

The Uses of the Grotesque in *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Journey to the West*

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In reading comparative critical studies of *The Journey to the West*, one comes upon the name of Jonathan Swift with some frequency; this is as it should be since Swift and the probable author of the *Hsi-yu Chi*, Wu Ch'eng-en, have much in common as writers, both in form and in content. Though Swift's name is mentioned, the comparison is seldom elaborated beyond an expression of similarity in satiric thrust. It will be the object of this paper, therefore, to focus on the use of the grotesque as a shared technique and method of the two authors, to elaborate this use in terms of form or type, and to offer some thoughts as to its purpose or function.

Toward a Working Definition of the Grotesque

In attempting to define the grotesque as a literary technique, one comes immediately to an understanding of the importance of this method for comparative study. Few aspects of art so readily cut across national and racial lines as the employment of the grotesque; it is to be found in all literatures and with a frequency that belies the relatively sparse critical treatment that it has received in the past. A working definition of the grotesque must include, first of all, the concept of tension between the comic and the horrific; its effect often depends, in fact, upon the balance or sequence of the reader's understanding. The process of this effect in the reader's awareness is best exemplified by a statement such as Swift's famous, "Last Week I saw a Woman *flay'd*, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse."¹ The content is perceived to be ludicrously ironic, and it is only in mid-laugh that one is suddenly presented with a horrific image so appalling that laughter is replaced by unease, by

discomfiting questions such as, "Is it appropriate to laugh?" Philip Thomson has summarized this tension in his study, *The Grotesque*, as being "the co-presence of the laughable and something which is incompatible with the laughable."²

A second issue of definition hinges on the distinctly valuative sense of the normal. The grotesque is defined by the OED as "figures or designs characterized by comic distortion or exaggeration. . . . Characterized by distortion or unnatural combinations," and Carl Skrade in *God and the Grotesque* embodies in his use of the term this sense of subjective value:

I define the grotesque according to the common usage of that term in literary and artistic criticism; i.e., the grotesque is that which deviates from the conventional and the normal, that which is incongruous with that deemed real according to consensual validation.³

The informing of the grotesque, in other words, is implicitly tied to the norm. Imagistically, the author's departure from this norm is limited to a single step, for that one step provides the platform from which he may present us with our own skewed reflection, powerful in its circus-mirror distortion; a step further leads to the absurd and a step beyond that to meaninglessness and chaos. Both humor and disgust are strong emotional reactions to a perception. These responses are elicited by the nearness of the image to the norm, not by its extreme misrepresentation of pragmatic existence. Verbal irony is often defined as the difference between what is said and what is meant, but the grotesque image, properly employed, is the difference between what is and what could almost be. It presents us with a deflating vision of the natural world through striking, "unnatural" portraits of it.

Finally, a definition of the grotesque must include a discussion of its non-rational nature. The grotesque has historically been a component of myths, folk tales, and children's literature in part because it does not depend for effect upon rational discourse. Neither humor nor horror is logical, and both are intensified by their near coupling in the grotesque equation of tension discussed previously. It is not surprising, for example, that *Gulliver's Travels* is often read as a series of children's tales, for the more reasonable satire, irony, and philosophical discourse of these Books is winnowed out by the child's mind in favor of the fantastic images of giants and little people. It is not unusual for the adult reader to find this non-rational level of the work appealing as well, but that same reader can also

find himself confronted by images that, through their very non-rational nature, are both effective and incapable of resolution or dismissal. One would like, for instance, in regard to the *Hsi-yu Chi*, to embrace the rational comfort of Hu Shih's statement that the work is, "simply a book of good humor, profound nonsense, good-natured satire and delightful entertainment,"⁴ but the very existence of powerful grotesque imagery, of profound residual unease rather than of the lighthearted response elicited by nonsense, must, by force, reflect the non-rational assault on the reader made by the author and the work.

In summary, a working definition of the grotesque in literature is that it is seen in an image or situation which creates a tension in the reader between the mutual pulls of the comic and the horrific; it is a near departure from the norm to a skewed vision of an "unnatural" world view, and it is non-rational both in its presentation and its effect, leaving the reader with an uncomfortably unresolvable sense of uneasiness. Although this topic deserves a more complete elaboration, we may now, with the discussion at hand, proceed to explore a comparison of forms of the grotesque, a typology.

A Comparative Typology

When addressing the works of two authors who made such extensive use of a particular technique, one must be careful not to attempt exhaustive examples for fear of simply restating the works themselves. For the purposes of this paper, I intend to restrict the typological discussion to a sampling of representative forms which are striking either in or out of context. As well, I will focus on what I have delineated elsewhere as the specific grotesque as distinguished from the narrative or controlling grotesque.⁵

In particular, grotesque images of the body summon up sheer physicality, an earthiness intimately related to human perceptions of bodily integrity, wholeness, and acceptability. As such, these images are especially effective and frequent in works employing the grotesque, and they appear in several forms.

The Monstrous

The monstrous has more to do with size than shape and have some correlation to a frame of reference. Gulliver, for example, in the first two Books of

the *Travels* is confronted with his own monstrousness in relation to the Lilliputians and with the monstrousness of the Brobdingnagians in relation to himself:

I reflected what a Mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this Nation, as one single *Lilliputian* would be among us. But, this I conceived was to be the least of my Misfortunes: For, as human Creatures are observed to be more Savage and cruel in Proportion to their Bulk; what could I expect but to be a Morsel in the Mouth of the first among these enormous Barbarians who should happen to seize me? Undoubtedly Philosophers are in the Right when they tell us, that nothing is great or little otherwise than by Comparison. (*PW*, XI, 71)

In the vein of the monstrous in the *Hsi-yu Chi*, we find that that monstrousness may totally lift the reader out of the norm. It may serve the purpose of isolation of the principal combatants in a supernatural setting beyond the referents of either the story or the real world, and the humor may hinge, as it often does, on Monkey's ability to out-monster the monsters.

With a loud giggle, the Bull King then revealed his original form — that of a gigantic white bull, with a head like a rugged mountain and eyes like bolts of lightning. The two horns were like two iron pagodas, and his teeth were like rows of sharp daggers. From head to toe, he measured more than ten thousand feet, while his height from hoof to neck was about eight hundred.

"Wretched ape!" he roared at Pilgrim. "What will you do with me now?" Pilgrim also changed back to his true form; yanking out his golden-hooped rod, he bent his back and then straightened out, crying, "Grow!" At once he grew to a height of one hundred thousand feet, with a head like Mount T'ai, eyes like the sun and the moon, a mouth like a bloody pond, and teeth like doors. Lifting high his iron rod, he brought it down on the bull's head, and it was met by a pair of flinty horns. This battle truly rocked the ridges and the mountains, alarmed both Heaven and Earth.⁶

Monstrousness, too, may refer to enormities other than physical ones, especially to those of palpable wrongness in ideas or actions. In Swift's

A *Modest Proposal*, the projector-persona is blithely unaware of the proportions of his plan:

I have been assured by a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance in *London*; that a young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; Whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*; and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricasie*, or *Ragoust*. (*PW*, XIII, 111)

Likewise, in the *Journey's* Bhiksu Kingdom, the young master has closed his eyes and his heart to the horror of the royal father-in-law's requirements for making him immortal:

Some time ago he went, in fact, to the Ten Islets and the Three Isles to gather herbs. After his return and the preparation of all the medications, he still requires the terrible medical supplement of one thousand one hundred and eleven hearts of young boys. When the medicine is taken with soup made from boiling these boys' hearts, the king, so the Taoist claims, will live to a thousand years without aging. Those little boys you saw in the geese coops are the selected ones, who are being fed and nurtured before they are slaughtered. Fearing the law of the king, the parents dare not even weep. (*JW*, IV, 42)

Malformation

The grotesque through malformation is closely allied to the monstrous. It is another form of assault on body integrity and appropriateness through the imagery of skewed vision. The image may be one of form near that of the human but lacking in reason or intellect, or its obverse, in which reason and intellect are possessed by a physically alien creature. In the *Travels*, for example, Gulliver encounters the Yahoos:

... the *Yahoos* were known to hate one another more than they did any different Species of Animals; and the Reason usually assigned, was, the Odiousness of their own Shapes, which all could see in the rest, but not in themselves. He had therefore begun to think it not unwise in us to *cover* our Bodies, and

by that Invention, conceal many of our Deformities from each other, which would else be hardly supportable. But, he now found he had been mistaken; and that the Dissentions of those Brutes in his Country were owing to the same Cause with ours, as I had described them. (*PW*, XI, 244)

In the *Journey*, one of the more humourous running motifs is that of the appearance of Tripitaka's grotesque companions; they are so hideous that they are often left outside while the master begs for shelter in order that they not frighten their hosts. On first meeting, Monkey and Chu Pa-chieh appear more than a match for each other in this regard.

When the violent gust of wind had gone by, there appeared in mid-air a monster who was ugly indeed. With his black face covered with short, stubby hair, his long snout and huge ears, he wore a cotton shirt that was neither quite green nor quite blue. A sort of spotted cotton handkerchief was tied round his head. . . . "Monster, where do you think you're going? Tak a good look and see who I am!" The monster turned around and saw the protruding teeth, the gaping mouth, the fiery eyes, the golden pupils, the pointed head, and the hairy face of Pilgrim — virtually a living thunder god! He was so horrified that his hands became numb and his feet grew weak. With a loud ripping sound, he tore open his shirt and broke free of Pilgrim's clutch by changing into a violent wind. (*JW*, I, 376-78)

Anatomization

The dissection of a human being or of a rational creature always assaults the sense of bodily integrity, and it is again a favorite subject in the use of the grotesque, for it assures the author maximum emotional effect. In Swift's poem, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," we see this form quite clearly:

Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,
Takes off her artificial Hair:
Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,
She wipes it clean, and lays it by.
Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,

Stuck on with Art on either Side,
 Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,
 Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.
 Now dextrously her Plumpers draws,
 That serve to fill her hollow Jaws.
 Untwists a Wire; and from her Gums
 A set of teeth completely comes.
 Pulls out the Rags contriv'd to prop
 Her flabby Dugs and down they drop.
 Proceeding on, the lovely Goddess
 Unlaces next her Steel-Rib'd Bodice;
 Which by the Operator's Skill,
 Press down the Lumps, the Hollows fill,
 Up goes her Hand, and off she slips
 The Bolsters that supply her Hips.⁷

This same sort of dissection occurs humorously in the *Hsi-yu Chi* when Monkey is challenged to show his black heart.

Taking the dagger, the monk untied his robe and stuck out his chest. As he rubbed his belly with his left hand, he plunged the dagger into himself with his right hand and, with a loud ripping noise, tore open his own chest. A mass of hearts rolled out, so terrifying the onlookers that the civil officials paled in fright and the military officers turned numb. When he saw that, the royal father-in-law said in the hall, "This is a monk of many hearts!"

The spurious monk took those bloody hearts and manipulated them one by one for all to see: a red heart, a white heart, a yellow heart, an avaricious heart, a greedy heart, an envious heart, a petty heart, a competitive heart, an ambitious heart, a scornful heart, a murderous heart, a vicious heart, a fearful heart, a cautious heart, a perverse heart, a nameless obscure heart, and all kinds of wicked hearts. There was, however, not one single black heart! (*JW*, IV, 56).

Invasion of the Body

Before moving on to bodily images having to do with other than bodily integrity, we should explore one grotesque form that does not seem to

occur in Swift's writing but which is quite prevalent in Wu Ch'eng-en's work: that of bodily invasion. One of Monkey's favorite sports is to penetrate to the interior of an opponent and then to make witty comments while beating his adversary into submission from within. Swift, I think, would have loved this form had it occurred to him to use it. An excellent example of this is when Monkey allows himself to be swallowed by the lion monster, who, in fear for his life, begins to down goblets of potent wine to anesthetize Sun Wu-k'ung:

But our Great Sage, you see, could not take too much wine. After he had swallowed seven or eight gobletfuls from the old demon, he became so delirious that he began to do calisthenics without pause inside the demon's belly. He did jumping jacks and cartwheels; he let loose high kicks; grabbing the liver he used it for a swing, and he went through handstands and somersaults, prancing madly here and there. So unbearable was the pain that the fiend slumped to the ground. (*JW*, III, 428-29)

Perverse Sexuality

Issues having to do not with bodily integrity but with physical needs of the body also serve as vehicles for the grotesque because, through these elements carried to excess, we may feel disgust or be reviled. Perverse sexuality plays a part in both authors' works in several places. A good example of this form in Swift occurs when Gulliver is set upon by an eleven-year-old Yahoo:

Being one Day abroad with my Protector the Sorrel Nag, and the Weather exceeding hot, I entreated him to let me bathe in a River that was near. He consented, and I immediately stripped myself stark naked, and went down softly into the Stream. It happened that a young Female *Yahoo* standing behind a Bank, saw the whole Proceeding; and inflamed by Desire, as the Nag and I conjectured, came running with all Speed, and leaped into the Water within five Yards of the Place where I bathed. I was never in my Life so terribly frightened; the Nag was grazing at some Distance, not suspecting any Harm: She embraced me after a most fulsome Manner; I roared as loud as I could, and the Nag came galloping towards me, whereupon she quitted

her Grasp, with the utmost Reluctancy, and leaped upon the opposite Bank, where she stood gazing and howling all the time I was putting on my Clothes. (*PW*, XI, 250-51)

A repeated pattern of this form occurs in the *Journey* centering on the fact that Tripitaka's flesh and semen are known to bring about immediate immortality. He thus becomes the sexual target of practically every female monster the pilgrims encounter. One particularly powerful adversary of this nature is the rat monster.

Like spring's tender shoots her ten fingers looked.
 Her round, powdered face was a silver disc;
 Smooth like a cherry were her lips of rouge.
 Solemn and proper seemed her beauteous form,
 More delightful than Ch'ang-o of the moon.
 This day she caught the scripture-seeking monk,
 With whom at once she would share her bed. (*JW*, IV, 110)

Appetite

Grotesque appetite plays a dominant role in the humor of Swift and Wu Ch'en-en. The grotesquerie may be manifested in the volume, in the possessor or in the object of the appetite. It may well be in the barbarousness of that appetite. Again, we see this in *A Modest Proposal*:

Many other Advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the Addition of some Thousand Carcasses in our Exportation of barrelled Beef: The Propagation of *Swines Flesh*, and Improvement in the Art of making good *Bacon*; so much wanted among us by the great Destruction of *Pigs*, too frequent at our Tables, and are no way comparable in Taste, or Magnificence, to a well-grown fat yearling Child; which, roasted whole, will make a considerable Figure at a *Lord Mayor's Feast*, or any other publick Entertainment. (*PW*, XII, 115-16)

As mentioned in regard to sexual appetites, Tripitaka's flesh becomes precious in its immortality-bringing efficacy, a fact which makes him over and over a target, but for sheer grotesquerie few scenes in the novel can match the excess and the barbarousness of the cave of the Garuda monster

and his fellows:

A mound of skeletons,
 A forest of dead bones;
 Human hair packed together as blankets,
 And human flesh trodden as dirt and dust;
 Human tendons knotted on the trees
 Were dried, parched, and shiny like silver.
 In truth there were mountains of corpses and seas of blood;
 Indeed the putrid stench was terrible!
 The little fiends on the east
 Gouged out flesh from living persons;
 The brazen demons on the west
 Boiled and cooked fresh human meat. (*JW*, III, 411)

The Scatological

Finally, the scatological is an admirably suited type of the grotesque. Since excretory functions are seldom an acceptable topic of conversation or literature and since they are, at the same time, a very fundamental and natural part of life, Swift and Wu have at their disposal a ready and effective contrast between humor and disgust. Swift, in particular, has come under violent attack over the years for his use of scatological grotesquerie, but this form, except in its ability to rouse the ire of "gentle" readers, is no different than those previously discussed. The taboo, however, against this sort of imagery is evident, in Western culture at least, in the fact that an individual would normally more willingly expound with intimacy upon his sex life than speak with any real candor about his bowel movements. For Swift, excrement is often a weapon, as seen with the Yahoos:

Several of this cursed Brood getting hold of the Branches behind, leaped up into the Tree, from whence they began to discharge their Excrements on my Head: However, I escaped pretty well, by sticking close to the Stem of the Tree, but was almost stifled with the Filth, which fell about me on every side. (*PW*, XI, 208)

In Wu's *Journey*, urine also becomes a weapon on occasion, especially one of derision as in the false Taoist trinity scene, when, after dropping

the idols into the privy, Monkey and Pa-chieh fill a cistern with "holy water."

"Disciples," said the Tiger-Strength Immortal, "bring me a cup so that I can have a taste." A young Taoist immediately fetched a tea cup and handed it to the old Taoist. After bailing out a cup of it and gulping down a huge mouthful, the old Taoist kept wiping his mouth and puckering his lips. "Elder Brother," said the Deer-Strength Immortal, "is it good?" "Not very good," said the old Taoist, his lips still pouted, "the flavor is quite potent!" "Let me try it also," said the Goat-Strength Immortal, and he, too, downed a mouthful. Immediately he said, "It smells somewhat like hog urine!" . . .

O Taoists, Taoists,
 You are so silly!
 Which Three Pure Ones
 Would be so worldly?
 Let our true names
 Be told most clearly.
 Monks of the Great T'ang
 Go West by decree.
 We came to your place
 This fine night carefree.
 Your offerings eaten,
 We sat and played.
 Your bows and greetings
 How could we repay?
 That was no holy water you drank.
 "Twas only the urine we pissed that stank! (*JW*, II, 321-22)

In summary of this rather extended list of examples, it is worthwhile to note that many others could also be included. We have only touched on a category of literary technique that has amazing breadth. We have left unexplored any of the grotesque images of the mind or of learning also prevalent in the two authors' works, and we have avoided a discussion of the controlling grotesque for which an equal argument might be made. With something of a catalog before us, however, we may now turn to the topic of purpose or function in the use of this device.

The Function of the Grotesque

It is perhaps most sensible to begin this section with a conclusion and then to work back over the thoughts that led up to it. The conclusion is that though Jonathan Swift and Wu Ch'eng-en might be as closely compared as any two authors in terms of the use of a literary device, in this case the grotesque, it is remarkable that such a similar method was used to arrive at fundamentally dissimilar ends, for one author speaks of dissatisfaction, of a continuing quest, while the other arrives at resolution and tolerance.

Jonathan Swift was not a man to accept his own times. Satire in itself is a fierce and discordant plea for rectitude in a world judged at least slightly mad. As an Anglican churchman, a fact often discarded by those desiring easy answers or keys to the author, Swift wrote of perceived abuses in the government, religion, and learning of his own day. One has but to read his works to realize their moral and instructive intent, and Swift himself was quite clear on this point in a letter to his friend Alexander Pope near the completion of *Gulliver's Travels* when he said about the book that "the chief end I propose to myself in all my labours is to vex the world rather than divert it."⁸ In some of the greatest satire in the English language, Swift laid bare the wrongness of his times, and yet, for all the power of his angry disdain for mankind, Swift could summon up the most tender regard for the individual: to vex, yes, but for quite positive reasons. As he also wrote to Pope:

I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is toward individuals. . . . But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years, but do not tell, and so I shall go on till I have done with them. I have got materials toward a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition *animal rationale*, and to show it would be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy, though not in Timon's manner, the whole building of my *Travels* is erected; and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion.⁹

Swift could, as the Grub Street Hack would have liked, take along his

“gentle” reader on a tour of abuses for that one reader’s instruction.

If one looks at *Gulliver’s Travels*, he finds a quest that never materializes, a central consciousness that does not grow, and a conclusion that has led to more willful misinterpretation than any other in the language. Two points are almost always discarded in regard to the *Travels*: 1) it is primarily a vehicle for satire, and 2) it was written by a cleric who believed in his religion. In reading literary criticism, we are often presented with conclusions such as those of James Fu in his study, *Mythic and Comic Aspects of the Quest*:

Though Gulliver is not Swift, both of them are “smitten with pride” as they see their own image projected in other people. Mistaking his ego for god, Gulliver is unable to laugh at himself in the comic world of the Yahoos. Having too much disgust to love life, he is all masculine intellect like Swift, and some reconciling feminine element, found in most creative artists and mythic heroes, seems absent in him. Like Swift, the masculine figure in the Age of Reason, Gulliver at last loses his reason as the light of consciousness vanishes in the darkness of the unconscious.¹⁰

Yet Swift’s concern is not for his own fictional creation, Gulliver, but for the bitterly satiric end of Gulliver as an apotheosis of the pride he natters against. The reader is not without guidance to this conclusion, nor is he encouraged to end as Gulliver ends, hopelessly lost in admiration for a species without the fatal flaw of human feeling, the characteristic necessary for the advent of God’s grace in the Christian system. One must transcend reason religiously, and beyond this point, he is on his own as Swift affirms.

Swift’s use of the grotesque controls and informs these conclusions, for without the grotesque, his satire becomes sermonizing, a form which, as he had ample evidence to show, lacked reliable efficacy. The grotesque in the hands of Swift is a blunt but comic instrument, a weapon or tool of his satire, used to cajole or disgust us into right reason and its religious transcendence. As one modern writer who was also fond of the religious grotesque, Flannery O’Connor, said:

When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then

you have to make your vision apparent by shock — to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.¹¹

The Houyhnhnms are just as “large and startling” as the Yahoos. What they know cannot be taught, and that way lies madness for imperfect, for grotesque man.

The conclusion of *Gulliver's Travels* is not harmonious, is not an ending, and is not the reward of the quest. The quest is aborted, and the work itself remains intentionally grotesque in its non-resolution. For Swift, the grotesque was the most serious of vehicles, for with laughter he instructs, and with horror or disgust he enforces a point of view. It is curious that almost none of his contemporary commentators seemed to have misunderstood these facts.

In turning to the *Hsi-yu Chi*, we find many of the same traits, but cast often in a radically different light. The work is fundamentally a quest and a completed one, unlike Swift's. But it seems a quest at many levels rather than a simple frame of stages through which Tripitaka and his followers must pass to claim the sought-after scriptures. It seems most a quest of integration: the integration of the pilgrims themselves into a unit; an integration of the individuals into acceptable and useful roles in regard to society; and finally an integration into a religious spirit, into Buddhahood. Although the work employs satire, it does not appear to be a vehicle for it as is the *Travels*, for there is a story to tell, and the focus is elsewhere, in the integration.

In this light, the grotesque has a more subtle role than in Swift, for it is used for representative rather than motivating purposes. The path of the spirit and to the spirit lies in overcoming external obstacles, no matter how grotesque, fantastic, bizzare, or supernatural, and in ascribing to them a “not me” status. In fighting the tangible monsters, the protagonists and, by association, the readers experience separation through antagonism. This, of course, differs from the experience of Gulliver and of the readers of the *Travels* because the proposed change is not experiential, is not fought for; change is observed to be necessary, but the path, the way, is debatable; it is individualized as a direct result of satire and of the grotesque. As Anthony Yu has said of the *Journey* in the introduction to his translation:

... the meaning of the journey, as it is developed in the narrative, is not confined to the benefits of acquiring sacred scriptures for the people of T'ang China. On a more personal and profound level, the journey signifies for the pilgrims a new beginning, a freely given opportunity for self-rectification. It is in this way that the theme of the journey as a protracted process of merit-making complements and magnifies the theme of Buddha's mercy. (*JW*, I, 55)

The great power of the *Hsi-yu Chi* lies in the interpersonal struggle of the pilgrims because this conflict and resolution cycle mirrors ongoing integration and provides a microcosmic pattern of development reflective of the macrocosmic forces against which the group must defend. In their initial conflicts, one senses an organism much like an amoeba that moves forward by extending a pseudopod and dragging the remainder of its ill-defined mass along. Monkey acts from his own pride, and the others react with untrusting weight against him. C. T. Hsia in *The Classic Chinese Novel* has made note of this fact:

Monkey is also the antithesis of Buddhist emptiness in his passionate attachment to the cause of the journey and to his master. At times one gets the feeling that he is the only serious pilgrim, perpetually harassed by the mistrust and indolence of his fellow pilgrims and the indifference and malice of the deities above.¹²

Monkey becomes admirable and heroic to the reader because of his invincible person and will, but within the frame of the novel, his pride borders on Gulliver's or on Milton's Satan's. His character is what it must be, given his history and his attainments, and it is indeed a hard nature to overcome, for overcome it he must. As Professor Yu has said of all three of the supernatural pilgrims: "they are not just immortals with great magic power, they are also delinquent ones" (*JW*, I, 55). Monkey's particular strength is, as is so often the case, his particular flaw as well, and his delinquent status can only be shaped by the discipline of the fillet controlled by his antithesis, the totally inactive, uncourageous Tripitaka. In the often hidden, often violently open, conflict between these two characters, the process of change is born. Monkey learns some tolerance, learns to curb his haste to

act, while Tripitaka learns the bravery of trust, of reliance on the only one ultimately that could bring him through.

In the confrontation between the two characters, the grotesque plays a seminal role. The struggle itself, for example, is grotesque, for at Tripitaka's moments of greatest error and weakness, he exercises his power over Monkey in a most humbling fashion, and Monkey, through the assertion of his pride, becomes a sulking truant. The grotesque, as well, aids in the definition of role since Tripitaka's all too human failure in confronting it in the form of monster after monster erodes his own rather obstinate sanctity, and since against a monstrously grotesque array of opponents, Monkey can offer only the moral rectitude of the quest to prevent himself from becoming the chief among monsters. In that rightness there is harmony, not the disharmonious tension between the comic and horrific.

As C. T. Hsia has said, in *Chu Pa-chieh*, Wu has created a central character:

... who symbolizes the gross sensual life in the absence of religious striving and mythical ambition. He is doubly comic because as a reluctant pilgrim, he has no calling whatever for the monastic life and because with all his monstrous size and strength he entertains no ambition beyond a huge meal and a good sleep with a woman in his arms. He is the average sensual man writ large who could have become more serious if he had been provided with the proper incentives for worldly success and domestic contentment.¹³

Pa-chieh, this "average sensual man writ large" more than any other character, serves as a catalyst for the grotesque. Monkey has traits we would all like to have; Tripitaka has the comfort of unquestioning belief we would desire, but *Chu Pa-chieh* has all of the faults we know we have in even greater proportions than we ourselves have them. His appetites, his misrepresentations; his lack of clear commitment, and his imperfect spirit make him both victim and origin of many of the malign forces of the journey and allow him to cause as many problems as his occasional rashness can cure. His comic power lies directly in his representation of grotesque tension in his own spirit. He is both comic and horrific, a deflating figure for the pretensions of the monsters and the pilgrims alike. The unexamined dualism of this character is that of the reader "writ large," and the process of ameliorative integration of his nature into the group nature, into unity,

the most natural for an imperfect human. One feels he manages to slip into the presence of the Buddha on the pretense of being a spectator in a throng of worthies.

Conclusion

In summing up a comparative study of the works of Swift and the *Journey to the West* of Wu Ch'eng-en, we find that the grotesque plays an important role, has an important function, in both writers. The essentially comic thrust of the *Hsi-yu Chi*, moving from lack of integration and disharmony to successful resolution and new harmony, is quite different from the primarily satiric intent of *Gulliver's Travels* in its observation and critique of unresolved, unfought disharmony. Both writers employ the grotesque to counterpoint the disassociation of their works from the world as found, to emphasize and overstate the flaws of unexamined existence, but for Swift the flaws are heightened for motivation, while for Wu, monstrous flaws are distractions, impediments, to proper understanding and integration. The results, ultimately, of the two writers differ, as well, for Swift through his use of the grotesque leaves the reader sensing a need for action, for resolution of tension, while Wu through his use of the grotesque brings one to the understanding that the world is laughable.

Notes

1. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub, The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert David (London: Basil Blackwell, 1939), I, 109. Hereafter cited in text as *PW*.
2. Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, The Critical Idiom, No. 24 (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 3.
3. Carl Skrade, *God and the Grotesque* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 13.
4. Hu Shih, "Introduction to the American Edition," *Monkey*, trans. Arthur Waley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 5.
5. See John W. Scott, *Swift and the Grotesque: To Vex Rather Than Divert* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985).
6. Anthony C. Yu, trans., *The Journey to the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978-84), III, 178. Hereafter cited in text as *JW*.
7. Jonathan Swift, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," *Swift: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Davis (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 518.
8. Jonathan Swift, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. F. Elrington Ball (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910-14), III, 277.
9. Swift, *Correspondence*, III, 277.
10. James S. Fu, *Mythic and Comic Aspects of the Quest* (Singapore: Singapore

- University Press, 1977), p. 24.
11. Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 34.
 12. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 135.
 13. Hsia, p. 149.