Chapter 4

Refashioning the Problematic “Self”: The Representation of the Abject

To corroborate de Certeau’s idea of the traveling subject as a “multiple and iconoclastic passer-by,” we need to reiterate the last stage of Gulliver’s travel account. In *Heterologies*, de Certeau points out the three stages of a travel account. He uses Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals” as an example to discuss the position of the “savage I” in the process of encountering others. The first stage is marked by the defection of names and discourses which “they destroy one another as soon as they touch: a shattering of mirrors, the defection of images, one after the other” (71). Moreover, *Gulliver’s Travels* describes what the traveling subject has perceived and experienced in exotic lands. The departure and return not only imply the repetitiveness of voyages, but also generate certain “textual space” which “has the form of a meta-discourse” (73). The second stage is characterized by “from body to speech” which the cannibal appears and the savage society is recognized. To de Certeau, “the cannibalistic community is founded upon this ethic. It draws its strength from it since a heroic faithfulness to speech is precisely what produces the unity and continuity of the social body […] The ethic of speech is also an economy” (76). The third stage is shown by the return of the savage I and it is portrayed as “from speech to discourse.” Gulliver’s return culminates in his writing and it may elicit a possible relation between speech and discourse. And de Certeau has this to say about Montaigne’s essay:

Finally, the saying that induces writing and the ear that knows how to listen designate the same place, the other. The cannibal (who speaks) and La Boetie (who listens) are metaphors for each other. One is near, one is far, both are absent—both are other. […] The savage ethic of speech opens the way for a Western ethic of writing—a writing sustained by the
impossible Word at work within the text. If one cannot be a cannibal, there is still the option of lost-body writing. (79)

Since I have discussed Gulliver as a speaking subject who has already perceived the “savage body” of the natives, it is important to emphasize that Gulliver has entered the alien lands and linguistic systems, for Gulliver’s peculiar experiences and his communications with the others in exotic places motivated him to write his travel account. Nevertheless, the voyage-out has already preordained its return and has shown that Gulliver is always re-positioning and re-orienting himself with the idea of “home,” as discussed in the second chapter. The sense of belonging leaves its mark on the traveling subject until he encounters the strangers in the Houyhnhnm-land. At first, Gulliver seems to believe that he belongs to this newfound place because the strangers that he has encountered position the traveler in a process of identifying between the Yahoos and their masters. In Houyhnhnm-land, Gulliver encounters the Yahoos and their masters that he is forced to recognize himself with these two types of strangers. The presence of the Yahoos impresses Gulliver with their body which eventually leads to his transformation when he finally returns home. However, he loses his consciousness the moment he knows that he is deprived of the opportunity to stay at the island by the voting of the Houyhnhnms. As a faithful witness, Gulliver makes every effort to examine what he has seen through communicating with strangers and the various signifying practices may enable Gulliver to realize his limitation as a speaking subject. After returning to his country, he suffers from such a psychological disorientation⁴⁷ that he cannot adjust himself to the world of the Yahoo-like humans. By making use of de Certeau’s idea of three

⁴⁷ In his “Introduction” to Swift, Ernest Tuveson mentions that “what happens to Gulliver is a warning, and a psychological preparation for us, the readers. We, too, if we are to encounter human nature in its spiritual nakedness, must see clearly all its potentialities for evil, without the protections of our proud estimate of what it is to be ‘human’” (14).
possible stages of a travel account, I will discuss this appalling transformation in this chapter.

Gulliver produces a series of travel accounts concerning his experiences among the strangers.\footnote{Regrettably, Kristeva does not provide any textual evidence to support her theory of subject. However, it seems to me that her idea of “strangers to ourselves” goes beyond the reach of what James Clifford names as the “soft” critics and the “hard” critics of *Gulliver’s Travels*. This idea also helps reveal the importance of the relationship between Gulliver and his disturbing others. Moreover, the ideas of “strangers to ourselves” and “abjection” are also related to Freud’s idea of “uncanny.”} In his travels, Gulliver will encounter many strangers and the importance of their presence echoes Kristeva’s idea of cosmopolitanism. Here, Kristeva’s main concern is characterized by an ethics of cosmopolitanism. She says: “he [that strange Stranger] is a foreigner: he is from nowhere, from everywhere, citizen of the world, cosmopolitan. Do not send him back to his origins. If you are dying to ask the question, go put it to your own mother…” (Kristeva 1991, 30). This basic concept of the subject has already touched upon Kristeva’s theory of “strangers to ourselves,” a theory that emphasizes the pluralities of the subject and can be incorporated into travel theory. Thus, a combination of *Gulliver’s Travels* with Kristeva’s theory may offer a new approach to understanding this classic text. It is necessary both to examine Gulliver’s eccentric behavior in the last travel and to reconsider Gulliver’s subjectivity and its subsequent transformations. This chapter, therefore, will be divided into two parts: Gulliver’s encounter with the strangers in the Houyhnhnm-land and how much he has been transformed after returning to his country.

The reason why I focus on Gulliver’s last voyage\footnote{In the second chapter, I have discussed the representation of the subject and have associated this idea with Gulliver’s urination in Lilliput. Here, I will address the representation of the abject and equates this idea with Gulliver’s confrontation with the strangers in the Houyhnhnm-land. In a sense, my discussion offers a parallel analysis of the structure of *Gulliver’s Travels*.} in this chapter is to dwell
on his tremendous psychological transformations as represented by the changes of his subjectivity from a European Gulliver, to a Yahoo-like Gulliver, to a Houyhnhnm-like Gulliver, or to a possible combination of the Yahoo’s “bestiality” and the Houyhnhnm’s “rationality.” Here are some important questions to ask: Does Gulliver become a mixture of species, consciously or unconsciously, so that readers cannot distinguish which one is the traveler in the last voyage? Does Gulliver essentially turn into an irredeemably vindictive misanthropist after returning from the Houyhnhnm-land? If the Houyhnhnms represent the ideal society for Gulliver to emulate, does it mean that he has become a Houyhnhnm as well? Are the Yahoos essentially an abhorrent animal? If they are, what makes the Yahoos different from Gulliver? Indeed, it may stand to reason to claim that Gulliver’s subjectivity is no longer stable, but to what extent Gulliver has transformed is still vehemently debated among critics.

With regard to these questions, I think that Gulliver cannot be simply reduced to a one-dimensional European traveler in exotic places. Moreover, it is also too

---

50 In “The Final Comedy of Lemuel Gulliver,” John F. Ross argues that “Gulliver’s attitude, in its simplicity and finality, is a kind of misanthropic solution of the problem of evil. […] so far as I can see, Swift offers no answer of his own, no solution. But he does transcend the misanthropic solution. He could see that his own severest satire was the result of a partial and one-sided view, which was therefore properly a subject for mirth” (196).

51 In “The Meaning of Gulliver’s Last Voyage,” Irvin Ehrenpreis deals with the problem of Gulliver’s imitation of the Houyhnhnms. He states that “though he strives to imitate the Houyhnhnms, he never imagines he has become one. […] It is the vision of the life of reason that nourishes his apparent misanthropy: unlike most men, Gulliver at least tries to be a ‘true’ man; and both this attempt and the humility which it implies endow him with the ground upon which he condemns the pride of those who have less insight” (37).

52 In the previous chapter, I have mentioned Islam’s idea of “the sedentary traveler” to pose a possible question: Does Gulliver function as an “othering machine” so as to acquire a privileged position to speak and dictate the meaning? To identify Gulliver as a sedentary traveler does not mean that he is a one-dimensional traveler. However, such a reasoning may reiterate the importance of Gulliver’s body, because the strangers’ body is the first thing that the traveling subject will identify with and turn
 naïve to equate Gulliver with a colonizer and thereby to characterize him as representing a European voice. For example, through understanding the linguistic system in the School of Languages, the speaking subject learns how to decode their speech and encode the process of the signifying practice in his mother tongue. In addition, Gulliver eventually returns to his country, and he is psychologically displaced by what he has perceived in the Houyhnhnm-land.

There are polarized critical views on Gulliver’s final transformation, and the idea of rationality may provide one possible explanation. In “The Role of the Horses,” Conrad Suits argues:

Rationality is desirable, however, even though unattainable. By making the horses, a nonhuman animal, rational, Swift has produced a double insult, or double attack, upon mankind in its physical being and in its mental being and has, on the one hand, obliged humans to identify themselves with disgusting animals, and on the other hand, has precluded the possibility of humans identifying themselves with horses. (126)

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the idea of rationality from the perspective of the psychological symptom and have pointed out that rationality may be an effective way to limit the instinctual drive that Kristeva has addressed. The idea of rationality represented by the relations between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms is engaged, ridiculed, and threatened by the presence of the Yahoos. In this sense, Gulliver is both physically and psychologically under scrutiny. Identifying with either of them as a

away from. Their presence enables us to discuss psychical transformation when encountering the strangers. Moreover, the representation of Gulliver’s body is fundamentally challenged by the fourth voyage to the Houyhnhnm-land because the presence of the Yahoos not only constitutes an uncanny experience, but also produces a relation between Gulliver’s body and his subject. The presence of the Yahoos may undermine the unity and totality of Gulliver’s subjectivity; it thus brings Kristeva’s theory of subject to the fore to explain Gulliver’s transformations.
privileged discourse is impossible. As Clive Probyn describes in his “Swift and the Human Predicament,” the Yahoo is an “ape-like brute without speech or reason […] the antithesis of man as a rational animal. Gulliver’s human demoralization is complete […]” (66-67). Swift audaciously challenges the boundary of rationality and, to some extent, toys with the possibility of totality and unity that this rationality desires to obtain.

From the Houyhnhnms’ perspective, Gulliver has equipped himself with a pittance of rationality which distinguishes himself from the Yahoos. Here, a sensitive question needs to be considered: Of these three species, which one is more rational than others? With Suits and Probyn’s extrapolation, this question may turn into a possible interpretation: limited rationality suggests that the presence of Gulliver renders a different angle to examine the Houyhnhnms’ view on the Yahoos. To some degree, I agree with Boris Ford’s idea expressed in “The Limitations of the Houyhnhnms” which presents us with some provokingly crude descriptions of the behaviors of the Yahoos and thus assesses the essence of these abominable animals:

The Yahoo is a mirror in which human nature must see itself. […] The Yahoo is the image of man, but distorted: man with a difference. Each picture of the Yahoo reminds us of the odious resemblance, but if we try to escape from it [Yahoo] by insisting on the difference we come up against another sets of images, of human behavior, which show us what the difference really amounts to […]. (Ford 150)

The representation of the Yahoos focuses on the physical aspect, for their image functions as a mirror for Gulliver to reflect upon himself in a world of strangers. With this physical identification with the Yahoos, the traveler recognizes that there is an “odious resemblance” between them and, consequently, a sense of strangeness is aroused. In this sense, the encounter with the Houyhnhnms may offer a way to escape
from this situation. Nevertheless, by the same token, Ford also addresses some unsympathetic sides of the Houyhnhnms: “they feel no sorrow at the death of their relatives; they marry according to the wishes of parents and friends, knowing nothing of love and courtship […]” (152). He concludes that “the Houyhnhnms were an idea to be played with, offering scope for the indulgence of temperamental animus, but not to be taken too seriously” (153). Hence, there are three implications from Ford’s conclusion: first, the Houyhnhnms are only an idea, not an ideal to identify with; second, Gulliver should tell self-restraint from self-indulgence so that a pittance of rationality may prevent him from pursuing the instinctual drive represented by the Yahoos; and third—which Ford does not touch upon here—the importance of the encounter or contact between two or more subjects in outlandish places.

In other words, there are at least two types of strangers who, consciously and unconsciously, Gulliver encounters in the fourth voyage: the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. But what is the relation between Gulliver and these two types of strangers? Here, Gulliver’s physical resemblance to the Yahoos and his limited rationality may

---

53 In the “Introduction” to English Masterpieces, V, The Augustans, 2nd, Maynard Mack argues that “for we discover, if we look closely, that all through the fourth voyage Gulliver is represented as becoming more and more like a horse […] He is represented, in other words, as isolated himself from mankind, and it is only this isolation in its climactic form that we see in his treatment of his family and his residence in the stables at the close” (16).

54 What I mean by “consciously and unconsciously” is to engage Gulliver’s subjectivity in a broader sense: the presence of strangers may leave some visible and invisible traces upon the making of the traveler’s subjectivity. The visible part may be addressed by Gulliver’s conscious interaction with the strangers in exotic lands. For example, Gulliver abhors the existence of the Yahoos for “the ugly Monster” makes him realize he resembles them. The invisible part may be represented by Gulliver’s final return to his country where he unconsciously abominates the Yahoo-like humans whose presence indicates Gulliver’s limited rationality. Moreover, the scenario echoes what I have said in the second chapter: Gulliver’s subjectivity is a work in process.

55 The Houyhnhnms are the master of the Yahoos. However, at first Gulliver believes that there should be other species who rule over the Houyhnhnm-land. After Gulliver realizes that the Houyhnhnms reign over the kingdom, the traveler needs to reorient himself in this rigid hierarchy.
put him in an ambivalent situation. Furthermore, the confrontation between the essentially European Gulliver and “a perfect Yahoo,” an appellation used by the Houyhnhnms to describe the protagonist, culminates in the inadvertent exposure of Gulliver’s body. Gulliver depicts through his Master Houyhnhnm’s observation of his body:

My Master observed the whole Performance with great Signs of Curiosity and Admiration. He took up all my Clothes in his Pastern, one Piece after another, and examined them diligently; he then stroked my Body very gently, and looked round me several times; which he said, it was plain I must be a perfect *Yahoo*; but that I differed very much from the rest of my Species, in the Whiteness, and Smoothness of my Skin, my want of Hair in several Parts of my Body [...]. (229)

The above passage is a shift from Gulliver’s perspective to that of the Houyhnhnm’s and the position of the viewer is replaced by that of the Houyhnhnm who examines Gulliver’s body sedulously. The gaze of the stranger brings back Foucault’s idea of power: Gulliver is observed and examined by the stranger. Under this typical circumstance, Gulliver is no longer a traveler but a stranger. The traveling subject experiences the loss of sense of belonging that the signifying practice is represented by the moment of encounter. This signifying practice includes the difference between Gulliver and strangers in their body and language. Through seeing and communicating with each other, Gulliver’s sense of belonging is challenged. Kristeva describes “[t]he brutes’ encounter” as “[n]ot belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance” (7). The secret of Gulliver’s physical body is eventually revealed and decoded by an unexpected encounter. Moreover, this encounter foreshadows Gulliver’s later self-hatred, solitude, and indifference after he returns to his home country.
In “Scientific Discourse,” Frederik Smith argues that “Gulliver’s striptease before his Houyhnhnm master is a good illustration of such generic doubleness. The observer in these travels always verges on becoming the observed [...]” (Smith 157). Nevertheless, the “striptease” is a tentative gesture for Gulliver and his master to re-orient their recognition of “Yahooness,” so to speak. In addition, this passage is worth noting, for the distinction between a true Yahoo and “a perfect Yahoo” is merely a piece of clothing. The clothes may prevent Gulliver from exposing his body to the Houyhnhnms. However, a piece of rags also does not preclude the possibilities of physical differences between Gulliver and the Yahoos. The physical representation of Gulliver’s body is intended to be concealed by the clothes. What is left unsaid cannot be achieved by communicating with Gulliver but by observing and uncovering his body. This unspeakable “truth” may partly be attributable to Gulliver as a traveling subject, but it is of critical importance for readers to recognize Gulliver’s “Yahooness” and equate this idea with “a perfect Yahoo.” In A Reading of Gulliver’s Travels, Kathleen Swaim attempts to define “a perfect Yahoo” as follows:

An ambivalent epithet meaning either achieving the furthest extreme of Yahooness, that is, evil, or escaping furthest from Yahooness, that is into good. The fictional voyage is itself an operational definition of man’s moral dilemma. [...] The purpose of the definitions is to make mutually clear—and this includes the reader along with Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms—an unfamiliar concept by means of an explanation in comprehensible, nearly equivalent, but strangely and variously enlightening terms. (163)

Swaim suggests that “a perfect Yahoo” is an enlightening term for readers to understand not only the ironic aspect of Gulliver’s voyages, but also the transformations that he assumes after returning to his country. Therefore, a dilemma is
presented in the form and the content of this travel narrative, respectively. *Gulliver’s Travels* is regarded as a fictional text, but what Gulliver has encountered and experienced may provide a familiar situation for the readers. Moreover, Gulliver’s position as a European subject is thereby undermined by what he has encountered in exotic places. For example, since Gulliver’s body is scrutinized by his Houyhnhnm master, he underscores two distinctive differences between a true Yahoo and “a perfect Yahoo” by way of his observation: whiteness and smoothness. By recognizing that Gulliver’s skin takes on different features from that of the Yahoos’, the Houyhnhnm master may exclude the possibility that Gulliver is a true Yahoo.56

Then, the spotlight shifts to the encounter between the European Gulliver and a true Yahoo. First, the encounter or contact assures that though Gulliver is psychologically influenced by his perception of the Yahoos in the Houyhnhnm-land, the traveler essentially assumes the position of an other, privileged or not privileged, which reinforces the transformation of his final return. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva describes an encounter as follows:

> A crossroad of two othernesses, it welcomes the foreigner without tying him down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him. A mutual recognition, the meeting owes its success to its temporary nature, and it would be torn by conflicts if it were to be extended. The foreign believer is incorrigibly curious, eager for meetings: he is nourished by them, makes his way through them, forever unsatisfied, forever the party-goer, too. Always going toward others, always going farther. […]

He does not long for meetings, they draw him in. He experiences them as

---

56 It is important to note that during the “striptease” the Houyhnhnm master still does not believe that Gulliver is not a Yahoo. It is through Gulliver’s limited rationality represented by Gulliver’s learning of local language and constant communications with the Houyhnhnms that the Houyhnhnm master reconsiders his perception.
in a fit of dizziness when, distraught, he no longer knows whom he has seen nor who he is. (11)

Kristeva posits meeting against wandering and argues that “meeting balances wandering” (11). The temporary nature of meeting may indicate that Gulliver’s position as an other is primarily epitomized by the fact that he is a stranger and the position he has assumed is not stable. Moreover, the sense of strangeness has already been reinforced by Gulliver’s first impression of the Yahoos: “their Shape was very singular and deformed, which a little discomposed me” (215). Gulliver goes further to point out that “upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy” (215). For the possible implication of the Yahoos’ filthiness, Norman O. Brown argues in “The Excremental Vision”:

The Yahoos’ filthiness is manifested primarily in excremental aggression: psychoanalytical theory stresses the interconnection between anal organization and human aggression to the point of labeling this phase of infantile sexuality the anal-sadistic phase. Defiance, mastery, will to power are attributes of human reason first developed in the symbolic manipulation of excrement and perpetuated in the symbolic manipulation of symbolic substitutes for excrement. (192)

What Brown concerns is the connection between anal eroticism and human aggression. The excremental vision of the Yahoos helps lay emphasis on the relation between the animal body and Gulliver’s. The excremental aggression is substituted by the function of human rationality, though Gulliver still describes the Yahoos as “ugly Monster” and “cursed Brood” (216). At this moment, Gulliver may not realize that his very nature resembles the contemptible animal he has perceived. At the same time, readers need to know from this crisis that Gulliver is forced to identify himself with
the Houyhnhnms because as Gulliver has trouble eschewing from these filthy creatures, the Houyhnhnms come to his rescue and drive away those strange animals.

Thus, the presence of the Houyhnhnms temporarily provides Gulliver with a shelter from the aggression of the Yahoos. But when does the traveling subject become aware of the fact that he himself is “a perfect Yahoo” in essence? Two indicators come to mind: clothes and languages. The function of the clothes is not only to cover the body, but also to bring in the idea of art and nature that Joseph Horrell describes in “What Gulliver Knew”:

This encounter between civilized man and natural horse is described within the general terms of Swift’s favorite “clothes philosophy” […] The little allegory of Art and Nature plays upon the story as it unfolds in the rest of the book: whether civilized man, who is physically inferior to the horse, or indeed, as the Houyhnhnm Master points out, to the Yahoo, will use the art which his rationality affords him to perfect himself, harmonizing Art with Nature, or will use this art, by accentuating the propensity to vice of a fallen creature […]. (498)

The problem between art and nature has indicated a contradictory aspect of Gulliver’s unmasking. That is to say, why does nature teach us to hide what nature has given? The significance of the exposure lies in the physical descriptions of Gulliver’s body. And his unintentional exposure which I have just discussed may also offer a chance to prove that the traveler boasts a speck of rationality. About the exposure, Swaim has more to say:

The Houyhnhnms explore the details of his person making comparisons with Yahoos as to color, texture, amount of hair, usefulness and decorativeness of bodily parts, and so forth. […] When judged only physically in the preliminary identification, Gulliver knows himself to be
essentially Yahoo, beneath his deceptive, protective clothes. When judged physically as to usefulness, Gulliver is found and finds himself to be less than Yahoo. (160)

On the one hand, the “usefulness” Swaim mentions may address the difference between Gulliver and the Yahoos. Through the process of identifying himself in a world of strangers, Gulliver discovers his limited rationality which represents the mental and physical frailty of human species. On the other hand, the “usefulness” may represent the social position of the Yahoos, for they not only are subordinate to the Houyhnhnms, but also are deprived of rationality. But the physical link between Gulliver and the Yahoos may induce the traveler to stay in the Houyhnhnm-land because his return means that both physical and psychological confrontations are bound to occur. Thus, the problem becomes more intricate if the traveler stays with the Houyhnhnms. But what makes this happen? In other words, the “crisis in subjectivity” is changed into the “crisis of return,” for Gulliver may be enticed by a modicum of reason and will not go back home. This directly goes back to my main argument in the second chapter: *Gulliver’s Travels* shows that the basic structure of travel narratives requires a return—a return with differences. This not only echoes Abbeele’s idea of “the voyage always takes us somewhere” (xxx), but also accentuates the circle-like image that essentially a series of voyages have already posited a return—a return of the traveling subject to his mother country. Moreover, de Certeau’s idea of a travel account suggests a possible position of the speaking subject: the return has transformed the speaking subject into a narrator in the discourse.

The European Gulliver not only returns from the Houyhnhnm-land, but also transforms into another Gulliver, a traveling subject whose conscious and unconscious have been uncovered by the strangers he encounters. The “crisis of return” also brings to light what Abbeele postulates:
Yet if there is such a great cultural investment in the voyage, that locus of investment is nonetheless one whose possibility of appropriation also implies that threat of an expropriation. The voyage endangers as much as it is supposed to assure these cultural values: something can always go wrong. The “place” of the voyage cannot be a stable one. (xv)

In the Houyhnhnm-land, Gulliver is unaware that he is not only a mixture of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos, but also something else that cannot be identified. In other words, what perplexes readers is that Gulliver can learn languages and reason things as the Houyhnhnms do. However, the physical link to the Yahoos necessitates a process of identification between a true Yahoo and “a perfect Yahoo.” Knowing that he may be “a real Yahoo in every Limb and Feature,” Gulliver sets out to imitate every move of the Houyhnhnms. The traveling subject highly reveres the virtues of the Houyhnhnms and would like to “cultivate Reason, and to be wholly governed by it” (259). The obfuscation of telling Gulliver from a real Yahoo seems to generate an ambiguous space which endangers the value system in his homeland. More importantly, behind this ambiguity, a power relation is produced. The observation from the Houyhnhnms may posit a position of cultural difference, which will support what I suggest by “a power relation is produced”:

He [a Houyhnhnm] added, how I [Gulliver] had endeavoured to persuade him, that in my own and other Countries the Yahoos acted as the governing, rational Animal, and held the Houyhnhnms in Servitude: That, he observed in me all the Qualities of a Yahoo, only a little more civilized by some Tincture of Reason; which however was in a Degree as far inferior to the Houyhnhnm Race, as the Yahoos of their Country were to me […]. (264-65)

The previous passage may support Abbeele’s following statement: “the voyage
endangers as much as it is supposed to assure these cultural values: something can always go wrong” (xv). The cultural value is represented by a power relation that one subject is subjugated by the other. This cultural value of Gulliver’s home country is assured by his procurement of “a little more civilized by some Tincture of Reason” (264). From this point of view, I will try to prove that Gulliver is in no way a misanthropist. After returning to his country, Gulliver’s transformation is explicitly represented by his attitude toward his family. However, the way he acts as a traveling subject in his homeland may also articulate what I am eager to discuss in this chapter: *Gulliver’s Travels* is about relationship or self-relationship, namely, the relationship between Gulliver’s self and his refashioned self.

Considering the relationship between Gulliver’s self and his refashioning self, readers should first take note of his banishment from the Houyhnhnm-land. It is after a vehement debate that Gulliver loses his opportunity to stay with his Houyhnhnm master. Although his master has come up with a piece of testimony of proving that Gulliver is capable of limited rationality at the General Assembly of the Houyhnhnms, other Houyhnhnms decide that he should leave their country immediately. Therefore, on the one hand, Gulliver is forced to leave this island because he is treated in the same way as the Yahoos. Moreover, the presence of the Yahoos is represented by the hidden part of his subjectivity.57 On the other hand, the traveling subject recognizes

---

57 In *Gulliver’s Travels*, the unknown part of Gulliver’s subjectivity is examined by his encounters with the radical others in exotic lands, and one of the conspicuous examples is represented by Gulliver’s last encounter with the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver describes the way he leaves his Houyhnhnm master and this specific passage also renders an effective way to investigate the emerging transformation of Gulliver’s subjectivity. The traveling subject thus describes this typical scene: “I took a second Leave of my Master: But as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his Hoof, he did me the Honour to raise it gently to my Mouth. I am not ignorant how much I have been censured for mentioning this last Particular. […] But, if these Censurers were better acquainted with the noble and courteous Disposition of the Houyhnhnms, they would soon change their Opinion” (274). I would like to suggest that this passage not only indicates the relation between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms, but also reveals the hidden part of Gulliver’s subjectivity.
that he does not belong to this place because of the psychological symptoms that he has accumulated by encountering the Yahoos or linguistic inconvenience that he may face by encountering the strangers. 58 These psychological symptoms may reassure that Gulliver is an exile in nature: he is physically and psychologically in exile, not because he cannot accept the fact that he is a true Yahoo, but because he eventually recognizes the hidden part of his subjectivity. Moreover, the situation is neither as simple as a misanthropist nor a self-hater can represent. In Reading Kristeva, Kelly Oliver extrapolates Kristeva’s theory of the Unconscious, which may offer a way to examine Gulliver’s psychological symptoms and his split subjectivity:

Kristeva suggests that abjection operates outside of the dialectic of negativity that is central to the theory of the Unconscious upon which Freud’s analysis of both neurosis and psychosis is based. She explains that abjection, specifically phobia, is based on expulsion rather than denial. […] Kristeva argues that the theory of the Unconscious that informs this analysis is based on the hypothesis that the contents of the Unconscious are repressed and, although they do not have access to consciousness, they affect the subject’s speech, body, or both. (58)

Here, my main concern is to engage Gulliver’s subjectivity with the presence of strangers and emphasize the process of abjection. It is through encountering the disturbing others that Gulliver may recognize what are unnamable and undesirable in his subject. Gulliver’s expulsion underscores the position of “a perfect Yahoo” that he refuses to accept and this refusal further leads to a specific phobia which splits his subjectivity. Moreover, the final expulsion of the traveling subject raises the question

58 One of the linguistic inconveniences is that the Houyhnhnms has no letters to express their ideas, for “the Houyhnhnms have no Word in their language to express any thing that is evil, except what they borrow from the Deformities or ill Qualities of the Yahoos” (267).
of exile. The possible interpretation of exile not only problematizes the position of the traveling subject, but also examines what Gulliver has experienced in the Houyhnhnm-land.

In “Reflections on Exile,” Said describes the state of an “exile” as a person who “lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” (362). For Said, an exile stays away from the real home and thus acquires a possible detachment from its cultural value. However, he concedes that “a state of exile free from its triumphant ideology—designed to reassemble an exile’s broken history into a new whole—is virtually unbearable, and virtually impossible in today’s world” (360). Said’s explication of the exile may help us understand why Gulliver is desperate to stay in the Houyhnhnm-land. And it is in this mood that Gulliver is torn between two possible ideologies while refashioning his subjectivity in a world of strangers.

Said uses “triumphant” ideology to pinpoint the privileged position of home. And exile is an effective way to assess the privileged position, for it may produce a critical distance to examine that cultural value. Thus, John Lechte defines “exile” in a more optimistic way: it means “to open up new possibilities, to be able to confront

59 Said distinguishes “exiles” from refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. “Refugees” is a political term “suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance […]” “Expatriates” are people who “voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons…but they do not suffer under its [exiles] rigid proscriptions.” And “émigré,” situated in an ambiguous status, is “anyone who emigrates to a new country […] [they] may in a sense live in exile, but they have not been banished” (Said 1990, 362).

60 In Gulliver’s Travels, the fourth voyage is the most conspicuous example to indicate the tension between the traveling subject and the strangers. Their encounter may undermine or reassure the fundamental cultural values behind the traveler. For example, the specific encounter between the European Gulliver and a perfect Yahoo is engaged through Kristeva’s idea of abject. The former cultural value of the European Gulliver explains why Gulliver abominates the Yahoos; the latter representation of a perfect Yahoo implies a dynamic transformation that Gulliver has undergone after returning to his homeland. Therefore, “a perfect Yahoo” is an ambiguous term to describe Gulliver’s subject-in-progress.
new challenges; but most of all, it means coming to terms with ‘differences’ and the ‘other’—not destroying them, either by violence or indifference” (80). What Lechte addresses focuses on the moment before or after encountering others. And through the experiences of organs, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching, an exile may either maintain or ruin the dynamic of relationships between two subjects. The contact between Gulliver’s body and the Yahoos’ re-addresses the problem of subjectivity. To recognize the difference between their bodies and identify with each of them may highlight the problem of exclusiveness that Gulliver does not accept that he is essentially a Yahoo. From this perspective, the “exile” may deal with a particular problem of “being excluded” and the condition of foreignness. In this case, Kristeva argues that things are not as simple as they appear:

For one must take into consideration the domination/exclusion fantasy characteristic of everyone: just because one is a foreigner, and the faith that abated at the source is suddenly rekindled at the journey’s end in order to make up from whole cloth an identity the more exclusive as it has once been lost. […] As enclave of the other within the other, otherness becomes crystallized as pure ostracism: the foreigner excludes before being excluded, even more than he is being excluded. […] (24)

With respect to Gulliver’s “being excluded,” there is a possible way to look into “the domination/exclusion fantasy”: the European Gulliver represents a privileged position to exclude others in the four voyages of *Gulliver’s Travels*, while the Yahoos in the Houyhnhnm-land are dominated by their masters. These relations are undermined by the image and representation of a perfect Yahoo which, literally and metaphorically, serves to dominate/exclude the idea of Yahooeness. Therefore, the presence of the other produces a dynamic signifying practice within and between the subjects and the psychological symptoms represented by Gulliver’s encounters with
the Yahoos originally stems from this practice.

Therefore, drawing inspiration from Kristeva’s theory of “strangers to ourselves,” I focus on the physical link between the traveling subject and the Yahoos because the representation of the Yahoos’ body may call Gulliver’s subject into question. However, his identification with the Houyhnhnms is reinforced by the presence of European Gulliver, who holds a set of cultural specificities to observe and communicate with the inhabitants in alien lands. Although the idea of the European Gulliver allows the traveler to escape from the Yahoos, this process is eventually challenged by the recognition of Gulliver’s limited rationality. In other words, as Kristeva argues in *Powers of Horror*, given the fact that Gulliver is a traveling subject, the act of identifying with others offers him a chance to encounter “a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside”:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire […] But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (1)

The threat that Gulliver encounters is something that both attracts and repels. Moreover, the experience of abjection is to identify with the border, or more precisely, what breaks the border. A limited rationality may serve to connect the Houyhnhnms and European Gulliver, whereas the representation of body between the Yahoos and “a perfect Yahoo” offers a dynamic drive to break the boundary. In the *Interview*,
Kristeva suggests a socially prescribed subjectivity resulted from a possible relation between the child and his mother:

[…] it is an extremely strong feeling that is at once somatic and symbolic, which is above all a revolt against an external menace from which one wants to distance himself, but of which one has the impression that it may menace us from the inside. The relation to abjection is finally rooted in the combat that every human being carries on with the mother. For in order to become autonomous, it is necessary that one cut the instinctual dyad of the mother and the child and that one become something other. (118)

The “instinctual dyad” is what the child tries to separate. However, to facilitate the process of separation, the mother is made abject. Thus, the abject replaces the other whose position is occupied by the mother or the maternal body, though the child cannot tell if the abject is itself or its other. From the perspective of Gulliver’s subjectivity, abjection is rendered as a struggle to separate himself from the maternal body, which is represented by the act of Gulliver’s traveling. It is also regarded as a threat to the unity of the Houyhnhnms’ society. Moreover, Kristeva’s idea of the “Symbolic order” can be used to explain that Gulliver’s abject threat is prohibited by the Houyhnhnms’ society.61

To prove what I have said, one of the most conspicuous examples is Gulliver’s earlier observation in the Houyhnhnm-land: “every Animal in this Country naturally

61 I have associated Gulliver’s act of urinating with Kristeva’s idea of the “Symbolic order” in the second chapter. Here, I would like to elucidate more on the relation between society and the individual subjectivity. The Symbolic order maintains its borders within the context of society. That is why Oliver has this to say about the function of society: “the abject threat comes from what has been prohibited by the Symbolic order, what has been prohibited so that the Symbolic order can be. The prohibition that founds, and yet undermines, society is the prohibition against maternal body […]” (Oliver, 56).
to abhor the Yahoos, whom the Weaker avoided, and the Stronger drove from them” (235). What Gulliver has not observed at that time is a socially prescribed law to keep the Yahoos in the corner, even in the expression of their language. However, what is jettisoned still threatens the Symbolic order and the boundaries where the subject is constructed. Hence, Gulliver’s attempt to identify with the Houyhnhnms is destined to fail, because the process of abjection is positioned in an ambiguous condition which is neither subject nor object and cannot be fully achieved, penetrated, and repudiated.

The vigorous part of travel narrative is to regard the traveling subject as an abject whose presence not only requires readers’ close reading, but also a psychoanalytic interpretation. The process of abjection has caused the totality or unity of subjectivity to become flimsy and a source of anxiety, though it has its potentially creative side. Gulliver arguably not only suffers from this unspecified anxiety, but also finds many possible ways to escape from this psychological symptom, such as imitating the Houyhnhnms and wearing clothes to avoid from being identified with the Yahoos. In “Approaching Abjection,” Kristeva makes a clear statement on the abjection of the self:

The abjection of the self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (*Strangers to Ourselves*, 5)

Since Gulliver returns to his home country, he is afraid to see any “inferior creatures” because their look and smell threaten the totality of Gulliver’s subjectivity and remind Gulliver of the Yahoos and of his banishment from the Houyhnhnms-land. It is the recognition of the subtle difference between the European Gulliver and a perfect
Yahoo which results in the tremendous transformation of the traveler. Moreover, it is the acting-out such as seeing, urinating, speaking, and imitating that complicate Gulliver’s recognition.\textsuperscript{62} This specific “want” that Kristeva addresses is represented by Gulliver’s abject self. But how does it work? It is through the eyes of a traveling subject who sees the impropriety and uncleanness of the Yahoos. Thus, the impurity of the Yahoos enacted by their body has elucidated that Gulliver’s refashioning subjectivity involves the idea of the body.

The impurity of the Yahoos may offer another dimension to prove the potential instability in the land of the Houyhnhnm. In \textit{Purity and Defilement in Gulliver’s Travels}, Charles Hinnant discusses about the signification of purity and its characteristics as follows:

Purity is the primary norm around which the opposition between Houyhnhnm and Yahoo is organized. […] But it would be wrong for us to think of this opposition as purely static. […] Representing a strand of depravity within nature, the Yahoos stand for what is imperfectly repressed and at least offers the possibility of devouring Houyhnhnm culture from inside. (87)

The sense of impropriety and uncleanness may be caused by the encounter or contact between two subjects. And I suggest that the impropriety and uncleanness not only result from Gulliver’s perception of the Yahoos, but also from what he sees after returning to his motherland. Nevertheless, the contact between the Yahoos and

\textsuperscript{62} Throughout \textit{Gulliver’s Travels}, the acting-out serves as a shortcut to examine Gulliver’s subjectivity and what he represents in exotic lands, because from these acting-outs readers may recognize his transformation. The dynamic part of acting-out is that the traveling subject, physically and psychologically, encounters the disturbing otherness. Therefore, the urination in the first voyage, the speech in the third voyage, and the imitation in the last voyage are considered Gulliver’s acting-out, which can be equated with Kristeva’s theory of the subject. And it provides a heterogeneous interpretation of discussing this travel account.
Gulliver, made possible by the Houyhnhnm master, touches upon the idea that the traveler has already been rejected in the Houyhnhnm-land.

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas offers her discussion of “uncleanness” from an anthropological perspective:

To conclude, if uncleanness matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. To recognize this is the first step towards insight into pollution. It involves us in no clear-cut distinction between sacred and secular. The same principle applies throughout. Furthermore, it involves no special distinction between primitives and moderns: we are all subject to the same rules. (41)

Douglas implies that the relation between sacred and secular is so ambiguous that it is impossible to give a clear definition. Moreover, the idea of primitives and moderns can be used to support the point I made in previous chapters: what Gulliver has perceived in exotic lands has already positioned himself in a privileged location, for the traveling subject may pre-select what he would like to represent. Therefore, Douglas further argues that:

At any time we may have to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions. Uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring and distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions. By and large anything we take note of is pre-selected and organised in the very act of perceiving. […]. (37-38)

The presence of the Yahoos does not assume a “consistent experience” that Gulliver had before. Their body presents an unfamiliar semblance to his own body. The act to
“ignore and distort” what he has perceived is viewed as a psychological symptom that is epitomized by Gulliver’s abject self. There are several ways to examine Gulliver’s possible anomalies in his homeland. Taking into consideration the fact that Gulliver is both a traveler and a stranger, we may say that the sense of strangeness may be conjured up by what he perceives in his country.

In my opinion, Gulliver’s return may suggest that he is on the border of becoming an abject. He sometimes crosses to the other side because his final gesture is so unequivocal that the abject is still signifying because of the presence of the Yahoo-like animal in his homeland. The signification of strangeness or “foreign-ness” is the last signal that Gulliver delivers. But what is the possible explanation of this foreign-ness? Lechte’s idea is of “foreign-ness” is of some help here: “foreign-ness is in us: we are strangers to ourselves—étrangers a nous-memes. Foreign-ness is our unconscious other caused by a failure of repression” (80-81). Lechte’s attention to the unconscious part of this “foreign-ness” helps us connect the semiotic with the symbolic so as to deal with the relationships between Gulliver and others. The return of the other is typified by the return of the repressed.63 It is in this spirit that Gulliver’s psychological symptom is inevitably and despairingly acting out. One of the most conspicuous examples of acting out is Gulliver’s pondering over what he has perceived in his mother country and seeing his body in a lake:

> When I thought of my Family, my Friends, my Countrymen, or human Race in general, I considered them as they really were, *Yahoos* in Shape

---

63 In “The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud propounds the idea of the homely (“Heimliche”) and its opposite unhomely (“Unheimliche”) to discuss what he has termed “uncanny.” He says, “this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (Freud 2003, 25). Unlike the Freudian interpretation, Kristeva argues that “imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (Kristeva 1982, 4).
and Disposition, perhaps a little more civilized [...] When I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my Face in Horror and detestation of my self; and could be better endure the Sight of a common Yahoo, than of my own Person. By conversing with the Houyhnhnms, and looking upon them with Delight, I fell to imitate their Gait and Gesture, which is now grown into a Habit [...]. (270-71)

In this passage, Gulliver’s abject self is deeply internalized by what he has encountered and experienced in the Houyhnhnm-land. The abject self functions through and is represented by the reflection of Gulliver’s image on the water which forces the traveling subject to perceive what he really looks like. The power of horror is symbolized by Gulliver’s recognition that he is neither a perfect Yahoo nor a true Yahoo, but an abject he has repelled. The exorbitant others existing inside and outside of Gulliver’s body not only threatens the totality of his European identity, but also causes a narcissistic crisis. It is this crisis that Gulliver defends against the separation from and identification with the homeland.64 It is important to point out Freud’s idea of the “fort-da” game, because the repetitiveness of Gulliver’s voyages indicates the fact that the traveler may set up an invisible boundary between his homeland and the foreign lands. In this sense, the boundary can be viewed as a narcissistic structure.65

64 In Reading Kristeva, Oliver describes Freud’s possible impact on Kristeva and what Kristeva has called the “narcissistic structure.” This structure “provides a new way to conceive of the oedipal situation as well as a new way to use it in the analytic situation. [...] This structure, which enables the child to negotiate between the maternal body and the Symbolic order, is the ‘narcissistic structure. [...]’” (70-1). In Gulliver’s Travels, the voyages to Brobdingnag, Grubbdubdrib, and the Houyhnhnm-land are three remarkable examples to highlight the abiding influence of homeland. In addition, the reason why I choose the Houyhnhnm-land as the focal point of my discussion is because the return of the traveling subject marks a significant transformation of his subjectivity.

65 Here, a possible dialectic relation is used to describe this “narcissistic structure.” In the second chapter, I have discussed Freud’s idea of the “fort-da” game and how it is justifiable to explain
This structure prefigures any departure and returning, and to position Gulliver’s body in a world of strangers is simply to problematize this structure.

To a certain extent, Holly has arrived at the same conclusion by evincing that “whenever he [Gulliver] goes and whatever he sees, his experiences are communicated as a ratio of what is already familiar to him.” And to him, “as a perpetual foreigner, even on his return home, Gulliver is always addressed in an alien jabber” (149-51). A pointed example of Gulliver’s “jabber” occurs in the last few lines of *Gulliver’s Travels*:

> But the *Houyhnhnms*, who live under the Government of Reason, are no more proud of the good Qualities they possess, than I should be for not wanting a Leg or an Arm, which no Man in his Wits would boast of, although he must be miserable without them. I dwell the longer upon this Subject from the Desire I have to make the Society of an *English Yahoo* by any Means not insupportable; and therefore I here intreat those who have any Tincture of this absurd Vice, that they will not presume to come in my Sight. (288)

Although Gulliver has sarcastically elucidated that he may be intolerant of the presence of the “English Yahoo,” his gesture of rejection brings to light the idea of abject that Gulliver may recognize himself as a foreigner in a world of strangers. Thus, the representation of the abject self is not completed, and the disturbing otherness sometimes may bring about a violent encounter. Furthermore, this violent encounter

Gulliver’s constant movements between his homeland and exotic places. Kristeva also argues that the rupture between the semiotic and the symbolic is to produce a space between Gulliver’s conscious and his unconscious. Moreover, in the third chapter, this dialectic may be conceptualized by the signifying practices between the subjects in the “School of Languages” in Laputa. In this chapter, the “narcissistic structure” is regarded as a boundary between European Gulliver and his abject self. However, the crisis suggests that Gulliver has gone too far to both separate from and identify with the maternal body.
may include a subtle way to describe the idea of the “narcissistic structure.” Although Gulliver still cannot tolerate the obtrusive smell of a Yahoo and keeps his nose “well stopt with Rue, Lavender, or Tobacco Leaves” (288), these specific odors from plants or spices only strengthen the idea of the “narcissistic structure.”

In this chapter, I discuss Gulliver’s problematic self and his final transformation. The presence of the Yahoos in the Houyhnhnm-land challenges and reexamines Gulliver’s subjectivity. Moreover, I adopt Kristeva’s idea of abject to further investigate what and how Gulliver is transformed after returning to his homeland. The crucial point to understand Gulliver’s final transformation lies in that Gulliver resembles the Yahoos, but he acquires a limited rationality. It is this limited rationality that Gulliver may identify himself as a stranger in his homeland. It is more of a psychological experience than a physical identification, because Gulliver’s acting-outs may serve an effective way to treat his psychological symptom. This symptom is represented by a sense of strangeness when Gulliver returns to his country. From the perspective of “strangers within ourselves,” there is no particular species that Gulliver will identify with, for he is a stranger to himself. To keep an “English Yahoo” at a safe remove is no claim for Gulliver’s superiority, but it may be interpreted as Swift’s attempt not only to push for the farthest limits of irony, but also to represent Gulliver’s abject self in a world of strangers. Hence, Gulliver is a possibility rather than an identity, a process rather than a product, and a becoming rather than a stasis.