirical aims.

The response of Ivan's masters is equally outrageous and remarkable in its cruelty. Even today, insofar as Leskov is incorporated into the canonical and popular culture in modern Russia he is invariably, and erroneously, interpreted as a serious and devout adorer of Russia and the Russian soul. Elite Russian theaters stage *The Wanderer* with actors playing in the Stanislavski vein – serious, elevated delivery that thrives on pathos and identification with the character. For instance, the prestigious Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow recently presented one such version of *The Enchanted Wanderer*.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, *Obrazovaka*, a popular Russian website equivalent to *Sparknotes* states that “In the image of Flyagin, Leskov shows the spiritual maturation of a person, his formation and understanding of the world.” Flyagin is a “real Russian righteous man, a seer.”<sup>39</sup> This is indicative of just how misinterpreted Leskov remains, and how his “reduced”

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<sup>38</sup> For information see: [https://vakhtangov.ru/show/ocharovannyiy\\_strannik/](https://vakhtangov.ru/show/ocharovannyiy_strannik/)

<sup>39</sup> <https://obrazovaka.ru/books/leskov/ocharovanny-strannik>

and silent satire still hits the mark.

To finish the reflection of the unsolicited violence in Leskov's satires, let us take a look at how Flyagin's masters respond to his misdemeanor. His masters are nobles, counts. They are indebted to Ivan, because he saved their lives with the unbelievable selflessness and bravery that further emphasize the contrasts discussed above. Now, presumably, if Zozinka was a stray cat with no master, nothing would have happened. But as it turns out, Zozinka belongs to the countess' maiden. So, some sort of retaliation is due. In the interest of space, I will skip some subtleties of the episode, and just focus on the eventual punishment. Its sadistic “refinement” is its most fascinating aspect. At first, Ivan is whipped routinely until his skin peels off of his back. There is nothing remarkable about it except that it would not appear a proportional punishment for Ivan's severing of Zozinka's tail. Ivan's reaction, however, is remarkable. He takes the beating and talks about it as if it was nothing. He himself seems to be unaware of the disproportionate nature of his punishment. He takes it with ease, as it were, and even claims it did not hurt him much. It is the second part of his punishment that was too much to take, even though he still does not complain about any excess or injustice. He bluntly and flatly accepts the violence coming his way.

The second part of his punishment is to crush large stones into pebbles in the count's English garden, while his fellow servants mock him because he saved his masters' lives only to be punished so harshly over their cat's tail. However, he has to do this on his knees, dragging himself along as the sharp pebbles hurt his knees. As in the myths of Sisyphus and the Danaides, Flyagin himself creates and aggravates his punishment. But here, there is no profundity, no mystery, and no divine forces involved. It is just human cruelty and “bestiality” and the “fair”

judgment of the nobility class that bring about Ivan's pain. The ignoble ways of the nobility are being satirized in their mercilessness as well as absurdity.

These are some fine examples of how satire in *The Enchanted Wanderer* works. Rather than outright condemning, it shows the state of things as a deep-seated and unresolved problem. It seeks to inspire thought rather than emotional pathos. It is devoid of mercy and piety, and thrives on the shock value and the “reduced,” delayed humor. It is a silent satire. Its lack of obviousness and its subtlety are its chief virtues.

### **Prejudice Run amok – Russia's Asia and the Cultural Other**

Leskov's narrative ruse and ironic refinement succeed even better in the novella's treatment of the subject of the ethnic and cultural relations between the “mainland” Russian Empire and its neglected and unruly, in fact, fiercely independent provinces. The same techniques are employed in this large section. The journey is especially productive in the writer's interrogation of the questions and dilemmas of cultural identity.

The vast Russian Empire involves “too many” countries, cultures and languages. This issue was “resolved” by conveniently lumping together all the difference into an unclear and familiar cultural concept – “Tatars.”<sup>40</sup> This is a generic name for the innumerable Turkic peoples of the Islamic faith. Flyagin assumes full knowledge of the “Tatars” and remains comically ambiguous about their cultures and their relationship to the “Holy Russia” of the ancient Kiev

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<sup>40</sup> The word “Tatar” is not a taboo in Russian language or scholarship, as words “Negro” or “Indian” have become in English. However, the word is a misnomer and it is not used as a self-designation by any number of diverse Turkic-speaking Muslims in Asia. Unfortunately, in common usage the word frequently adopts disparaging and racist connotations. To reflect this, I generally refrain from using the word without the quotation marks. The scare quotes are meant to suggest an external point of view, usually Flyagin's. When I use the designation “Tatar” without the quotation marks, I intend to use it in a neutral way in which it is still used in Russian historical scholarship.

and Muscovy, or the holy places such as Valaam. He narrates *as if* he knows, but often he is clueless, and comically so.

Consequently, the reader cannot be offended by blatant surface-level prejudice and ignorance permeating Leskov's *skaz*. In fact, Leskov's insight and basic awareness of the actual difference and profundity of the diversity of the Russian colonies is surprisingly broad and devoid of condescension. If anything, there is curiosity accompanied by irreverent skepticism about Russian dogmas. He does not subscribe to the comfortable and complacent perceptions of the "Tatars" that marked the intellectual accounts of many elite Petersburg intellectuals. As Edyta Bojanowska explains: "Prior to the twentieth-century wave of decolonializations, imperialism lacked the kind of stigma we attach to it now. The possession of large territories was seen as augmenting the imperial nation's grandeur, serving as proof of its vigor and even racial superiority. In the Russian context, to make the dynastic empire congruent with the nation was a long-standing goal of the ruling elites." In fact, "Russian nationalism perceived no contradiction between national and imperial projects" (181). Leskov does not share this sentiment, and, as Maiorova points out, approaches the anti-imperialism of late Tolstoy in his views and values (2015). Still, unlike Tolstoy of *Hadjimurat*, Leskov does not resort to the accusatory tone. He contrasts the monolithic and inaccurate *perceptions* to the inconsistent but inescapable *realities* of the "Russian Asia."

In order to do this, the writer slyly allows Flyagin to freely exhibit his ignorance, and speak in the most confident tone of the things he has no knowledge of. This is meant to incite Russian readers to reflect and reconsider their ideas. So, to read Flyagin's account literally and to object to the scandalous representation of the Other in the same way many modern readers object



to Joseph Conrad's representation of the Africans is to fall in the satirical trap. What is problematic in Conrad's masterpieces, is what Leskov is problematizing by means of the *skaz*. I would describe this approach as “prejudice run amok.” Prejudice follows Flyagin on his journey through the vast and layered Russian Empire, and expresses all the wrong ideas humans have of each other. The grotesque and decidedly non-heroic course of events is again rather unconventional and comic.

The story of how Flyagin ends among the Kazakhs in the Ryn Sands on the right side of the Volga river makes for another peak in Leskov's subtle satirical artistry. Having escaped from the English garden of his masters, he reaches the steppes along the north of the Caspian Sea. There, Ivan explores the local customs, and even kills a man in a whipping duel. This is one of the most outlandish and charged episodes in the novella. Ivan's account of the customs and values of the Tatars is in many ways offensive to the modern sensibility. The representation of the Tatars is caricatural, mechanized, and arguably dehumanized. Nevertheless, Ivan's ambivalent attitude toward the “Tatars” allows for a rather flexible perspective on the intercultural relationships.

This is why the episode has two duels. The first whipping duel is between two Tatars who fight over a horse. One Tatar is slim and tall, and the other is round and brawny, as if echoing the caricatural Don Quijote-Sancho Pansa couple. It is partly a “mere” comic device, and partly an intentionally ludicrous portrayal of the Tatar people. The names of the participants reflect this attitude: Chepkun and Bakshey. The names are meant to sound “Tatar,” which is why they come off as derisive imitation of the normal names a Russian person would make. There is a dismissive connotation to such a naming “technique.” The same goes for the representation of

the local customs – in Ivan's account, they frequently seem scandalous and risible. They are surely inferior.

Then again, from another angle, these customs – dueling conventions for example – are logical, fair, perhaps more advanced than Russian, in spite of Ivan's irresponsible account. Regardless of Ivan's intentions, the described duel between Chepkun and Bakshey appears to be comparable or even equal to the dueling conventions of the contemporary Russia, with a significant feature of not fighting over “honor,” but over something specific and worthwhile – in this case a horse. So, the episode is also a gibe at the Russian dueling “culture,” its own absurdities and exaggerations.<sup>41</sup> It mocks the idea of fighting for “honor,” when it is really vanity. It is worth noting that banalities and absurdities of dueling have already been unfavorably portrayed in the narratives of Pushkin, Lermontov and late Dostoevsky. Eugene Onegin's or Stavrogin's duels were already ingrained in the literary imagination of the Russian public. Stendhal wrote a wonderful parody of a duel that could not have been unknown to Leskov.

Therefore, Leskov is participating in a new tradition that divests the combat between the arch rivals of its virile heroism and “epic” prestige. As Irina Reyfman observes, “unlike Dostoevsky, Leskov did not believe that the honor code was a reality in Russia. He did not believe that it was respected by a sufficient number of nobles.” According to Reyfman, Leskov continues his ongoing dialogue with Dostoevsky, ultimately contending that “it was possible for an ordinary person to reject the honor code and still retain his dignity” (264-5).

I believe that by allowing Ivan to narrate his fanciful story of the “Tatar” cruelty, Leskov cleverly produces a twisted mirror image of the Russian customs and conventions. The strange customs are eerily familiar from the Russian point of view. As we will see, Ivan is quick to learn and

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<sup>41</sup> Dueling was outlawed in Russia only after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

adapt to them.

The whipping duel reactivates some devices and topics discussed before, such as mechanized and ritualized violence, intellectualized violence, or “saming” of the other. These are all essential to the satirical discourse, and their iteration is very important here. My argument that *The Enchanted Wanderer* is a satirical novella is premised precisely on this insistence and prevalence of such devices and topics.

The Tatars sit down and line up in a seemingly absurd, even ridiculous position. They sit, press their feet against each other, hold each other's left hand, while holding a whip in their right arm. They start dealing blows – first one participant, then the other. The point is to bring the opponent to the point of exhaustion. The winner gets the horse. The battle is long, and many curious observers cheer, discuss and wage bets on the outcome. There are many subtleties to consider and there is an element of analytical refinement more suitable to a chess game. Everything is important – the strength of the right arm, the overall posture, the pace and technique of dealing the blows, the “technique” of bearing the blows, the size and signs on the back – blood, bruises, distribution of whip marks... The key element, as it turns out, is the breathing technique. The less favored slim competitor, Chepkun, prevails in a duel because he breathes better, keeps his teeth and mouth sealed, and he is not losing internal heat, as opposed to the overly arduous Bakshey, whose excessive breathing eventually tires him out, making his strikes less forceful and precise. Bakshey eventually drops his left arm, falls on his back, with his right arm still mechanically twitching, as if trying to continue the battle.

Is this offensive? Is it ethical to make, however narratively convoluted, portrayals of other cultures and groups? Quite possibly. At the same time, is it comic? Resolutely so.

As seen in the previous chapters, overdone, compulsive and automatized violence, as well as the reverse device of the intellectualized violence, are both a powerful satirical means of “absurdizing” violence, and depriving it of prestige and meaning. In the case of Leskov, this device is positively present as early as *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1865), as Leskov was evolving into a full-fledged satirist. Furthermore, topics such as stupor to pain (even one's own), random and remorseless manslaughter, unbearable vice-inducing boredom, profligacy, heavy and senseless drinking, objectifying horses or women and then elevating them to the stature of the ultimate social trophies, are all pervasive in Leskov. His invariably ironic treatment of such topics testifies to the satirical nature of his works, even when they are not obviously satirical. The main contribution of this chapter is precisely to show that Leskov's satirical artistry is not exhausted in his “obvious” satires. It is a satire that is more refined and restrained. We are talking about the understated, silent satire – to which the mode of *skaz* is so conducive – the satire whose skeptical wisdom exhibits maturity and dialectical resilience that exceeds the more conventional satire, but is all the more satirical for that.

While there is no space to get into all of the important common themes and tropes in this chapter, it is crucial to remark that all of them are present in *The Wanderer* in at least one episode, and they are all treated with Leskov's trademark subversive irony. *The Enchanted Wanderer* is a narrative satire structured around the “loose” device of the episodic digression, and executed through the journey as its generative, storytelling principle. It is quite like *Gulliver's Travels* or *Candide*, and – as we will soon see – Domanović's oeuvre.

To move on with the journey of Ivan Severanich Flyagin, I will finish this section with Ivan's own duel and his actual stay among the Tatar tribes in the steppes. As I already mentioned,

Ivan kills a rival in a duel. Again, it is a fight over a horse, following the same decorum.

Remarkably, Ivan blends easily into the new setting, as if it were the same culture. At first he was confused, but having seen one fight, he grasps the concept and volunteers to fight for a Russian nobleman to win him a horse – that is, a chance to pay a fair price for a horse. As a horse connoisseur, Ivan admires the gorgeous animal, but since he has no money, he is willing to fight for somebody else. Also, Ivan is so attracted by the promise of a fight that he is willing to indulge in it interest-free. Here too we have a tripartite nexus of boredom, stupidity and violence – the favorite satirical targets and follies proscribed by all the authors I discuss in this study.

Yet, there is an appeal and a “learned” aspect to such contests, excitement, and superficial delight in activity and commotion. There is a measured justice to the Tatar duels too – people are going to want to have the same things, so why not have them “contend peaceably” (*потягаться на мировую*), as Flyagin puts it (131)? Fighting “peaceably” over privilege seems to be more fair and honorable, as opposed to getting everything with money, like the Russian princes (152). This sideswipe is another example of Leskov's sly and strategic rebuke of the Russian values. While the princes may be fighting duels to protect their sense of honor, there is nothing honorable in their other dealings.

Yet, it is not just Russia that is satirized throughout *The Wanderer*. I mentioned how Flyagin's wayward narration allows for the collective unconscious and prejudice to run amok. Prejudice is unbridled in *The Wanderer*. Every nationality, ethnicity, or group is represented with the most unapologetic flippancy. No culture is overly dignified in Leskov's world. Barbarism – I use this word as an antonym of the word “culture” – is often stronger than culture. Flyagin resorts to disparaging terms and adjectives without a second thought. In probably the most

offensive racial slur in the novella, Flyagin disparages Tatars as “tatarva.” It is a collective, pejorative noun that lumps in a dismissive manner all Tatars into some vague and amorphous mass, as if they were pest or vermin. It is spelled in lower case that reflects the abstraction and dehumanizing generalization. Still, for all its offensiveness, Ivan's prejudice is comic because of its superficial and “innocent” incompetence. Ivan even accepts the erasure of his own identity while among the Tatars. They treat him as a generic Russian as well. “Ivan” is meant to be as average and Russian as possible. The Tatars of the steppe always address Ivan only by his first name, without respect and as if they are dealing with a typical specimen of a Russian bumpkin. At this point in the story, Ivan stops being Flyagin, and is only referred to as “Ivan.” He becomes so generically Russian that his identity is virtually resolved.

Likewise, the Tatars refer to Russian women by a simple and common name. They are all “Natashas” to them. Ivan accepts this and refers to the Tatar women he is given to marry as “Natashas” too. All Tatar women are the same to him, and he goes along indifferently with the Tatar habit of referring to them as “Natashas.” The same applies to his many and thoughtlessly procreated children. With one of the wives he has had six “pieces” (*шесть штук*) in five years. All of them are called “Natasha,” for the girls, and “Kolya,” for the boys.

As we can see, there is a certain opacity to many episodes. How to interpret this? The reckless prejudice and generalization makes us wonder, we are struck with awe at the oddity and strangeness of the world. The radical difference often dissolves in the steppe-like flatness and monotony. Like Candide and Gulliver, Flyagin experiences extreme boredom behind the adventurous surface of his wanderings. Equalization of difference, another satirical strategy we have described in previous chapters, is provocatively employed to undercut the mainstream, and

imperial, concepts of radical dissimilarity. As in the books of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, the reader discovers the relativism of proportion under which human averageness emerges. From Lake Ladoga deep into the steppe, there is not as much of a difference as one might expect.

The “sameness” of the Other – it is a another profound topic of the journey-based satirical narratives. We will dissect the anxious and disenchanting quest for a Serbian self-discovery in the final chapter. And, for all the enchanting charms of Flyagin's journey and narration, the ultimate realization of *The Enchanted Wanderer* is that of sobering disenchantment. The exotic and wild Asia is Russia itself. In fearing Asia, Russia is afraid of itself. The center, the imperial “core,” the Petersburg intelligentsia of all varieties is delusional and detached. In this sense, *The Wanderer* is a satire of the learned elites who imagine their own fanciful Russia, without engaging with its colorful – or else banal – realities. The intelligentsia's version of Russia is unreal. It fails to bridge what Hosking calls “the great social divide” between the educated elites and the people (94).

Late in the story, in another entertaining escapade, Flyagin even becomes an actor in Saint Petersburg. He joins a theater, claims skills and merit, but quickly engages in a vain fist fight that ends his “career.” The impulsive, fist-throwing *bogaty*r is out of place in the dignified and cultured Russia the intelligentsia imagined and desired. Leskov's Russia is shockingly wild, “enchanted” and even surreal at first glance, but then it morphs into something quite realistic. Leskov does not attack or scold Russia, but shows it its distorted mirror image that is hard to like and embrace. His mature works beg a question: “Do you like this?” “Can one like this?” “Is this the holy Russia you are describing in your patriotic accounts?” This is the reason why he had success with the public, but not the critics. As Mirsky puts it: “It was a time of intense party

strife, when no writer could hope to be well received by all the critics, and only those who identified themselves with a definite party could hope for even a partial recognition. Leskov never identified himself with any party and had to take the consequences. His success with the reading public was considerable, but the critics continued to neglect him. Leskov's case is a striking instance of the failure of Russian criticism to do its duty" (325).

What is more, Leskov excels in annoying discretely the critics and the intellectual rivals in Saint Petersburg. As I explained in the introductory part of the chapter, most critics did not like *The Wanderer*. They were quick to jump on its flaws, failing to see that those very flaws may be the key virtues of the work.

Leskov also succeeds in disturbing the modern readers' anticolonialist sentiments and a sense of cultural propriety and respect. The "Tatar" episode is outrageous at first glance, and likely to provoke loud, morally charged protests. The "Tatars" are presented as barbaric and coarse. They are dehumanized. As Hugh McLean explains: "Their flogging duels and their `bristling up` of a man's feet are savage and brutal; and their life at home seems sordid and unpoetic in the extreme" (254). McLean makes note of the "revolting display of blood-thirsty brutality" and adds that "Leskov shows these very Tatars in an exhibition of the `Russian` qualities of endurance and cruelty which go to such extremes that leave even Russians aghast (245-6). McLean refers to the cynical remark of Joseph de Maistre: "Grattez le Russe et vous trouverez le Tartare." The idea of this condescending aphorism is that if you "scratch" or "peel off" the surface level of the supposedly "enlightened" Russianness from a Russian, you will encounter a savage "Tartar." This is all very provocative and displeasing to our modern and more benevolent cultural sensibilities. But that is also why it is interesting and inspiring. It unwittingly



pokes holes in the supposed moral integrity of the modern multicultural benevolence and its praise of innocent diversity. Indeed, at all times, it is possible to flip the script and propose a conclusion that “Tatars” are barbaric too. There is evidence of cruelty unique to the culture and equal in force and to that of the Russians. The “bristling up” McLean refers to is one of the coarsest and ludicrous parts of the plot. In order to prevent Ivan from escaping, the Tatars strip the skin on Ivan's feet and put bristles in his flesh, tying him up and making him endure incredible pain until the open wound heels. Afterward, Ivan is unable to walk properly, because of the pain the sewn-in bristles give him. He “adapts” to the pain, however, by walking on his ankles, due to which his legs develop an “O” form. Still, rather than being outraged by this, Flyagin takes everything for granted, as it were, and finds his new condition advantageous, because he finds riding to be easier with his “deformed” legs. Everything is coarse and brutal to the extreme, yet Ivan takes it with unbelievable lightness and silliness.

Ultimately, the “philosophy,” the wisdom of Leskov's satire is not in what is narrated. The shame is. But the wisdom lies in what is insinuated and implied. Insinuation is a staple satirical device described by Auerbach and discussed at length in the chapter on Voltaire. Leskov is a master of two-pronged insinuation. In the horrible sketches and anecdotes from the Ryn Sands, in the malicious caricatures of the Russian otherness, Russia itself is revealed in its troubled and problematic state. Russia too is represented as barbaric, brutal, and crass. These characteristics are not contingent but integral to the very culture. This is why it is perfectly reasonable to speak of satire, even if it is of a less obvious variety than the satire we encounter in some other Leskov's tales.

### **The *Skaz* and the Journey: Tropes, Techniques, Devices and Their Purpose**

Several genres and modes are activated and parodied in *The Enchanted Wanderer*. In each case, they may preserve the flavor of benign and “playful” parody. Taken together, they make for an unorthodox, sharp satire. Igor Smirnov's account of the “diachronic transformations” of different literary genres and motives is particularly helpful in gauging Leskov's interventionist and revisionist poetics (1981).

*The Enchanted Wanderer* functions as a mock-hagiography. The legendary, half-historical, half-mythical air to the protagonist, his aura of sanctity and mystery all promise a hagiography. Ivan's life is nevertheless not a life of a saint. Similarly, there is a promise of an epic. Leskov's working title for the novella was *Black Earth Telemachus* (“Черноземный Телемак”). The novella echoes the neoclassical literary fashion of the times – the one of rewriting the western classics in the Russian vein to provide seriousness and prestige to the Russian culture. Ivan Turgenev wrote his versions of *Hamlet* and *Don Quijote*. Leskov already parodied the trend in his overdone mock-tragedy of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*. In *The Wanderer*, he responds with a mock-Odyssey, a botched epic that nevertheless comes off as more authentic and “Russian” than many serious attempts at imitating western canonical works.

Finally, the narrative matrices of the Russian oral epic – *bylina* or *staryna* – are also activated. *Bylina* is an oral epic poem about “what has been” (*bylo*, the past tense of the verb *быть*, “to be”). Similarly *staryna* is a tale of the old events (from *star*, “old”). The epic accounts of heroic exploits of the *bogatyrs* and their holy lives were deeply ingrained in the literary culture and memory. Major contemporary painters, such as Vasiliy Vereshchagin, created grand, brutally realistic paintings of the *bogatyrs* and their heroic exploits. This is why the narrator

compares Ivan Flyagin to Ilya Muromets, the chief oral epic hero, as he is represented in Vereshchagin's majestic painting. Leskov of course, in partly respecting the conventions of the genre, is treating them in the tongue-in-cheek manner, showcasing the farcical discrepancy between the elevated representations of the Russian history and its prosaic, though no less wondrous, reality. Ivan last name is equally subversive of the elevated expectations of a heroic *bylina*. Flyagin is a pun based on the word *фляга*, flask. It alludes to Flyagin's habitual and non-heroic drinking – the savage drinking of a provincial peasant to whom vodka is often the last resort.

All of this testifies to the rich, multi-layered irony of the *skaz*. It is the only narrative mode that Leskov employs “seriously,” as a participant in an evolving tradition that reaches its peak in the works of Gogol and Leskov. The *skaz* is vital and rich, and, while extremely potent as a means to parody other modes and genres, it itself is not yet ripe to be parodied. It is one of the authentic and thriving Russian innovations, more so than the contemporary neoclassical imitations of the western models or the Russian past.

A penchant for pun and creative error is another key feature of the *skaz*. Leskov loves to play with the language, and he is fascinated and drawn in by ignorance and error. Throughout *The Enchanted Wanderer* Flyagin makes ridiculous grammatical and logical mistakes, without ever being corrected or challenged. Leskov is by no means mocking the common speech of the *narod*, but he is also equally removed from deferentially recreating it in its supposed purity and perfection. He is showing the folk dialect (*народный говор*) in its beautiful and charming imperfection.

For instance, Ivan thinks he is working in an “Eglish” garden – instead of saying

“английский сад” he says “аглицкий сад,” because he was sent to the village of Aglitsy to expiate his torture of Zozinka in an English garden. Later on, he speaks of fireworks as “фейверок” instead of “фейерверк.” He says “релегия” instead of “религия” (*religion*). He botches the titles of the “Tatar” leaders and Islamic dignitaries in the most absurd and ludicrous manner. He says “и мамов” instead of “имамов” (*imams*), as if it were two words, and “дербыши” instead of “дервиши” (*dervishes*). When describing the duel between Chepkun and Bashkey, Ivan says they start to “regale” (*потчевать*) rather than “whip” (*бичевать*) each other, as if they too find delight in their “peaceable” contest. The similarity in the sound of the two verbs in the infinitive – “pochevat” (*to regale*) and “bichevat” (*to whip*) is wittily contrasted to the difference in meaning. The contestants seem to be “regaling” each other with the blows and enjoying it.

Crucially, there is no malice in Leskov's distortions, but just a fond and “low” representation of the commoner's reality that is devoid of condescension and piety. This fine balance of ironic amusement and restrained fondness of the *narod* makes these puns and mistakes so endearing and effective. They permeate the novella and enrich it semantically more than an overly pious *skaz* ever could. The glitch becomes part of the narrative code, and a source of its power and appeal. This is, again, both satirical and modern.

Finally, before proceeding with the concluding remarks, I must highlight the all-important role of the multi-faceted protagonist. Ivan is the main narrator, but he is the main actor as well. He speaks and, in the act of speaking, reenacts his eventful past. His character is composite. He has at least eight identities, and as many names.

His “real” name is Ivan Severanich Flyagin, but he also figures as Golovan – roughly

translated as “the one with a large head.” This is because he was born with a head so large that his mother died upon giving him birth. It alludes to his size, stature, but also limited intelligence.<sup>42</sup> During his long stay as a soldier in the Caucasus he becomes Pyotr. Eventually, as a monk he is called Ismail, in reference to the Biblical outcast from Abraham's family. He is always given names by others. He accepts them indifferently and acquiescently. His incredible naivete and his easy going nature make him peacefully accept any position or role that comes his way. His identities, professions and social statuses constantly change. He was born a serf before becoming a horse master, a marauder, a slave, a nanny (with a clear implication of feminization in the Russian feminine diminutive “нянка”), then a vagabond and a drunkard, an officer, even an actor of some sort... He finds his fate as a modest monk and a supposed prophet – as if he were Ilya Muromets. The prophecy of him as a “promised child” is fulfilled, but a sense of destiny is weak and vague. Ivan seems more pleased to have a place to stay and food to eat in the monastery than he is eager to find peace in prayer and devotion. He does not fit the image of a self-denying *bogatyř* dedicated to a higher cause. The overtones of incongruity prevail at the end that are more appropriate for the comic and satirical genres than for “serious” novels. Who, then, is Ivan Severanich Flyagin? What to make of his quasi-hagiography and epic adventures? What to make of his “dramacomedie” (*драмокомедия*), as the introductory narrator describes Flyagin's tale in a rare instance of stepping out of his role of a witness?

Ivan's imperfect yet endearing mixture of virtues and flaws corresponds to the satirical image of humanity, not the epic and heroic one. There is also something very “modern” in Ivan's

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<sup>42</sup> Indeed, so limited that when he saves his masters' lives in the early stage of the story, instead of asking for a permission to go after his prophesied fate in the monastery, he asks for a concertina, a trinket music box (125). Then he discovers that he is unable to even play the concertina – as if it requires any skill – and drops it. This episode is decisive for my interpretation of the story as mock-hagiography. Instead of going after his sacred, God-determined calling and life fulfillment (*жизнейское исполнение*), Ivan makes a silly and banal choice that triggers the long sequence of absurd and unholy events. It is a flagrant subversion of the hagiography.

acceptance of everything that comes his way. There is a touch of identitarian fluidity to him that is highly appreciated in modern critical theory. Furthermore, Leskov's own view of the world gels well with his portrayal of the enchanted wanderer. There is no misanthropy and acerbic distrust like in Swift. There are no sardonic outbursts that mark Voltaire's satire, nor even “humble” philosophical solutions at the end. Ivan cultivates nothing and settles for the mild digestive comfort, yet his easygoing nature and his lack of “hard” identity makes him so appealing and liminally charming – humble indeed. His many names and faces paradoxically become a hallmark of a “true Russian hero.” Indeed, each word needs to be placed in quotation marks: Ivan Flyagin is a “true” “Russian” “hero.” He shows the many facets of the chimeric and evasive Russia. His tortuous trajectory renders this variegated, incoherent, enigmatic, and very much imperfect Russia manifest, while also opening new space for its others.<sup>43</sup>

The narrative device of the journey is devoid of the “expected” profundity. What is revealed is the relative banality and similarity of the enchanted and miraculous world. Yet, there is room for genuine awe in such a whimsical, impulsive universe, but it is imbued with irony, skepticism, wit and play devoid of ideology. Indeed, Leskov juggles with seeming carelessness with all sorts of notions, prejudices and stereotypes in a way that borders on foul taste.

O. V. Evdokimova claims in her 1996 study of Leskov's “poetics of memory” (*поэтика памяти*) that in the depth of the subtext there is a will and intention of the *speaking* Leskov (italics mine), as “adamant and ascetic” as that of the famously, or notoriously, intransigent Tolstoy. “Dialogical nature of truth in Leskov,” says Evdokimova, “does not revoke that truth is in front of us” (64). This scholar points out a proximity of Leskov's technique to the Socratic method. In other words, some sort of truth needs to be reached eventually, through smart

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<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account of Leskov's relationship to the Russian popular culture, see Gorelov, 1988.

questions, tactful doubts, cautious observations, incisive bends and twists, through maieutics, after all, but of a mischievous variety.

So, for a long while in this story, the author is quiet – if not quite absent, as I argue. He has been letting the “questionable narrator” say what he had, and only accompanied his words with a sort of disapproving silence. This why it is fair to speak of a joint venture of the *skaz* and satire. *The Wanderer* does not only work toward some sort of open-ended, dialogic worldview, of dialectic, organic or whatever variety. There is an edge, and an attitude to this *skaz* that is meant to throw the reader off balance. It is meant to deregulate – if ever so slightly – a common, unthinking approach to the issues at hand: the issues of identity, national pride, good governing, and alike. As Muckle remarks, Leskov's was an attitude of “unsentimental piety”: “His attitude is free from sententious drivel about the sacred destiny of Russia, or the unique qualities of the Russian peasant, but it is accompanied by an awareness that these questions are vital for the society in which he and his readers live” (152).

And this awareness is more important than any answers. Awareness is vital; answers are dangerous. Leskov shows us the farcical stupidity of collective narcissism, he shows us the ridiculous fear of the “inferior” other the “superior” collectives feel. The very lack of “interpretive keys” I referred to before, reminds us of Walter Benjamin's argument that “it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation...”? (89) And yet, as Evdokimova shows, storytellers like Leskov offer a modest and useful counsel, a practical advice, a maxim. “Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom,” says Benjamin with great acumen. Benjamin adds that such attitude is devoid of “mystical exaltation” and focused on a man who “finds his way about the world without getting too deeply involved with it” (86).

It is a materialist wisdom of a craftsman. It is most effective, and useful, when there are no explanations attached, no arguments made, no views insisted upon. Thus, Leskov's puns and “creative errors,” as well as Flyagin's different names and identities reveal the satirical nature of the story. Without lambasting society in the vein of a classical satirist such as Juvenal, Leskov provides a smart, decidedly de-idealized image of the *narod* and the Russian nation. His satire is “Horatian” – that is to say, satire at its most skeptical and refined.



## CHAPTER IV

### **Domanović's Voyage Back Home: Nothing There**

#### **Context and Overview**

Radoje Domanović was a Serbian writer at the turn of the twentieth century. He lived from 1873 to 1908, and played an important role in the modernization of Serbian literature. His unconventional and innovative narrative style quickly departed from the conventions of the realist narration that were well-established in Serbian literature of the time. Domanović is especially renowned for his “phantasmagorical satirical hyperboles” that developed the genre of satire to its full shape, and for his unique brand of socially conscious humor (Penčić 119). His short life and uncommon trajectory, however, make him an unusual phenomenon in literature, a writer who is displaced in both the Serbian national canon, and literary history more broadly.

The context in which Domanović wrote was rough. Among other things, his homeland of Serbia had to deal with the torments brought about by more than four centuries of brutally indifferent, or else downright abusive, Ottoman rule. It left a small but ambitiously minded country in a state of often self-destructive perplexity as to its own importance and identity. It is a context of suffocating provincialism which gnaws at reason and intelligence with an impulse of natural enmity. The most compelling and lasting anatomy of such an environment was presented in the seminal book by Radomir Konstantinović – *Filosofija palanke* (“The Philosophy of Parochialism”).

This Yugoslavian/Serbian philosopher explains the lived experience of the Yugoslav peoples in unflattering, often merciless terms. The so-called “small town philosophy” or “the philosophy of parochialism” (*filosofija palanke*)<sup>44</sup> is Konstantinović's critical account of the problematic values and attitudes that emerged in Yugoslavia of the author's time (1969). The concept has been expanded and applied to describe the broader experiences that involve, and stem from, the Ottoman period. Konstantinović describes small-town philosophy as the spirit that, forgotten by history, aims to turn this neglect into its own privilege, to forget history itself, to petrify itself beyond time, the time that lies somewhere “over the hill,” where the chaos of the “absolutely open” world begins (19).

As if anticipating Konstantinović's dark thoughts, Domanović creates a realm in which corruption and abuse are a matter of good manners, a realm of petty thieves who rule as haughty ministers, a land of absurd and arbitrary holidays that are celebrating the unsurpassed glory of a nation that is decidedly not glorious, a world where a flat loss is taken to be not a mere victory but a triumph. It is a realm of chauvinist and inconsequential patriotism, of oppressive and relentless patriarchy, where women wallow under “the men's umbrella”, as in the trenchant formulation by the Croatian poet Vesna Parun (1987).

In spite of the depressing darkness, this chapter sheds light on the qualities of mind and soul that are needed to account for, and transmute this demoralizing milieu into a beautiful, perverse and singularly dark source of laughter. Domanović's restrained and pessimistic wisdom comes as a consequence of hard and selfless thinking, of coming to terms with all the dark possibilities. It is philosophy without philosophy – “provincial,” but without ambition, as

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<sup>44</sup> *Palanka* is a cottage settlement in the Balkan outskirts of the Ottoman Empire, but also a metaphor for the mentality, lifestyle and overall existential condition.

opposed to Leibniz. It displays no mental or rhetorical prowess; only an ingrained spiritual composure (the ancient “ataraxy”) that comes in the wake of all the hurtful toil. It is precisely this type of perspicacity, sharpness and wit that drives Domanović's artistic vision and wisdom. The writer's terse masterpieces represent the finest examples of narrative satire whose mournful reflections and unflinching honesty and wit are the sole comfort in an otherwise morose universe. Domanović perfected the artform of ridicule. His short stories – in fact, delightful vignettes – such as *Razmišljanja jednog srpskog vola* (“Ruminations of a Serbian Ox”), *Ne razumem* (“I do not Understand it”) or *Mrtvo more* (“Dead Sea”), to name just a few, provide a powerful example of how narrative satire deals with or even transmutes reality, and strengthens our senses, gives us practical wisdom, and salvages the remainders of truth from complete obliteration on part of the falsehood and denial. Domanović is a satirist who places himself below his intellectual level and subverts from below, as in the wonderful Serbian idiom “dobacuje odozdo” – literally, and paradoxically, “throws up from below.”

The writer's verbal magic is in his blunt and earnest style. He cultivated a concise, incisive, and sententious style that is both clear and easy to understand, but also evocative and polyvalent. His style exhibits the humble, understated, yet obvious, and indisputable intellectual primacy of the satirist. Domanović's greatness is not so much in his simplicity – his main points are too simple, as it were, to be understood by his compatriots, who typically react to his brilliant jokes with anger. Domanović's greatness lies in his range. He is able to satisfy not just the simple and honest “folk,” but also the refined, philosophical and sophisticated audience. Discussing the somewhat anomalous position of the writer in the history of satire, the critic Borislav Mihajlović notes that outstanding satire is usually written by old and experienced writers, and lists

Cervantes, Swift, and Gogol as examples of mature satirical artistry.

Domanović's key writings, however, were written by the time the writer turned thirty (Mihajlović 5). Domanović died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty five, having already experienced a creative decline after incarceration, dismissal from service, a short-lasting semi-exile in Munich (his sole trip outside of Serbia), and a gradual progression of his disease. Given these fast-developing and catastrophic circumstances, his work evokes Edward Said's puzzling remark that any writer's style is “a part – or paradoxically, not a part – of the era in which it was produced and appeared” (134). Domanović reflects his time, and has nothing to do with it. His style bursts with wit and vigor, and yet a certain fatigue, exhaustion and “lateness” permeate it. In fact, Said's notion of “late style” – which is quite suitable for a seasoned satirist – is also applicable to Domanović's “early” modernist works in the sense that, at least according to Said, “modernism has come to seem paradoxically not so much a movement of the new as a movement of aging and ending” (135).

Thus, in spite of Domanović's early death, his small but compact and precociously mellow opus stands as the most significant satirical literature in all of the former Yugoslavia, and retains its critical status to this day. Early critics such as Bogdan Popović and Jovan Skerlić were quick to note Domanović's talent, and more recent critics are unanimous in the view that Domanović's importance as a satirist is unsurpassed (Vučenov 1969, Koš 1967, Mihajlović 1968 and Gligorić 1956). Milovan Vitezović remarks that in terms of polemical belligerence, intransigence, spite, and rage Domanović could be compared to Voltaire (12). In a note unusual for a deeply lyric poet, whose work shares no similarities with nor makes other mentions of Domanović, the great Croatian poet Antun Gustav Matoš observed that no writer took more

(physical) beating than Domanović, implying that Domanović's courage as a writer was unmatched, and adding that he suffered like an ox from his well-known tale, an ox that was later to expound his “deep philosophy” (cited in Koš 5). Indeed, Domanović was politically persecuted, libeled, incarcerated, almost executed, coerced to leave his homeland, as well as physically beaten by his opponents.

The context that required such bravery was that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kingdom of Serbia. The young country that emancipated itself from roughly four centuries long Ottoman domination went through a turbulent period in which it eventually obtained independence. Exposed to three major influences from the outside – the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Russia – and torn by the internal dynastic struggle, Serbia eventually fell under the despotic rule of the Obrenović dynasty. In Domanović's time, Serbia was ruled by Aleksandar Obrenović, whose increasingly unpopular government fell after a coup in May 1903, toward the end of Domanović's life. Throughout the rule of Aleksandar I, Domanović was involved in the oppositional Radical Party that sought to introduce democratic forms of government in Serbia. His attacks on the regime made him a prominent figure in public life, and his satires, as Jovan Skerlić wrote down, had a significance of a “manifest and political event” (8). Historian Slobodan Jovanović wrote that Domanović's most popular satires considerably decreased the king's reputation, and created a caricature of a feckless leader who was no longer taken seriously by his subjects (cited in Koš 11). At any rate, Aleksandar's eventual demise led to further turbulence, and a return of the rival Karađorđević dynasty to power in 1903. Domanović was not pleased with the outcome, and died in seclusion in 1908, leaving a poor family behind.

It is important to have a general grasp of these events and circumstances, as they bestow a certain forcefulness and authenticity to satires that may otherwise appear as a witty but detached aesthetic play. It is significant to appreciate the fact that Domanović's outright attacks on the monarchist regime represented a life-risking endeavor, and that they gave voice to progressive, democratic, and modernizing elements of Serbian society. That being said, the bulk of the power and wit of these satires stems from their own strength and creativity. Domanović's satires can be read without any insight into the context, and their linguistic prowess stands out regardless of their implied political stance. Therefore, my commentary will emphasize the inner workings of several select stories, drawing on the context to highlight essential socio-historical elements that can enhance understanding, and intensify appreciation of the stories themselves.

Derek Attridge writes that “taking responsibility for the work includes being responsible and responsive to the culture within which we encounter it, the culture which it offers to remake in some way, slight or momentous” (125). This remark is particularly relevant for interpretations that seek to conjoin recent theoretical perspectives with scholarly sound elucidation of the texts written in the past. Therefore, my reading of Domanović, and my attempt to introduce this writer to an Anglophone readership, will partly rely on, and partly examine the mainstream posthumanist framework that understands modernism and posthumanism as two related phenomena that stand in contrast to the legacy of humanist literature. As Paul Sheehan writes, “at some time in the middle of the nineteenth century a seismic shift occurred in Western thought, an alteration in how the human was understood,” a shift “from the human as a *given* towards the human as a *problem*” (181). This entailed a re-calibration of the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities, laying the ground for the new, posthumanist ethics tightly bound to modernist

aesthetics (Ryan 2015). At the same time, absolute divorce from humanism never took place, nor was it ever possible. Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini observe that posthumanist discourses “promote neither the transcendence of the human nor the negation of humanism,” but rather “engage with the humanist legacy to critique anthropocentric values and worldviews” (xiv). This particularly pertains to the relationship between the human and the animal, a relationship that is particularly suitable for an examination of the premises and tenets of anthropocentrism. For a satirical writer fighting against suffocating social and literary conventions, the human-animal dynamic possesses a great critical and dialectic potential.

Domanović wrote a lot about animals. Animals figure frequently, and sometimes prominently in his stories. However, unlike some renowned modernist authors, such as D. H. Lawrence, who, in Jeff Wallace's interpretation, sought to embrace “radical mystery” in animals and see “spontaneity, the unknowable, the bodily, and the pure” in animality (101), or Virginia Woolf, whose essay “The Death of the Moth” is interpreted by Derek Ryan (2015) in terms of “non-anthropocentric anthropomorphism”, that is, as a call to a deeper, transhuman exploration of an unrecognizable, altogether different state of being, Domanović took a less adventurous and affirmative approach. The author's dry and mundane humor required a different angle on the subject of the human-animal relationship. Domanović often starts with a negative image of the animal, an image that prevailed among his contemporaries, and uses that image to interrogate and shake up the anthropocentric notions of human rationality. In most cases, Domanović strives to show that humans are even more irrational than animals. Then, in his more subtle pieces, he makes a step further, and de-exoticizes, and most importantly, *rationalizes* the animal. This results in a reevaluation of the fundamental humanist concept of humans as rational creatures – a

concept that was already under scrutiny of satirists since Jonathan Swift – and an introduction of a peculiar, “humanized” understanding of animals as sapient and virtuous creatures.

In this chapter, I focus on Domanović's stories that thematize the human-animal relationship. I show how humans and animals are sometimes equaled as bearers of dull, helpless, instinctual vitality devoid of reason, and, by contrast, how animals are sometimes praised for their patience, persistence, and reasonable bearing that stands in stark contrast to human folly and conceit.

**Could It Be that Our Greatest Enemies Are Ourselves? *The Leader, A Mark, and I Do Not Understand***

For instance, the story entitled *The Leader* (“Vođa”), written in 1901, treats the fundamental political question of governance and leadership by means of a subtle, fable-themed allegory. The story's simple plot relies on several different subtexts that render the story itself rather complex. Faced with extreme deprivation, the people of an unknown country decide to depart in search of a better, more fertile and prosperous land. In order to do that, they ask a mysterious unknown man, whose enigmatic silence they interpret to be a sign of wisdom, to lead them to the new land. He agrees, and the crowd of more than two hundred families follows in his steps. After many calamities, the leader takes the crowd into an abyss. Many people fall in it and lose their lives, while the leader fortuitously survives. Eventually, the three surviving followers interrogate the leader more thoroughly, and discover to their dismay that he is blind. They remain alone, aimless, and lost in a desolate landscape, not knowing where to go next.

Clearly, there is a messianic and biblical subtext to this story, and the fact that the blind



leader carries a stick with him makes a clear parallel to the story of Moses. *The Leader* could thus be read as a dystopic narrative, in which the journey from a nameless desolate land ends in absolute perdition, and the people's fate is doomed at the hands of an incapable and feckless leader. However, the narrator's seemingly benign insistence that the story must have happened somewhere and sometime long ago activates a socio-political subtext of the story that was easily discernible to Domanović's contemporaries (Mihajlović 9), and turns the story into more than a mere biblical parable. Even though overt references are absent from the plot, it was well known that Domanović's principal target in *The Leader* was a politician, Nikola Pašić, the leader of the Radical Party of Serbia, whom Domanović perceived as a demagogue and destroyer of the unity of the anti-monarchist political opposition. Hence, the seeming dystopia of the story emerges as a representation of the all too familiar and politically sterile territory of Serbia. This subtext was clear to the readers, as well as its political message concerning the state of affairs in their homeland.

Skillfully maintained allegory thus establishes a contrast between the messianic and the urgent political subtext. Most important, far from being a facile critique of a single and impotent politician, or a general critique of leaders and leadership, *The Leader* is a political satire that criticizes the people above all else. It is targeting the stupidity, credulity, and herd-like mentality of the seduced mass. The narrator's seemingly detached treatment of the two hundred families following the blind leader they themselves chose, implies a scornful bestialization of the people. The enlightened *demos* Domanović fought for and believed in as a driving force of the democratization of the young independent Serbia, degenerates into a mindless rabble in *The Leader*. People clearly act like a flock of sheep following a blind, incompetent, and impassive

shepherd into an abyss.

Evidently, the implied opinion of animals is low, but what is important here is the depreciation of humankind. Pseudo-patriotic collectivism is censured, as is a blind faith in the Serbian leadership. *The Leader* sends an unsettling message that invites self-doubt and humility, and renders the reader aware that dignity earned through free and independent thinking is easily lost and supplanted by a helpless, herd-like instinct. Still, the poetics of this story remain realist and traditional on the whole, and the conventional hierarchy between humans and animals is assumed, and at any rate unchallenged. If human and animal behavior is equaled or paralleled in the story, it is to highlight the downfall of humans, not to bring into question the fundamental primacy of the humankind.

The story *A Mark* (“Danga”) from 1899 makes a more radical proposition, however, and stages a thought-provoking reversal of the relationship between humans and animals. Like *The Leader*, it relies on the common and shared perception of domestic animals as creatures inferior to humans. It is understood that domestic animals, and beasts of burden in particular, are placed in a subservient position through practices such as branding or riding. The passive acceptance of the condition of being used for human purposes implies a lack of reason and free will and, consequently, inferiority, or even degradation. These deep-seated conceptions are activated, and then reversed to a surprising effect. *A Mark* shows that freedom of will and self-determination (and not just blind faith, as in *The Leader*) can be employed by humans to bring about their own enslavement.

As is the case in almost all Domanović's stories, excessive and irrational patriotism is the leading force behind the self-imposed debasement of the people. In *A Mark*, it leads the people

voluntarily to adopt the behavior that they would deem worthy of cattle.

It is very important to remark that the story is framed as a dream and a voyage. It is introduced by the narrator's opening sentence: "I dreamt a dreadful dream," and it goes on to recollect that dream. In it, the narrator, who describes himself as a common, law abiding citizen of Serbia, wanders through a wintry landscape on a cold and unusually long night before arriving in an unknown and strange land far away from his homeland. There, in the spacious market of the populous city, he observes a large crowd. As we have already seen in *The Leader*, scenes involving large, herd-like masses are a staple of Domanović's art. These scenes set high expectations and create suspense, which is eventually dissolved into a comic, and often disappointing, effect.

In *A Mark*, the narrator soon learns that the unknown state's authorities have issued a decree that every citizen must be branded in order to be distinguishable from other citizens. This is explained to him by a proud bar owner who, like his fellow citizens, interprets the branding as a matter of patriotic distinction and valor. Everybody in the state, for no apparent reason, hails the decree as a challenge to which they must arise and which they must endure with courage. However, unlike cattle that has no free will nor capacity to think, and must endure the branding passively and forcibly, the proud citizens employ their freedom and reason to comply with the decree voluntarily and proactively. It is supposed to be a proof of their loyalty and their love for the country. It is a matter of duty, not coercion.

This bizarre twist is further enhanced by a reversed social structure of this state. In it, the serf (*kmet*) rules over both ordinary and wealthy citizens, and crucially, over the police.

Domanović uses a colloquial word for a policeman (*pandur*) in defiance of the authoritarian rule

of the king Aleksandar Obrenović, who relied on a police state to control the population. Suddenly, the supposedly remote and foreign country shows signs of eerie familiarity in the actual behavior of both the rulers and the ruled. The obedience of the Serbian populace is also subtly satirized, and its misguided patriotism cast in a clear light. The fundamental societal model remains the same and easily recognizable. It is based on enforced obedience and unquestioning submissiveness.

This is illustrated by means of another common satirical device. Domanović uses an extended metaphor of riding to debunk the power relations in the fictional and real state. The verb *jahati* in Serbian is frequently used to express the notion of political or other oppression. The subjugated party is said to be ridden by the oppressor, and thereby reduced to the supposedly debased state of a domestic animal. Domanović extends the metaphorical expression to create a literal, vividly depicted image of a “high officer” (*viši pandur*) riding one of the state's most honorable and affluent citizens. And while the rare honor of being ridden by a serf is only bestowed upon the most honorable and servile citizens, the practice of state *pandurs* riding the wealthy elite is widespread in this outlandish country.

In fact, the above-mentioned citizen is described by the bar owner as “one of our most reputable citizens, our great rich man and patriot” (Domanović 1969: 45).<sup>45</sup> For him, to be ridden by an “inferior” citizen is an honor. Such is the nature of true patriotism: it consists of self-sacrifice and a selfless ability to make oneself useful, as cattle does.<sup>46</sup> But the strange image is also a travesty of the society and the very notion that something inherently ordered and hierarchical can be created for the common good, and glorified in general terms. Therefore, the

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<sup>45</sup> All translations from Domanović's stories and Serbo-Croatian sources are mine.

<sup>46</sup> This idea is developed in the story *Rumination of a Common Serbian Ox* that I will analyze later.

story which began as an eccentric voyage into an unknown, exotic and absurd land slowly evolves into a familiar tale about one's own society and homeland. A strong centripetal force overtakes the narration right at the point where it verges on a surrealist experiment, and returns the reader to the social and political reality of contemporary Serbia. The final emphasis is on the self-reproach. The two main targets reveal a common center. Anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism stem from the same misguided haughtiness, and yield the same error and folly, inviting farcical laughter.

A comical peak of the story is reached at the moment when a clerk in charge of branding the people reproaches the busy, frantic commoners who have enthusiastically congregated in front of the building of the court to receive their mark: "Take it easy, for God's sake, everyone will have his turn, you are not cattle to scramble thus!" (*Polako, zaboga, doći će svaki na red, niste valjda stoka da se tako otimate!*) (Domanović 1969: 49)

The parallel is frequently established in colloquial speech between the behavior of the disturbed mass of people and that of cattle. A sense of superiority is always implied by the speaker, and a cool scorn for the animals devoid of reason, and for the group of people reduced to the same deprived state is displayed. Usually it is enough to say of one group or another that they are "stoka" (cattle), to express unconditional contempt for that group. Here of course, the clerk's glib words aspire to the same effect, but contempt is replaced by a light, easy-going satirical stab at the absurd and banal zeal of the "patriotic" rabble.

More absurdly yet, the story ends with the narrator being overtaken by the same sense of national pride at the sight of the foreigners' devotion, but now of a less exotic or remote variety. The narrator too, being a Serb, begins to boast of the glorious past of his people, and is suddenly

consumed by a desire to show off his heroism. He wants to challenge the newfound hero Lear, who quietly suffered the branding, and was so courageous as to endure it twice. The narrator boastfully pledges to take ten marks, as the story swiftly concludes with a return to the very beginning. The reader is suddenly reminded that the story was a dream from the get go, as the narrator awakes from his sleep and, rather unheroically, reconciles with a humbling return to reality, changing sides in his bed and getting ready to continue his “heroic” slumber.

And so, the story does what its title promises. “Danga” means a smack, or a mark that remains after a brisk blow, especially to the forehead. It is an archaic word associated with rural and colloquial speech. The eponymous story thus brands the excessive and unfounded popular pride, which becomes an object of ridicule, and an easily recognizable mark of inferiority behind the facade of pretension and posture. The story's sharp satire undermines the solemn but unsubstantiated populist rhetoric that manipulated the public sentiments by means of inflating national pride. In reality, it turns out, the proud members of the people are tame, even cowardly. More important, they are irrational and gullible.

We can see how Domanović problematizes, and even attacks the notion of human rationality. A committed supporter and practitioner of Enlightenment values, Domanović ridiculed the concept of Reason insofar as it sought its affirmation in sentimental and irrational rhetoric, or in a rigid and absurd disciplinary regimen. Reason was Domanović's own cherished guide, but also the favorite platitude of official governmental rhetoric. One of its more extreme, but also vicious, manifestations was the military culture of Aleksandar's kingdom. The military was important, orderly and rationalized in the late nineteenth century Serbia. The conscription process was heavily bureaucratized, and service expectations were rather stringent.

The semi-autobiographical tale from 1898 *I Do Not Understand* (“Ne razumem”) is a witty take on the of escalating bureaucracy and militarism in Serbia. This pithy vignette is one of Domanović's most effective and ingenious satires. In it, the first person narrator confesses jocularly his strong desire to serve and take part in a vengeful war against the Turks, as he playfully exhibits his “patriotic ardor” (*patriotski žar*). After he realizes that the expected call-up papers are late for some reason, he comes to his post with a self-written request to be recruited. However, his ardor is not met with much enthusiasm. He is even suspected of being a deserter. Upon his further assurances that he has indeed come voluntarily, the ill-humored commander of the post issues an order that the conscription register be checked. The protagonist's name is comically tautological and generic, reminiscent of the names in Russian satires, especially in Gogol. The protagonist's name is Radosav Radosavljević – it could be anyone.

The way the order is transmitted is ridiculous. It is shouted with great ardor from one officer to another, in descending order of rank. And so, the commander's order is carried over from an officer to a colonel, sergeant, corporal and eventually to a common soldier. At each instance, a soldier with a lower rank exclaims at the top of his lungs: “I understand!” The exclamation is a standard way of acknowledging an order in the military, equivalent to “Yes, sir!” in English. Domanović takes advantage of the literal meaning in Serbian in order to expose the absurdity of the situation.

The length to which the soldiers go in order to verify a rather basic piece of information is certainly comic. However, it is the outcome of the whole procedure that is delightfully absurd. The officer who took the order in the first place eventually returns and says he is “honored to report” that the soldier in question is dead (Domanović 1968: 17). This understandably perplexes

the protagonist who tries passionately to convince the officers that he is indeed alive. He does so to no avail, though, as the chief commander decrees: “you do not exist in the world for me,” as long as the township does not refer him again (presumably in official capacity).

The bureaucratic charade intensifies in the fast-paced finale of the story. Radosav is soon called up again, and expressly accused of being a deserter. After explaining his case, he is dismissed, and sent home. Then he is summoned again by another post which informs him that he needs to report to it because he has been mistakenly registered there, and needs to be referred to the proper post. When he eventually reaches the right post, the routine ensues consisting of “commands, steps, ‘I understand,’” only for Radosav to be told that he was not called up to begin with.

As soon as he comes back home, he receives another call-up in which he is summoned to be punished for failing to report. Finally, when he reports yet again, he goes to serve his two year term in the army.

The story ends with a final absurdist pirouette which takes the humor to the peak. Five years have passed, and Radosav has “all but forgotten I was a soldier” (Domanović 1968: 18). However, one day he receives an invitation from the township where he is given a large stack of papers that have been sent from his post. After examining the endless documents, signatures, seals and decisions he learns that it has been “officially determined” that he is alive, and is therefore invited to serve his regular term.

The literary treatment of the bureaucratic frenzy is hyperbolic, of course, yet a key autobiographical detail gives this story a stamp of eerie authenticity, and redoubles its effect. Strange to say, Domanović was born dead, at least from the official standpoint. He was born in a



small village in provincial Serbia, and his mother gave birth to him and his twin sister. His sister died at birth, while Domanović survived. However, due to a bureaucratic oversight, the officials registered Domanović's sister as alive, and the writer himself was proclaimed dead (Godine života 45). When the time came to serve in the army, Domanović indeed went through a similar bureaucratic agony described in *I Do Not Understand*. Yet again, we see how important it is to know about the context, and even the biography, to appreciate the narrative finesse of satire, and to realize the mind-boggling probability of such a bureaucratic nightmare in the disorderly Kingdom of Serbia of the time.

In fact, the disciplinary zeal introduces a sort of formalism and mechanization that equals the human and the animal, but in a very peculiar sense. Humans are now not so much degraded or lowered to the animal condition as in *The Leader* or *A Mark*, but the overarching absurdity of human practices is shown. In other words, animals do not act as soldiers do in *I Do Not Understand*, unless they are forced and trained by humans to do so. Not unlike circus animals, the soldiers of Domanović's barracks are showing the extremes to which human conceit and pretension toward fake order can take the rationalized disciplinary procedures. The endless documentation, intricate hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, blind respect for unbending and ineffective rules – all this testifies to a dark and potentially irreparable irrationality of humans, irrationality that is far more limiting than the supposed irrationality of animals. The title is particularly significant in this regard. It is the only bit of explicit, non-ironic commentary in the story, and its clear-sighted censure stands in sharp contrast with the inane exclamations of the soldiers. The negative particle *ne* is the sole ray of reason that penetrates the absurd edifice raised by the rest of the story.

### **A Thinking Animal: Analysis of *Ruminations of a Common Serbian Ox***

Other stories of Domanović point toward the same understanding of humans as irrational and undependable creatures. *Dead Sea* (“Mrtvo more”) describes the ludicrous pedagogical methods employed in schools, the brain-dead didacticism and rote learning enforced there, and the crude understanding of children as tree-climbing monkeys or stray dogs that need to be domesticated and tamed. *Abolition of Passions* (“Ukidanje strasti”) testifies to the similar treatment of the general population by the inept government. The longer novellas *Prince Marko Among the Serbs for the Second Time* (“Kraljević Marko po drugi put među Srbima”) and *Stradija* make for a scathing and particularly successful attack on the self-destructive proclivities of misguided nationalism. Each story profoundly questions the very foundation of the enlightened belief in social reform and progress – the human rationality, and human supremacy based on it. And while the implications of these narratives are often comic, they are also sternly moralistic. All stories bear the mark of an ethically unshakable satirist. In spite of playfulness and feigned naiveté of the narrator, ultimately there is no room for moral permissiveness in Domanović.

This is perhaps most evident in one of the writer's best known stories, *Ruminations of a Common Serbian Ox*, published in 1902. This succinct lampoon is an example of Domanović's wit at its most sharp and focused. It brings to maturation and culmination the writer's criticism of ethno- and anthropocentrism seen in his other stories. With regard to the relationship between humans and animals, the story not only problematizes, but subverts, and eventually reverts the conventional notions about it. The usually depreciated domestic animal is endowed with reason

and modesty, and capable of debunking human vanity and pretense.

The story opens with the narrator's remark that an ox appeared in Serbia that has started to think. It is a “common” (*običan*) ox that possesses all expected features of his species. It is implied that his thoughts will be just common, common-sense thoughts about common ideas and affairs. The noun used in the original – *razmišljanje* – could be translated as “thoughts” or “reflections,” but “rumination” is more effective, as it conveys a sense of process implied by the suffix “-anje,” and it is in line with the protagonist's character and species. As a ruminant, the ox in the story regurgitates the partially digested, and much-used ideas that were widespread in Serbian society at the time.

The story takes place on a day when the ox's master has stolen some sticks and poles, and took them to the town to sell them. He took his two oxen with him (one of them is the thinking ox, named Sivonja – “the Gray one”). Having sold the poles, he left his oxen with some food, and went to a tavern to drink *rakija*, a popular heavy liquor similar to brandy. However, having been left to himself, the ox neglects the food and starts to contemplate. The narrator remarks with playful irony that the ox is a “thinker,” and a “gentle, poignant soul”, with a “dreamy look” and a “sad facial expression.” The ox reflects on the things and people he sees around him. Some festivity is going on, so there are a lot of passersby. The ox observes the “humans,” “Serbs,” walking about, “proud of their bright past,” of their name, of their “ethnicity” (*narodnost*).<sup>47</sup> Their pride is manifest in their straight gait and stiff posture. It is a free people on their own, free land, a people living in their own kingdom after having spent four centuries under the “Ottoman yoke,” as the expression says. Still, something is not quite right.

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<sup>47</sup> *Narodnost* is a very important word only roughly translated by the word “ethnicity,” but with a stronger emphasis on essential belonging to one's own people, *narod*.

“What is it that my master and his fellow citizens, the Serbs, are proud of,” the ox asks. “Why do they raise their heads so, and regard me and my kind with bloated loftiness and disdain?”

These thoughts are accompanied by the clanging of the bell and creaking of the ox's yoke. The ox is addressed by the other ox lying next to him, a lazy, unthinking ox who advises him to stop thinking and eat. “If it were good to think, humans would not have left it to us oxen. That fortune would not have befallen us” (Domanović 1968: 21).

And yet, the thinking ox cannot refrain from going on:

“They are proud of their bright past. They have the Kosovo Field, the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>48</sup> What a marvel to behold, but haven't my elders hauled the army's food and war requisites; if it wasn't for us, that work would have to be done by the humans themselves. They have an uprising against the Turks.<sup>49</sup> It was a great, noble affair, but who of them was there. . . Why, just to take the example of my master. He too is proud of the uprising . . . But is it his merit? . . . Yet, how many of my elders were slaughtered during the uprising so that warriors could feed, and haven't my elders too, back in the day, pulled the war requisites, guns, food, ammunition, and yet it does not even occur to us to decorate us with their merits, for we have not changed, we do our duty just as our elders did it, conscientiously and patiently” (Domanović 1968: 21-2).

The ox is treating the two major topics of Serbian history with a surprising irreverence. While Domanović's views of these events were respectful, and he thought highly of the attempts of the Serbian population to free itself from the Ottoman occupation, the animal's perspective is devoid of such admiration. The Battle of Kosovo from 1389, and the two Serbian uprisings from

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<sup>48</sup> A key battle fought in 1389, in which an army of predominantly Serbian forces was defeated by the Ottoman conquerors. It is a consecrated and contested point of Serbian history.

<sup>49</sup> An event from the early nineteenth century that led to an increased independence of Serbia within the Ottoman Empire.

1804 and 1815 were “noble” endeavors, but belong to the past, and have no bearing on the present. This attitude is particularly subversive of the so called “myth of Kosovo,” which played a central role in the formation of a sense of national unity, and represented a historical defeat of the battle of Kosovo as a proof of heroic nature of the Serbian people – as the “Serbian Golgotha” (Emmert 1990). Even though the Serbs lost that battle, the strong resistance their army showed, and the losses caused to the Ottomans are seen to this day as a validation of the mythical (rather than historical) attachment of the Serbian folk to their land, and especially to the Kosovo field. Here, however, these events are reframed and characterized as strictly historical, while their modern-day validity is rejected.

Not only that – the ox represents the very tendency to ascribe symbolic meaning to the events as characteristic of humans. The ox contrasts the irrational and inflated pride of the humans to the common sense, and merit-based ways of the oxen.

“My kind suffers since it exists, on this very day we suffer and slave, but never once have we gloated over it. They say, the Turks tortured them, slaughtered them, impaled them, but my elders have been slaughtered by both Serbs and Turks, and burned, and subjugated to all sorts of other torments” (Domanović 1968: 22).

In an imaginative satirical twist, the ox raises the question of life beyond the anthropocentric standpoint. Suddenly, a routine subjugation of the cattle by humans appears as a crime. There is no justice in the exploitation of the animals. Quite to the contrary, this exploitation is seen as positively evil.

“And so, aren't I and my kind better in this than all of them? I didn't kill anybody, I didn't badmouth anybody, I didn't steal anything from anybody. . . I didn't betray my bovine

principle. . . and not only have I not done any harm, but I do good to those who do me harm. My mother calved me, and evil humans took away mother's milk from me right away. God supposedly created the grass for us oxen, not for humans, and they take away from us even the grass. Nevertheless, in spite of all the beating, we drag the carriages for humans, we plow the soil for them and feed them with bread. And yet, nobody acknowledges our merits for the fatherland” (22).

When, at last, the ox's master comes out of his tavern, he is dead drunk, struggling even to walk, and unable to speak coherently.

“This is what that proud descendant used his freedom for,” concludes the ox. The freedom that has been won by the “blood of the ancestors” is used by those enjoying it to “do just nothing,” and to be “proud of the past and of merits of their elders, in which they took part just as much as I did.” The whole affair is not just misguided or ridiculous, but shameful. Human conceit is not only reprehensible, but repugnant. In that, Domanović's satire reaches an extreme, as a censure of human folly is replaced by an implied rejection of human nature. The anthropocentrism is rendered void of any validity, and a subtle, but provocative reversal of the human-animal hierarchy is spelled out. This reversal is all the more subversive when imagined in the intensely nationalist context of Serbia in 1902, when the story was written. Human fickleness and hypocrisy are thus contrasted with the reasonable consistency and forbearance of the animals: “But we, the oxen, remained as diligent and useful workers as our elders have been. We are oxen, that is true, but still we can pride ourselves of our strenuous labor and merits of today” (23). Human values are accomplished by the “beasts of burden.” To the contrary, what humans aspire to is grotesquely betrayed by everything humans do.

The most dramatic and effective detail is in the final sentence of the tale. As the drunk master is approaching his carriage, “the ox heaves a deep sigh, and sets his neck ready for the yoke” (23). This seemingly realist detail carries a strong symbolic weight. The question eventually arises: who has been “yoked” by whom, and for how long?

Four centuries of subjugation under another group of the same species appears as a flimsy ground for heroism, and pales in comparison to the perpetual, patient, and meritorious service of the oxen.

### **Domanović between Serbian Literature, Russian Classics and Western Modernism**

As we can see, *Rumination of a Common Serbian Ox* not only reframes, but genuinely reassesses, and reverses the hierarchy between human and animal. But rather than showing curiosity for the otherness and the “radical mystery” of the animal, Domanović recognizes human qualities in the ox, whereas humans in the story are devoid of their essential properties. Enlightened rationality moves over to a thinking animal, and is altogether absent from the human “agents.” However, while hinting toward the posthumanist aesthetics of high European modernism, the story also remains fully lodged in the satirical tradition of interrogating human rationality as the fundamental concept of the Enlightenment. Serbian modernism depended on the legacies of classical humanism and the Enlightenment, and these legacies were not antithetical to modernization of the country, or to a sense of non-traditional aesthetics. Having acquired a hard-fought independence, Serbia obtained an opportunity to avail itself of these legacies on its own terms, after a prolonged, four-centuries-long Ottoman domination.

At the same time, the most innovative and socially critical artists were keenly attuned to

emerging modernist sensibilities. Writers such as Jovan Skerlić, Branislav Nušić, or Domanović himself are a case in point. Domanović, more so than others, distanced himself from the anthropo- and ethnocentric paradigms, and developed a somewhat anarchistic, recalcitrant worldview, as well as an experimental and unconventional narration that could indeed be described as vanguard and modernist. He also refused to submit to superficial patriotism and self-flattery, which is the main reason why the burgeoning Serbian nationalism pushed his critical perspective to the social and political periphery.

Scholarship on Domanović has not sufficiently recognized the degree to which the artist's eccentric aesthetics resonate with modernist developments across European literature (Russian literature very much included). Penčić rightly points out that Domanović's absurdist dystopias precede those of Yevgeny Zamyatin and George Orwell, which may help reassess the accomplishments and merits of the author (119). Domanović's work has all too often been situated within or in contrast to the realist tradition of Serbian literature. This contextualization is apposite, but it is only part of the story. In the wake of the theoretical developments of the late twentieth century, as well as the political turmoil of the 1990s in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia, we are able to realize how precocious, and how modernly wayward, Domanović's satires really were; all the more so, given the strong hold the realist paradigm still had in Serbian literature at the turn of the century. Furthermore, it is only now, in the wake of the recent humiliating breakdown of Yugoslavia in which Slobodan Milošević's Serbia played a major and dishonorable role, that we can fully appreciate the foresight and candor of Domanović's far-sighted political and artistic dissent.

Domanović now stands as one of the most forward-looking writers from the former



Yugoslavia whose uncompromising and unorthodox work uncannily anticipated the deleterious effects of the jingoistic patriotism in Serbia throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps even more importantly, his eerie and absurdist tales born in fanciful voyages established a mode of critical thinking and satirical writing that resonates throughout the former Yugoslavia to this day. For instance, members of a popular and artistically accomplished television show that ran from 1984-1991, *Top lista nadrealista* (“The Surrealist Charts”), especially the actor and screenwriter Nenad Janković who was the main creative force behind it, referred to Domanović as a key influence on the troupe's comparably bizarre and “surrealist” satirical sketches. Janković, better known by his pseudonym Dr Nele Karajlić (or simply Nele), said that Domanović was among his greatest literary influences, adding that whoever knows Domanović's work “will recognize his handwriting in many sketches of *Top lista nadrealista*” (Katalina). Similarly, in 2016, a writer Veselin Mišnić published a novel *Metamorfoze jednog srpskog vola* (“Metamorphoses of a Serbian Ox”), continuing the satirical legacy of his predecessor. This continuity points to one of the key reasons for Domanović's ongoing relevance. Vladeta Jerotić remarks that Domanović's work inspires a sense of sadness and “anthropological doubt,” triggered by the demoralizing persistence of false patriotism and political corruption in modern-day Serbia.

This profound, “anthropological” doubt is, of course, at the heart of the posthumanist revision of humanism. It is a doubt provoked by a sense of “realism and humility about the place of humans in a more-than-human world” (Waldau 129), and born out of “resistance to the rote privileging of human abilities” (Rohman 162). Domanović's Yugoslav critics have usually tried to explain away this more profound doubt and skepticism by pointing out the bleak context in which the author wrote. One of the leading critics of Domanović's time, Jovan Skerlić, detected

the caustic sarcasm of the “disappointed idealist” in Domanović, and, literary praises notwithstanding, deemed the writer's view of the world overly dark (7-8). A considerable number of critics from the socialist Yugoslavia also accounted for Domanović's increasing political faithlessness by context. Dmitrije Vučenov describes Domanović's environment as a petty bourgeois society under tyranny (1959: 29), and ascribes the writer's pessimism to the incapacity of the oppositional “civic left,” and the “poor peasant population” to break out of the shackles of the monarchist tyranny (1969: 273-4). Vučenov adds bohemianism, poverty, tuberculosis and developing alcoholism as further factors in Domanović's hopeless artistic vision.

However, while these explanations account for the circumstances in which the works were produced, they do not account for the far-reaching consequences of Domanović's satires. Jelušić suggests that the contemporary philosophical relevance of these satires, as well as their modernity, lie in the nihilism that discredits the metaphysical worlds and does not believe in the absolute transcendence of being (294). The uneasiness and discontent of the stories thus surpasses their historical and biographical context, and conveys a broader and more general sense of disappointment and despair that is not abated by the humor, but merely made palatable by it. This sense of disappointment and despair could be seen as precociously modern, especially given the “belated” dynamic of the struggling Serbian society.

Even so, Domanović is a writer who does not easily fit into the modernist narrative. He draws too much from the Enlightenment, and also from the realist prose of Serbia. On the other hand, he does so in an unorthodox way, and with a touch of innovation and refinement. Then again, a lot of his experimental and modernist elements actually precede those of the better known mavericks of modernism. There are a lot of “Kafkian” elements in Domanović's

enigmatic, reality-defying visions, but his absurdism differs from, and precedes, Kafka. Some of the inspiration stems from the Serbian oral and epic tradition, and its country culture (Gligorić 5-6). It is another possible source of Domanović's picturesque narration. Still, a closer look reveals clear Russian influences. Penčić situates Domanović's satires in the Russian tradition of Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin (118). This association is appropriate, as there are similarities and points of convergence between Domanović and the Russian authors, especially Gogol's playful and exhibitionist narrator who keeps his cool in the face of mind-boggling absurdities. Gogol's collection of tales *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* or his famous stories *The Overcoat*, *The Nose* or *Nevsky Prospekt* evoke a similar and eerie interplay between the composed and sober wit and the hallucinatory and permissive imagination.<sup>50</sup> Domanović's love for Gogol is well known. However, Saltykov-Shchedrin's and Nikolai Leskov's plunge into provincial Russia in works such as *The Golovlyov Family* or *The Enchanted Wanderer* (or even in Gogol's "Ukrainian" tales such as *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*) also echo in Domanović both thematically and tonally. Interest in provincial life and themes – where "social" thematic quickly morphs into a metaphysical exploration that understands the provincial space as the symbolic stage of troubled existence – is accompanied by refined irony that ranges from subtle, semitransparent understatement to playful, almost irresponsible, and darkly sardonic narrative escapades.

In addition, as early as 1910, most of Domanović's works have been translated to Russian. They were available to the leading vanguard and experimental writers of Russian modernism. While the impact of Domanović's translations into Russian needs to be better assessed, this peculiar position of the writer calls for an extended and ramified understanding of modernism itself, and for a recognition of the fact that a thorough account of the period will not

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<sup>50</sup> "Hallucinatory" in the etymological sense, from Latin *ālūcinārī*, "to wander in mind."

always disassociate modernism and humanism philosophically, nor modernism and realism aesthetically. Domanović, at least, was in need of both humanist principles and merciless refutation of them as he sought to fight off the backward forces in his homeland. He absorbed foreign literary influences eagerly and without prejudice, and eventually employed his talents to create an original and fiercely independent oeuvre that, often unconsciously, took part in, and even anticipated many of the significant literary and philosophical developments of the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

In this final section, I present the key findings, as well as broader theoretical remarks about narrative satire and its worldview and wisdom. I present the distilled and compressed realizations and revelations this powerful literary genre inculcates slowly, but surely, in its readers. I briefly address the main themes of the study, while also providing a more general and philosophical perspective on the style and genre of narrative satire.

### Satire and the Journey

The journey functions as a device that activates different narrative functions and effects, but it is also the very structure of prose satire. *Satire* is a journey; it does not merely employ the journey as a device. Its fast-paced narration and meandering style charged with irony, hyperbole and polemical insinuations bring a kind of chaotic whirlwind that gradually morphs into a – both firmly and loosely – structured itinerary. The itinerary is firm in the sense that it strives to provide grounds for a universal or cosmopolitan judgment. It is trying to give the reader the experience of the whole world, of remote lands, familiar countries, utopias and dreaded places. It is loose, however, in the sense that it does not show signs of premeditated and deliberate planning, with the specific intention of ending at one place or another. Displacement and rootlessness are integral to prose satire. Compared to full-fledged novels, the works I discuss are halfway between a rounded and “finished” structure, and a slightly improvised, *ad lib* affair.

They are not a quick improvisation without any sense of direction or revision, but they are also not a thoroughly planned out novel in which every detail is placed with vision and invites scrupulous and pedantic interpretation. The “improvised” quality of these satires I mentioned in the chapter on Voltaire is the effect of a particular (and deceptive) ease these writers achieved. They were capable of writing seemingly simple, light, but cutting and unsparing satirical novellas. My interpretation of these works strives to recognize and even replicate the agility of thought and perspective, as well as to show full awareness of just how provocative and unsettling these works were in the day and remain to be so if their premises and implications are followed.

Whether we describe the journey as a theme, trope or a fundamental structural principle, it remains an essential feature in every single story I discuss. The protagonist, as well as other characters, travel all the time. Journey enables the full thematic scope to unfold.

Satire strives for cognition through experience, and what better experience than the journey? Physical travel broadens the horizons and brings about mental changes, while leaving one without recourse to their own metaphorical castle or ivory tower at home. Satire talks about the whole world by means of talking about different places in sequence. It is not prone to aesthetically pleasing and morally appeasing propositions about pre-established harmony or fundamental purpose of the world. Instead of all-encompassing model or philosophy, satire slowly insinuates a sagacious outlook on reality.

Along the way, many of the central occupations of the epoch are addressed, and always with the same emphasis on insufficiency of general answers, and falsehood of optimistic ones. Let us review these central questions, discussed throughout this study.

## Satire, Violence, and Evil

The question of evil and human agency was massive for the age of the Enlightenment broadly conceived, with its impetus to explain and eradicate evil through reason. The burden of theory of Providence (vision of world and human destiny as pre-determined and purposeful) was still pressing heavy on many minds, including Swift and Voltaire. Providence, like Leibniz's "theodicy," explained the evil as part of the world that functions in a larger scheme and serves the purpose of higher good. It did not see contradiction in arguing for free will as inherent to humans as well. Similarly, Leskov and Domanović had to deal with the mythology of cultural fatalism, and they opposed it to their bright and sober interpretation of their respective cultures. The holy and predestined future of the country is always opposed to the complex and realistic present. This present is always reached through experience and the journey, and never through abstract speculation.

The main rhetorical strategy employed by the satirists I focus on is not argumentation, but problematization. Rather than making an explicit thesis or claim, these authors want to interrogate the all-important questions their respective cultures deem to be resolved and answered for good. By providing provocative antitheses they confront us with the implausibility of the existent answers and invite wise suspicion and further inquiry on the issue.

It is along these lines only that the triumph of evil and the deplorable powerlessness of human will make sense. It is only through taking an exhaustive the journey that these views could be proposed and grounded. The significance of the journey is thus not merely a matter of device, but of a structural principle. The satirists think through the journey and movement.

## Satire and Authority

Still, it is the business of satire to criticize and ridicule the authority. It speaks against the entrenched power. In principle, authority in human society is legitimized, justified and defended, sometimes imposed and often needed. To disrespect, disregard or ridicule authority is not a positive thing by default, nor is it a *conditio sine qua non* of purposeful political dissent. One might also respect, acknowledge and obey authority, or else strategize and make compromises with it, as Swift and Voltaire did throughout their lives and careers, sneaking themselves in and out of good graces of London and Dublin authorities (Swift) or such rulers as Frederick the Great, Louis XV, and Catherine the Great (Voltaire). Leskov had to be particularly smart in his own positioning within the Russian culture and make good use of the relatively permissive period of the Great Reforms under Alexander II. Domanović undertook life-risking endeavors, but also was able to seek refuge and rely on political forces favorable to him.

Still, it is the business of satire to criticize and ridicule the authority. Authority is seen as illegitimate, unjustifiable or indefensible, as well as unneeded. It is a matter of unjust impositions and force. These are seen all over the world, and can take shape of mindless bodily harm, such as rape, evisceration, or willful persecution (institutionalized and sanctioned), such as “heroic” battles, Inquisition and above all war.

The power struggle is severe and incessant, but its effects are transitory and inconclusive. Power is continuous yet ephemeral in the world of satire. Satire's worldview is fluid. All attempts to halt the flow (through usurping power, for example) are bound to be promptly thwarted. One king is followed by another (as in Voltaire's scene of the carnival of dethroned kings in Venice); the ferocious sultan is supplanted by his even fiercer nephew or brother. Power does not so much



“circulate,” as it appears to be absurd, impossible, and needless. Satire travesties power and presents it as void and voluntaristic. Power is a destructive force, not a means to creation.

### **Satire and Patriotism**

Another significant topic is the one of collective narcissism. Contemporary criticism operates with two different – and usually negative – notions to describe this tendency: nationalism and ethnocentrism. Both are accounted for by means of two supporting philosophical concepts: the Other and the Self. Ethnocentrism operates in such a way that Other is “othered,” despised and reviled, whereas the Self is affirmed and celebrated. While this approach can take the “mild” form of moderate nationalism, it can also develop into violent forms of jingoism, chauvinism and collective narcissism. I argue that narrative satire emerges as an expression of the enlightened tendencies in different literatures and societies discussed in this study. Regarding the collective narcissism, these tendencies become manifest through bringing into question, or even ridiculing, the ethnocentric paradigms. There is an undiscovered potential in the stories discussed. Their “canonical” status notwithstanding, the satirical novellas I analyze preserve their critical ability to undermine and find fault with the cultures that, however slowly, came to recognize them as important and integral to their “national” self.

Therefore, the image of the Self is rather negative. Patriotism is a flaw, not a virtue. As the famous Samuel Johnson's adage avers, “patriotism is the last resort of the scoundrel.” Consequently, the Other is not so much “othered” as “samed” in satire, if such awkward language can be forgiven for the sake of point. The Other is not represented as radically different (be it positively or negatively different). The differences are only in the customs, and they can

indeed be extreme. But these are superficial differences. The Other is approached and shown to be equally disappointing, equally barbaric, with the same potential for rapacity and evil. As Mason observes regarding Voltaire: “Voltaire's classical view of human nature as fundamentally the same world over beneath the superficial differences of custom between one country and another is brought to bear on what is constant and enduring in the human condition” (11). As such, “Voltaire's cosmopolitan outlook on the world admits of no nationalist patriotism” (24).

In this sense, satirical worldview is anti-patriotic, but also anti-utopian. It shows collective narcissism as present all over the world. It refuses to idealize the Other, but also refuses to depreciate the Other in a glib and prejudiced way. The parodic use of pseudo-utopia in the Book III of the *Travels*, the episode of El Dorado in *Candide*, the journey of Ivan Flyagin into the “Tatar” part of the Russian Empire, and Domanović's repeated voyages to his own beloved but marred country, show the exotic idealization of the Other to be equally misguided and credulous. These stories produce a destabilizing effect of uncertainty about collective belonging. The happiness is not to be sought in large, abstractly and narcissistically conceived communities, but in small communities based on shared and craft-driven labor, such as the community of the Houyhnhnm land, harmonious traditional family of the good Turk, or the rather diverse and almost random community formed by *Candide*'s troupe at the end. Ivan Flyagin finds a semblance of belonging in the self-effacing monastic life, and Domanović's characters never even achieve it. Still, the same implied idea that happiness and belonging cannot be found in large and self-praising communities persists.

Journey is the only path to insight. It is the antidote, and a panacea, to all traditional targets of satire: vice, folly, ignorance and prejudice. One has to travel and move in order to learn

and advance.

### **Human Folly and Vice Versus the Wisdom of Satire**

The fourth crucial and obsessive topic the narrative satire is that of human flaw and vice. Like violence, authority and patriotism, these are mighty, blind and sweeping forces. Stupidity, blind, “bestial” instinct, greed, avarice, lust and many others are also eradicable, and the only way to deal with them is to avoid them. Toward the ending of *Candide*, the good Turk spells out the three main vices from which his humble labor saves him: boredom (*l'ennui*), vice (*le vice*) and want (*le besoin*).

This calls for a larger point about satire that needs to be made. If indeed boredom, vice, and want are the three key elements and temptations of human faulty nature, it is the role of satire to propose some form of protection against them. It is inevitable for satire to provide some sort of “moral” or “takeaway,” or as Walter Benjamin's analysis of Leskov proposes, “counsel,” even when it is not obvious or intended. Interrogation of all norms and values instills a new kind of consciousness and awareness of reality.

Satire itself “cultivates” its garden. Its stylistic and narrative demands, its clever codes that require and stimulate interpretive discernment and the savvy “low realism” make satire itself a *modus vivendi*, a humoristic and creative response to a difficult and often disappointing environment. Satire too is a way to wage a battle against boredom, vice and wanton desire. It is a way to cultivate the habits of good reading and sound interpreting of both art and reality. It is in its fostering of these humble but essential skills that satire fulfills its political purpose much more so than through explicit political agitation. In his analysis of Voltaire, Hayden Mason notes that

“since the 1920s we have discovered even more horrors of which man is capable. So, it is not documentary evidence that we seek in *Candide*. What Voltaire provides is a whole worldview, unique and self-consistent, and this view remains relevant today as it was in 1759” (9).

The ability to present this “self-consistent” worldview is the chief merit of narrative satire. Vice and folly can only be overcome by means of wisdom and cleverness. And, finally, when it comes to the journey, it is through the act of traveling that the view of the world in the first place is possible. Everybody travels in the works discussed in this study. The meandering narration reflects and structures both the text and its reception. Journey is the ultimate way to knowledge, and a defense against the vice and folly that arise in passivity and stagnation, in the “philosophy of parochialism” I explain in the chapter about Domanović, or in the “Dead Sea” metaphor this writer fruitfully employed.

### **The Journey As Knowledge**

Most important, the journey is a mode of thinking and a mode of representation of the satirist. Always a liminal figure, the satirist can only function through the journey and juggling of perspectives. The satirist belongs to the community from which he is expelled. The satirist gravitates toward it, is fascinated by it, attentive to it, but still is thrown out by a centrifugal force from within. Best and truly patriotic intentions lead the satirists to perpetual predicament, because true patriotism is self-critical. There is brutal but irresistible dynamism to this ambivalent position of the satirist as a liminal and peripheral figure who nonetheless possesses greater knowledge and insight about their own culture, to their position as someone who is pulled with all their might to return and settle in their own place of origin but cannot help falling further

away from it. Compulsive insistence on staying put and thinking about one's own community is intertwined with incessant impulse to criticize, change and move on. Places, cities, countries and continents are all united by a sense of leveling commonality and monotony. Journey thus provides a dynamic and constantly changing element that nevertheless results in a demystified and sober worldview. For all its appeal and excitement, the journey can be sobering and disenchanting. Mild and comforting pessimism is the ultimate knowledge and wisdom.

There is a proverb in the former Yugoslavia that “you cannot hit a fly with a shovel.” The tool is inadequate and clunky for a task that may otherwise seem to be simple. Satire itself is the ugly, hairy fly of the proverb. As handy as a shovel may be for other purposes, it is not the right tool to “smash” a fly. The same applies for the notion of method, when it comes to satire. Satire cannot be accounted for by means of a shovel or any other reliable and purposeful tool. Like the ugly, hairy, swift, and annoying insect, it flies away and evades the critical judgment.

Moreover, a surprising recognition ensues. Satire can talk constantly about the “same” issues, the same mistakes and follies, and still inspire a sense of cheerful admiration in the reader. We are “happy” to assert that everything is the same and that it will always remain so, and that satire reaffirms this inert but undeniable truth. Satire is very much a “lecture” about the capricious and complacent spirit of humankind, especially when such sentiments are bound with bad habits, callous neglect and inveterate delusions.

Seeing the cosmic as the comic; a realization that the cosmic *is* the comic, is at the heart of satirical wisdom. The quiet defeatism of satire, its ability to recognize human imperfection is crucial. The “low” image of humanity allows for a more reasonable and enlightened perspective on life. In fact, satire makes an overarching cultural and philosophical argument that it is

important to be reasonable.

Michel Foucault described this attitude as the “ethos” of the Enlightenment. There is a distinction between the Enlightenment as an ideology, and the Enlightenment as a *spiritus movens* and – to use Foucault's term – “ethos” that helps humans affirm their rights and liberties on the grounds of Reason. I maintain that this distinction holds true for satire. For instance, in *Candide* we discover the reasonable Voltaire, who is not the ideologue of the Enlightenment, but a witty guru who professes insight and doubt, rather than the ultimate truth. K. A. Ukhtomsky's sculpture from the Hermitage Museum becomes an emblem of the satirist. Voltaire's discreet, delicate smile incarnates the ethos of the enlightened satirist. Voltaire's sly smile hints as much – there is no real knowledge without this wholesome attitude, without the inspiration and the joy of reading and writing. Laughter becomes the ultimate reward of learning, and even of suffering, the very ethos of the enlightened satirist. The humorous transmutation of the gruesome social truth becomes the moral code of satire. This “code” is inscribed negatively, through constant transgression and “shocking” of the readers, but it resides as a tenet of the strong and uncompromising satirical artistry.

Finally, what is the relation of the journey and satire? Why did I choose the word “journey” and not its less exciting cognates, such as “exile,” or “displacement” to express the ethos of my project? I argue that only the journey allows for the experience of movement to be fruitful and creative. Exile and displacement are horrible. The cultural rootlessness of the satirist, just the same. However, the ability of a lonesome, isolated observer to indulge in genuine dialectics and “wander” through the experiments and experiences without prejudice is only accounted for by the adventurous and advantageous notion of the journey. Ultimately, it is a

positive and creative sense of exploration and movement. The satirists are not victims of the underwhelming societies they depict.

The satirist assumes a desirable position at the margins of a culture. It is a “luxury” of a reasonable person to stand beside and mock the pervasive vice and folly. What seems to be a place of exile and marginalization, becomes a privileged spot from which to observe the world and learn about it. The frontier is the satirist's province and “kingdom.” The satirist is incontestable at the margins. His or her status already implies some degree of “surrender” and giving up on the society. So, already irrelevant, unimportant, the satirist can enjoy the pleasure of travel and observation. His or her – and in the time-frame I am addressing, satire remains, by and large, a male privilege – acerbic words irritate the satirical target by stating or insinuating the “ugly” truth, as an unwanted fly buzzing in the palace might annoy a king or queen. The satirist is like a court jester – a liminal nobody who is allowed to say everything.

On this note, we come again to the core supposition of this study. Something is unsatisfactory and imperfect about society and life, and it is profitable to think of society as fundamentally flawed. No satire praises human life. The dark and gloomy tone is a gateway to the satirical journey. To understand the view of the world of a satirist and appreciate it, one has to be able to vibrate at the same “wavelength,” so to speak, and absorb the shock of a marginal and liminal perspective. This resonates with the remark of Walter Benjamin about Nikolai Leskov that his stories reflect “the traditional sympathy which storytellers have for rascals and crooks” (105). The reader has to step out of society to appreciate the rewards of the satirical journey. It is only then that the recalibration of taste becomes possible. What seemed odd, eccentric or even perverted becomes witty and wise. The main goal of this study is to illustrate precisely that. How

great writers take us on an unpredictable and risky journey that pays off only at the end. As readers, we have to be pliable and subtle in order to appreciate satire – narrative satire in particular.

There is a quirky but accurate way to describe the rhetorical ruse behind narrative satire. The writers I discuss “spin” their ideas and sentences as a table tennis player “spins” the ball. Everything seems needlessly contrived – why not just hit flatly? – but the ball lands right where it should on the opposing side of the table, placing the opponent in a difficult situation. Then, when there is a chance, the satirist hits directly and flatly, dropping the mighty figures of speech and tools he or she normally relies on to add “spin” to their words.

Consequently, many words mean different things at the same time in satire. There is a “charge” to words that are often introduced innocently but used slyly and strategically. We have seen this especially in the chapter on Leskov. It is important to appreciate this mixed quality of language. It is indicative of the profound relativism of satire's worldview. At the same time, the complex language is not meant to be a vehicle of evasion or denial of truth. Satire's chief enemy is falsehood. In fact, as I argue throughout the study, there is a sense of uncompromising moral solidity at the foundation of all the seeming relativism and irony.

Finally, there is a certain moderation to satirical wisdom I describe. Even though satire regularly challenges authority, and subverts it, there is also an undercurrent to it that is conformist and accepting of the disillusioning reality. In many cases, there are no new discoveries or great truths to be unearthed. sometimes, a common, unambitious, and conservative truth is all there is. Humor, ideas, and worldview, do not have to be subversive at all times and at all costs. The modest, old, boring, “conservative” truth, will often do, as opposed to the



revolutionary and radical one. Satire challenges, changes and mocks the world. But it also accepts it in its imperfection. This is a particularly provocative and interesting tendency we can see in every writer discussed. A sense of settling for less is important and prominent in Swift, Voltaire, Leskov and even Domanović.

Instead of strong affirmations, apt doubts and powerful second thoughts – seemingly small thoughts, additions, “afterthoughts” – remain. Upon pondering, these afterthoughts may grow into major interventions and revisions, even revelations. This is where the anti-philosophical wisdom of narrative satire prevails. While never succumbing to fallow doubt, narrative satire remains skeptical and cautious. Its wisdom is embedded, rather than proclaimed. “Travaillons sans raisonner,” says Martin in *Candide*. “C'est le seul moyen de rendre la vie supportable” (C 46). “Let us work without reasoning. It is the only way to make life bearable.”

Hence, the wisdom I describe and promote as a legitimate form of knowledge emerges not so much as a coherent and strongly argued hypothesis or thesis. It comes to the reader as a cluster of ideas, questions, doubts, witty remarks... This wisdom, I argue, is the protagonist of narrative satire, its gist. It is far more important that the flat, “underdeveloped” characters of the stories I discuss. Or, at least, this understated, restrained wisdom is the reason why it is necessary that the protagonists – Gulliver, Candide, Flyagin and all Domanović's “Radosavs” are naive and simple-hearted. Behind their simplicity, lie the tricky workings of satirical “spirit” that allow for the dynamic of the imaginary and the real, the fantastic and the mundane, the banal and the complex to play out fully.

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