

Eighteenth-Century Transplantations

New Literary Lives, Forms and Contexts

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7 Gulliver Travels to Krakow

On Cultural Cannibalism and Transplanting Texts Across Time and Space

Anna Paluchowska-Messing

One of the most recent transplantations of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to the Polish cultural landscape is the theatre production *Podróże Guliwera. Opowieść O Świecie* (Gulliver's travels. A story of the world), written by Joanna Bednarek and Paweł Miśkiewicz and directed by Miśkiewicz, which premiered at the Krakow National 'Stary' Theatre in 2019. The play uses much of the text of *Gulliver's Travels* almost *verbatim*,¹ to the effect of both paying tribute to Swift's text and challenging its purport, as this chapter will show. The almost bare stage that greets the audience of this Stary Theatre production creates an austere backdrop for its all-female cast. The actors wear costumes suggestive of eighteenth-century sailor outfits, while the intervals between the voyages are marked by projections on a back screen which show the same actors as dark-skinned women, scantily dressed and swaying in a trance-like dance among lush exotic plant life. The play combines excerpts from Swift's text with passages from both ancient and recent philosophers, historians, anthropologists and journalists. The production, therefore, offers rich material for discussions of intercultural, intergeneric and intertemporal adaptations. Miśkiewicz and Bednarek's play stands out among other twentieth- and twenty-first-century Polish stage adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* in that it clearly aims at adult spectators and, thus, it could be said, returns Swift's work to the type of audience initially conceived for it. This shift naturally prompts reflections on the status of a text that was first introduced into a new cultural environment three centuries ago and on its long-term functioning within this landscape.

Gulliver's Travels found its first Polish literary appropriation in Ignacy Krasicki's novel *Mikołaja Doświadczynskiego Przypadki* (*The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*²), published in 1776, before Swift's work was translated into Polish in 1784 from a popular French adaptation.³ Krasicki returned to Gulliver's story in his later texts,⁴ and Gulliver's voyages soon inspired further novels and political satires of the Polish Enlightenment.⁵ Interest in the work subsequently revived in the second half of the nineteenth century in a very different form. While, as Romana Kozicka points

out, late eighteenth-century writers were fascinated primarily by the philosophical concerns explored in *Gulliver's Travels*, later abridged translations (usually of just the first two voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag) stripped Swift's text of most of its intellectually challenging content and sanitized it for younger audiences. *Gulliver's Travels* became reduced to a story of fantastic adventures with some didactic elements inserted for the benefit of young boys in particular.⁶ Although the first recorded twentieth-century play that used some of the motifs in Swift's work, *Dwie Przygody Lemuela Gullivera* (1961) (Two adventures of Lemuel Gulliver) by Jerzy Broszkiewicz, was addressed to the adult spectator,⁷ all others that followed had a young audience primarily in mind.⁸ Through this process of transplantation across time and space, *Gulliver's Travels* has, then, acquired very deep roots in the Polish children's literary canon, both in prose and drama.⁹ The Krakow Stary Theatre adaptation discussed in this essay clearly aims to prune away much of the by now conventional child-oriented representation of *Gulliver's Travels* to expose the text's neglected potential and give it new vitality. The production highlights the grim and gruesome elements of Swift's text and brings out themes which may prove too demanding for young spectators, such as reflections on Western European colonialism, racism, cultural violence, and the gender inequalities of Swift's times and ours.

The play's focus on themes of cultural violence and colonialism illustrates—I would like to claim—the tensions that arise in the process of transplanting a text across cultures. Miśkiewicz and Bednarek appear to oscillate between owning and disowning Swift's work as their own cultural heritage, which may correspond to their Polish audience's ambivalent attitude to the culture of the West more generally. Problematizing communal cultural identity and colonial expansion resonates with particular urgency for the Polish audience, who may view themselves as locked in what the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber first called a 'shatter zone', that is, a culture area between two other dominant cultural alter-egos.¹⁰ For Poland, these are the cultures of the global West and East. As David Graeber and David Wengrow show, the precarious position of the 'shatter zone' culture, which may be swallowed by either one of its neighbours, encourages its inhabitants to practise *schismogenesis* in a particularly complex manner, where *schismogenesis* stands for a variety of strategies by which communities come to define themselves through stressing the differences between their own and neighbouring cultures.¹¹ The 'shatter zone' cultures, as indicated by Graeber and Wengrow, typically find themselves constantly renegotiating their allegiances, aligning more with one set of neighbours while stressing distinctions from the other, and by switching sides.¹² Crucially, such cultures, in order to ensure their own cultural independence, must prevent too close an alignment with either of their neighbours and cultivate resistance to cultural colonization.

The past three centuries of Polish history certainly involved such struggles. The eighteenth-century partitions performed by Poland's neighbours to the East and West inevitably left their residues in the communal imagination of Poles, to which was subsequently added the experience of being allotted to the Soviet Union's area of influence after the Second World War. Despite (or because of) communist rule and propaganda in Poland, and especially immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the culture of the West was more often viewed in terms of ideals to look up to than as presenting issues to criticize. It is only recently that the cultural hegemony of the West has become more widely perceived in a more nuanced manner, and concerns have been raised over the extent to which current Western prosperity is built on colonial oppression and exploitation, including cultural exploitation.¹³ Perhaps this marks yet another stage in the relations continually forged and reformed between 'shatter zone' Poland and its formidable cultural neighbours to the East and West. Public discourse, meanwhile, represents these processes as involving cultural violence. For instance, it has become a political and journalistic commonplace to accuse one's opponents of 'pushing', 'pulling', or otherwise forcefully moving Poland to the East, towards the authoritarian rule of Russia.¹⁴ At the same time, Eurosceptics portray the European Union as 'vassalizing' Poland by exerting influence over the country's internal arrangements.¹⁵ Poles, too, may perceive themselves as representing the culture of the global North in the power dichotomy between the global North and South, and thus may also be particularly alert to the instability of the roles of the colonized and the colonizer, especially where cultural influence, broadly understood, is concerned.

My claim is that these tensions and anxieties were integral to the process of how Miśkiewicz and Bednarek transplanted *Gulliver's Travels*—a text of the Western literary canon—to the Polish twenty-first-century stage. Their Krakow Stary Theatre production grapples with (and asks the audience to grapple with, too) questions about the relationship between Polish culture and the culture of the global West: To what extent are Poles entitled to claim the latter as their own heritage, or should they, perhaps, view it as foreign influence, colonizing their imagination? To explore these tensions, I analyze the Krakow producers' adaptive strategies and follow Linda Hutcheon's framework for studying what she terms 'indigenizing' techniques employed in transplanting texts across cultures, that is, the adapters' choices between 'historizing' or 'dehistorizing' their material, 'racializing' or 'deracializing' and 'embodying' or 'disembodying' it.¹⁶ I add to Hutcheon's list another pair of categories, namely: the adapted text and the adaptation functioning in the roles of the colonizer and of the colonized, which I shall explore later. I propose, too, that the Krakow play offers a fresh view on Hutcheon's framework,

for instead of choosing one of the techniques—for instance, either ‘racializing’ or ‘deracializing’ the source material, which Hutcheon suggests would be typically the case—Miśkiewicz and Bednarek appear to employ both techniques in their production. This results in a hybrid strategy that makes the audience not only note the two perspectives but also the transition between them, for instance, between skin colour being and not being important. In this, the producers closely follow Swift’s own method, for, as demonstrated by Denis Donoghue, Swift often drew the reader’s attention to the effect he wished to achieve ‘by retarding [transitions between two perspectives], holding them back to his own speed . . . to set one perspective against another’.¹⁷ Swift’s aim in this strategy was, as John Richardson pointed out, to emphasize the inconsistencies and internal paradoxes of individuals and communities.¹⁸ Miśkiewicz and Bednarek, I argue, propose to their audience an introspective exploration of what might be considered Poles’ own inconsistencies and paradoxes in their perceptions of themselves; they also show that re-telling stories across cultures on a ‘reread—rewrite—repeat’ basis may be seen as a means for both individuals and communities to reflect on their cultural identities and paradigms.

In this sociological approach to adaptation, I join Simone Murray, Carol Poole and Ruxandra Trandafoiu and share their interest in ‘scrutinizing adapted texts for their critical reworking of power structures’.¹⁹ However, Murray focuses on the economic side of the adaptation industry, and Poole and Trandafoiu examine the different ways in which power structures are inscribed in the adapted text ‘by the author’s political identity’.²⁰ I, on the other hand, concentrate on the critical reworking of power structures as a task in which an adaptation involves its audience. Miśkiewicz and Bednarek’s production of *Gulliver’s Travels*, I aim to show, deploys ‘indigenizing’ adaptive strategies to confront its spectators with the realities of Western European colonialism and cultural violence, racism and gender inequalities and, further: to encourage reflection on individual and communal responses to these issues in Poland.

Between the Roles of the Colonizer and the Colonized

Hutcheon’s framework of intercultural adaptation strategies—‘historizing’/‘dehistorizing’, ‘racializing’/‘deracializing’ and ‘embodying’/‘disembodying’—may be usefully complemented by another pair of categories: that is, the roles of the colonizer and the colonized as ascribed to the adapted text and/or the adaptation as they stand in relation to each other. While colonial exploitation features as a prominent theme throughout the Stary Theatre production of *Gulliver’s Travels*, on the metatextual level, both Swift’s text and Miśkiewicz and Bednarek’s play appear to

switch between these two roles, and—depending on the moment and the perspective taken in the production—each can be viewed as the colonizer exploiting the other or as the colonized being imposed upon. To explain this more fully, it is necessary first to take a closer look at Act I of the Krakow play.

Act I of this Stary Theatre production certainly surprises the audience by not including or alluding to Swift's text at all. Instead, it opens with an anti-racist song 'Angelitos Negros' performed live by one of the actors (I shall return to the song's significance later on) and then presents a collage of quotations from ancient philosophers and more recent thinkers, ranging from Ruan Ji to Adam Smith and Albert Einstein, and passages from texts by recent writers on the history and future of humanity, such as Niall Ferguson, Yuval Noah Harari, Ian Morris, Javier Marías and others. The seemingly loosely connected episodes tell a concentrated history of humanity, beginning with the expansion of *Homo sapiens* and the concurrent extinction of the Neanderthals, followed by the extermination of mega-fauna by *Homo sapiens* across all continents. They then move to more recent history and the present day, always in a montage-like fashion, as shown in the extract here:

Philosopher: Between Australia and Hawaii there is a small island called Nauru. In 1798 it was first discovered by the British whaleman John Fearn . . . A hundred years later it was found that the island is rich in phosphate deposits, used for the production of fertilizers . . . They disappeared thanks to several corporations that soon converted most of the island into an open pit mine. In the 1960s and 1970s, the inhabitants of the island boasted the highest per capita national income . . . Obesity became the symptom of serious health problems among [them]. When the phosphate deposits were finally exhausted, Nauru was left with colossal debts, a moon-like landscape and three thousand diabetics . . .

Old Man: In the so-called 'Columbian exchange', the Europeans gained the new continent and the Indians the smallpox . . .

Old Man: Christopher Columbus was certain that he had reached India. He remained convinced that it was so to the end of his life . . .

Oracle: The Aztecs were certain that they knew the whole world, and that the main part of it was under their rule. 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main'—John Donne.

All: Yes, yes, yes!

- Emperor:* Hume believed that only white people are capable of creating real civilizations
- Mathematician:* In 1958 Clennon King, a black student who tried to recruit for a programme at the University of Mississippi, was taken to a psychiatric ward. The court ruled that a black man attempting to take a university course must be mentally unstable.²¹

The collage of quotations and anecdotes, seemingly only vaguely related, focuses on racism and the colonial expansion of European states, as well as alluding to the wars and destruction inflicted on the natural environment of the planet. The human victims in the reported stories quoted (or others used in the play) are not romanticized but appear merely to have lost the upper hand in the continual struggle for dominance. For instance, the account of the real events of the Opium Wars given at one point in the play is preceded by a dramatization of the passage opening Ian Morris's *Why the West Rules for Now*, which imagines an alternative version of history, with China subjugating Britain. The juxtaposition of documented events and such imagined alternatives suggests that the current dominant position assumed by the culture of the global West in relation to the East is not to be viewed as fixed but rather as a point on a continuum of fluctuation and change. Any stability in the relations between the global North and South is similarly questioned. It is only against this background, set in Act I, that Gulliver's story unfolds in Act II. The audience are, therefore, conditioned to view the selected excerpts from Gulliver's voyages in the context of the global cultural interactions that began around the time that Swift's text was conceived and which have intensified ever since.

With *Gulliver's Travels* conspicuously absent from the play's first, forty-minute act, the structure of the production may be seen as embodying the tension between the roles of the colonizer and the colonized on a metatextual level. On the one hand, the full title of the production, 'Gulliver's Travels. A story of the world', may be understood to be an acknowledgement of the domineering position of Swift's work in the Polish cultural sphere. *Gulliver's Travels* seems to function as an unavoidable reference text for discussions on the human condition—as a canonical giant from the West, colonizing the adapters' creative imagination. On the other hand, the fact that Swift's work is not even mentioned in the first act of the play may suggest that the producers' attitude towards it is more ambivalent. Of course, the collage of anecdotes in Act I may be considered to be a 'mere' preface preparing the audience for the enactment 'proper' of Gulliver's voyages in Act II. Equally, however, the text of *Gulliver's Travels* may be seen as relegated to a secondary place: it must wait its turn. This latter interpretation seems especially compelling since in Act II, Miśkiewicz and

Bendarek also richly encrust *Gulliver's Travels* with intrusions from other sources, cherry-picking chunks of Swift's text in ways that fit their own creative agenda. The play may thus be interpreted as exploiting its source text—as colonizing it. Rather than representing a dichotomy, then, on the metatextual level, the roles of the colonizer and the colonized oscillate and merge into a hybrid function, and the transitions between the two perspectives operate in a continual flux. The audience seems to be asked to note the instability of the positions of the colonizer and the colonized rather than settle on one interpretation alone.

A creative approach to the adapted text, such as that taken by Miśkiewicz and Bednarek, is, of course, far from unusual today and raises no scholarly eyebrow as critical discourse has moved on from mere considerations of fidelity and infidelity between the adapted text and the adaptation. Artists, as the theatre director Julia Bardsley shows, may, in fact, view 'canonical' texts as possessing 'a particular strength and robustness' and feel that 'their classic status . . . allows them to be pillaged and plundered in a particular way'.²² The language Bardsley uses here is strikingly aggressive, and the ambivalent treatment of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* by the Krakow producers—at once reverential and irreverent—also makes it applicable to their play. Furthermore, while Bardsley is referring to canonical texts of the culture she views as her own, producers who engage in intercultural adaptations may allow for a different sort of violence of cultural colonization to be played out in their production.

It could even be argued that the 'strength and robustness' highlighted by Bardsley make *Gulliver's Travels* attractive as material that—in an act of artistic violation—can be 'consumed' to produce an entirely new artistic entity. This process resembles 'cultural anthropophagy', which was first put forward as a creative adaptive process by the Brazilian modernist writer Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), as a response to the cultural domination of Western Europe over the post-colonial world. The movement's successive proponent, poet Augusto de Campos, thus explains: '[r]itual anthropophagy is a branch of anthropophagy in which the cannibal eats his enemy not for greed or for anger but to inherit the qualities of his enemy. The metaphorical, and also in certain aspects philosophical, idea of cultural anthropophagy [is] the idea of cannibalizing the high culture from Europe, with the results that one . . . could then construct something really new out of this development'.²³

Christopher Funkhouser notes another important aspect of this cultural cannibalism, similarly emphasized by Caetano Veloso, namely, that 'an anthropophagic text is in its form "at once loose and dense and extraordinarily concentrated"'.²⁴ This structural characterization appears accurately to describe the Krakow adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*, in which the seemingly loose structure only serves to bring out the density of its

content. As Act I recounts human history in a montage of quotations from different authors, the actors seem at times to be in conversation with each other, but more often, the passages they bring up and the anecdotes they retell are only indirectly prompted by what was said before. This apparently disjointed form in which individual episodes follow one another in kaleidoscopic fashion creates a dense spectacle that is both intellectually and emotionally demanding.

As the play gathers material selected from many different texts (quoted almost *verbatim*) and as it melds that material into a new textual organism, it also fulfils de Campos's claim for the anthropophagic text's innovativeness. One novelty can be found in the form of the production: unusually for theatre, diegesis (telling a story) far outweighs mimesis (acting the story out). Act I presents almost no dialogue between the performers at all, consisting instead of a miscellany of excerpts from written texts and dramatized vignettes. The second, longer act of the play is loosely organized around the storyline of *Gulliver's Travels*, but even here, most of the material is narrated rather than acted out, with long passages quoted almost directly from Swift's work. This has led the critic Olga Katafisz to refer to Miśkiewicz and Bednarek's production as 'a dramatic essay' rather than a play.²⁵ What makes this form even more striking is the interweaving of techniques from opposite ends of the representational spectrum: the actors speak whole passages from texts initially intended for reading, and then switch to pure improvisation, as, for instance, when Gulliver excitedly describes what he would do if he had been born a Struldbrugg (in the kingdom of Luggnagg) destined to live forever. The result is that the play moves between different genres and modes of representation and studiously avoids being locked into any single one.

This is, of course, fitting for an adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*, a text which itself mocked contemporary writing genres and eluded clear-cut generic distinctions.²⁶ While the Krakow production brings out the protean nature of dramatic representation, therefore, it also focuses the audience's attention on the moments of transition between genres and modes of textual embodiment. Like Swift, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek deliberately arrest these moments and combine the contrasting modes of representation into a hybrid form, asking the audience to reconsider previously established generic distinctions. This focus on shifts in perspective, and the hybridity which results from them, goes beyond the genre and structure of the play to become its very essence.

'Historizing' and 'Dehistorizing'

To see how this hybrid effect functions in Act II of the play, where *Gulliver's Travels* provides the central focus, it is useful to return to Hutcheon's framework of 'indigenizing' techniques employed when transplanting a

text into a new cultural environment. As the first set of possible strategies, Hutcheon identifies 'historizing' or 'dehistorizing'. By the latter she means removing the story and its characters from the social and historical context in which they were initially conceived and locating them instead in an environment undefined in time and space. Such stripping of an adapted text from its socio-historical specificity is often used to bring out reflections on the so-called universal human condition, applicable anytime and anywhere. 'Historizing' the adapted text, on the other hand, is a strategy that emphasizes the socio-historical context of the story, either that which informed its initial conception or a different context into which the text is transposed.²⁷

Unusually, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek successfully employ both techniques at the same time. On the one hand, and in contrast to some other Polish theatrical adaptations of Swift's text, the Krakow play deliberately historizes *Gulliver's Travels*. Many young-audience-oriented productions have typically represented the story as a universal parable. Consequently, not only the far-off lands to which Gulliver travels but also his own country have been portrayed with little socio-historical specificity and more as fairy-tale dominions. Gulliver, of course, is supposed to be closer in size and culture to the spectator than the inhabitants of the places he visits, but he, too, nevertheless, seems to be a character from 'once-upon-a-time'. The Krakow production 're-historizes' Gulliver by making him a man of his day: an English ship surgeon travelling the world for a living. The beginning of Act II, for instance, includes an extensive extract of Gulliver's biography, which in Swift's text opens Chapter 1 of the *Travels*. The socio-historical specificity of the voyages is also emphasized by the costumes, which are clearly meant to evoke outfits worn by eighteenth-century British sailors. Very few props are used on stage, in marked contrast to adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* designed for young spectators, where the 'wonder element' is typically enhanced by gigantic combs or glasses retrieved from Gulliver's pockets by the Lilliputian guards. The 'wonder element' of the Krakow play is achieved by applying the magnifying glass not to everyday objects but to everyday cruelty in the treatment of the 'other' by communities and individuals. Among the few props used in the production, the scenes recounting the voyages to Lilliput and Blefuscu feature a troop of approximately two-foot-high figurines arranged to evoke the Chinese Terracotta Army, reminding the audience of the East versus West cultural dichotomy highlighted in Act I (Figure 7.1). Following the tales of the colonial expansion of the West, which make up much of Act I and in which Britain features prominently, Gulliver's cultural specificity is of consequence. In Miśkiewicz and Bednarek's adaptation, his are not voyages of innocent exploration or trade but are part of the imperial project aiming to 'civilize' other cultures.

This 're-historizing' of Gulliver is effected alongside 'dehistorizing' his story. In true anthropophagic style, the 'loose' but 'dense' structure of the

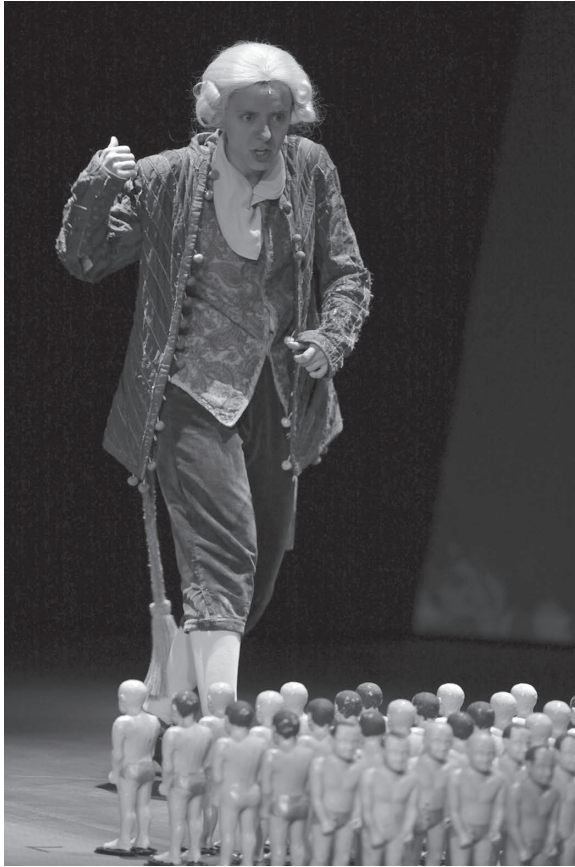


Figure 7.1 Monika Frajczyk as Gulliver in the National ‘Stary’ Theatre production ‘Gulliver’s Travels. A story of the World’ by Joanna Bednarek and Paweł Miśkiewicz. Photo: Katarzyna Pałetko.

play allows its creators to focus not on the plot but on individual episodes, and so, to drop, when suitable, the interest in any specific historical moment and to draw attention instead to the universal in human interactions and social arrangements. For instance, Gulliver’s boasting speech about the greatness of his own country, with which, in Swift’s text, the hero aims to impress the king of Brobdingnag, is directed in the play towards the audience, before a group of smirking or openly laughing Brobdingnagians.

Our Parliament consists of gentlemen . . . who are the greatest Ornament and Bulwark of the kingdom, always ready to defend their Prince and

Country by their Valour, Conduct and Fidelity . . . [Nobody with a bag full of gold could bribe them and gain their support in that manner] . . . To these are joined many holy men, whose particular Business it is to take care of Religion, and of those who instruct People therein. They are most deservedly distinguished by the Sanctity of their Lives, and the Depth of their Erudition and are indeed the spiritual Fathers of the Clergy and the People. In our Courts of Justice, there preside venerable Sages and Interpreters of Law . . . [Everyone is equal and the political parties express the will of the people].²⁸

Gulliver's encomiums on the probity of conduct of British rulers, legislators and church officials prove as powerful in their irony and satirical impact when applied to twenty-first-century Poland as they must have been when first read by the eighteenth-century British reader, and they could, no doubt, be found to be similarly relevant in other countries and at different times. Equally universal is Gulliver's desperate plea to the collected Brobdingnagians to allow him the dignity belonging to a human being despite his relative weakness and 'otherness'. The bitterness in his response to their mocking musings on the likelihood and desirability of finding him a suitable mate and propagating the breed only amplifies the brutality typical of interactions between any dominant group and the dehumanized 'other'.

'Racializing' and 'Deracializing'

'Othering' and racial discrimination become some of the central themes in the production, explored with the use of 'racializing' and 'deracializing' strategies plaited into the fabric of the play. In her analyses, Hutcherson demonstrates how emphasis on the skin colour of actors or depicted characters may affect the interpretation of an adaptation. For instance, adaptations of Bizet's *Carmen* in which the whole cast are black remove the racial tensions that are present in adaptations that retain *Carmen's* otherness in relation to the rest of the characters. Thus, by employing either of these two techniques—'racializing' or 'deracializing'—an interpretative shift may be effected in the adapted text.²⁹ In their adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek engage these strategies in a particularly unsettling manner. The transgressive choices made in the production for race representation accentuate the internal paradoxes found both in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and in the Krakow Stary Theatre adaptation. At the same time, the historical abuse as enacted by Western European colonizers on the grounds of racial difference is stressed and acknowledged, and further, it is made clear that colonization and cruelty may be also be enacted even when there is no visible difference in skin colour.

Adapting *Gulliver's Travels* in a manner that highlights the questions of colonial abuse and racial discrimination resonates with a lively (and long-standing) critical debate concerning Swift's own response to colonialism and racism. While some literary historians have dubbed Swift 'an explicit anti-colonialist',³⁰ others have expressed reservations, viewing him as at best an 'anti-colonial colonialist'³¹ and considering his criticisms of empire to be severely limited.³² Scholars reluctant to represent Swift as an anti-colonialist point to his strong belief in a hierarchy of peoples, a position shared and propagated at the time by a number of travel writers, illustrators and naturalists (including early ethnographers and traveller physicians), working deliberately or unconsciously in the service of the politicized agendas of empire construction.³³ Swift, as has been frequently pointed out, 'draws on a compendium of descriptions of native peoples in works of early-modern European travel'³⁴ to create Gulliver's first descriptions of the Yahoos in Book IV, which present them as closer to apes than people.³⁵ Gulliver's disgust—'I never beheld in all my Travels so disagreeable an Animal, nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an Antipathy' (207), also echoes the aversion found in accounts of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century travellers to Africa, in which—as Clement Hawes and Claude Rawson show—indigenous people were depicted as occupying an intermediate stage between humans and beasts. A host of stories and fantasies were published contemporaneously with *Gulliver's Travels* and disseminated as supposed proofs justifying such value judgements. These included chilling tales of cannibalism among neighbouring African tribes and 'miscegenation', that is, purported regular sexual contact between African women and large apes.³⁶ In Swift's text, Yahoos are not apparently guilty of any such depravity, but nonetheless, Gulliver's initial revulsion against them becomes even more pronounced as he learns more about their habits and vices. At the same time, he must, as the story progresses, face the horrifying realization that he, too, is a Yahoo. It is this equation of Gulliver with the Yahoo that partly earns Swift his anti-racist credentials.

Book IV may, in fact, be seen as a culmination of Swift's reflections on the position of the Englishman Gulliver in a hierarchically viewed chain of being. Skin colour, the white skin of the Europeans, which is a key factor differentiating them from the colonized indigenous people in all early modern narratives, is already questioned in Book II of the *Travels*. Gulliver's observation of the naked bodies of the Maids of Honour in Brobdingnag fills him with 'Horror and Disgust' as he is confronted with 'Their Skins so variously coloured when I saw them near' (111). He recollects, too, that his own skin appeared similarly multicoloured to the Lilliputians, whom he had previously visited. Whiteness of skin is, therefore, a mere optical illusion and as such can hardly be treated as evidence of any inherent

superiority belonging to its owner. More disturbingly, Swift repeatedly places Gulliver among the Brobdingnagian animals: the giants display him as a ‘*Splacnuck* (an Animal in that Country very finely shaped, about six Foot long)’ (92), and their instinct to view the tiny Gulliver more as a pet than a person seems to be justified when he is kidnapped by a monkey. Gulliver himself explains that the mishap occurred because the monkey ‘took me for a young one of his own Species’ (113). The episode produces a striking reversal of the stories of African women being abducted by apes in contemporary travel narratives and may be interpreted as arguing for a close affinity between monkeys and white Englishmen. Thus, *Gulliver’s Travels* appears to use the dominant pro-empire racist discourse to undermine the very claims put forward by those who deploy it in earnest.

The closing sections of *Gulliver’s Travels* are often viewed as Swift’s most prominent and clearest protest against colonialism and racism, in which he sums up the brutality of European expansion and its subjugation of other peoples:

A Crew of Pirates are driven by a Storm they know not whither; at length a Boy discovers Land from the Topmast; they go on shore to Rob and Plunder; they see an harmless People, are entertained with Kindness, they give the Country a new Name, they take formal Possession of it for their King; . . . they murder two or three Dozen of the Natives, bring away a Couple more by force as a Sample, return home, and get their Pardon . . . Ships are sent with the first Opportunity, the Natives driven or destroyed, their Princes tortured to discover their Gold; a free Licence given to all Acts of Inhumanity and Lust; the Earth reeking with the Blood of its Inhabitants: and this execrable Crew of Butchers employed in so pious an Expedition, is a *modern Colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous People. (269)

What is less often noticed is that this indictment forms a compositional bracket with Gulliver’s prefatory letter ‘To His Cousin Sympson’, which closes with admonishments against ‘that Infernal Habit of Lying, Shuffling, Deceiving, and Equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very Souls of all my Species; especially the *Europeans*’ (8). The Europeans, therefore, more than any other peoples, become the object of Swift’s censure.

However, this is where Swift’s position on colonialism and racism becomes more complicated. For all his condemnation of the means taken by the Europeans to colonize other peoples, Swift was not against the empire, colonialism, elimination of native cultures or even slavery *per se*. As Ian McBride points out, Swift rather ‘looked forward to eradication of Ireland’s indigenous language and customs’ and viewed ‘the native Irish

as the object of the historical process [of civilization] and not independent agents in their own right'.³⁷ It is clear that Swift would have viewed a 'civilizing' mission with full approbation had he not quarrelled with what he perceived to be the degenerate form this mission took. The controversies surrounding Swift's position on the question of race have perhaps been summed up most succinctly by Claude Rawson, who sees in it 'a radical pessimism about the species, which is unillusioned about the human animal, of whatever race, in a way that is inclusive of both racism and anti-racism, to some extent participating in both'.³⁸

This complexity in Swift's approach to racism and cultural diversity is picked up by Miśkiewicz and Bendarek and worked into the texture of the play through a mixture of adaptation techniques that focus on the problem of race. The all-female cast includes only white actors, who remain on stage during all the voyages in Act II. They become, in turn, Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Laputans and Houyhnhnms. Also, as the story progresses, different actors take up the role of Gulliver for individual scenes. Simultaneously, at the back of the stage, an intermittent projection shows the same actors, this time as dark-skinned women, nearly bare, and swaying in exaggerated postures amid 'exotic' vegetation. The continual shifts on stage, combined with the interchangeability of the roles performed live and recorded as background images, may be viewed as positing that there is, in fact, no inherent difference between Gulliver and the inhabitants of the lands he visits, in the same way as there is no real difference between the same actors whether they are white and in European sailor outfits or dark-skinned and naked: all 'otherness' becomes a trick of the mind, a mere illusion, a perpetrated convention. Such an anti-racist interpretation of the elements highlighting the skin colour in the Krakow play is not, however, the only way of viewing the performance. The grotesque rendition of dark-skinned women in the background projections brings to mind the offensive technique of blackface, defined recently by Ayanna Thompson as 'the application of any prosthetic—makeup, soot, burnt cork, minerals, masks, etc.— . . . to perform as, or appear to be, another race'.³⁹ Thomson argues that the practice is offensive even if, 'according to its own logic', it merely 'imitates' or even 'celebrates' people of colour.⁴⁰ The problem, of course, is that blackface perpetrates racist clichés even as the performers or producers who employ it may endeavour to defy them. And indeed, the internal paradox of the Krakow Sary Theatre production, which clearly aims to mock the imperial portrayals of the global South and East, is that it employs offensive stereotypical representations to do so.

One particularly disturbing moment is to be found in Act I, in the scene depicting the imagined alternative outcome of the Opium Wars, in which Britain has lost and is to become an overseas province of China. The words spoken in the play by Emperor Daoguang and 'translated' by the 'interpreter' as the Emperor's gracious acceptance of Queen Victoria's

tribute are: ‘Hong Kong, Yangtze, chyang’,⁴¹ that is, of course, merely an incongruous hodgepodge of place names and meaningless sounds. The effect of the producers’ choice to use gibberish instead of asking the actor to pronounce a proper sentence in Chinese is complex indeed. The Emperor’s pomp is thus completely deflated, but, at the same time, the audience members are confronted with their own reactions to the ridicule: is it acceptable to find it funny when nonsensical expressions are represented as another culture’s language? Or, perhaps, it exposes our (the audience’s, performers’ and producers’) ignorance of Chinese and the humiliatingly superficial knowledge we—as a community—have of this culture? Should this choice be viewed as a deliberately transgressive strategy on the part of the producers to prompt self-enquiry in the audience? Or should the producers’ intentions be doubted? Who or what are they poking fun at? Such unease as to the intent of the performance very much echoes the internal paradoxes of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, in which racist and anti-racist discourses appear to interlace. The ambiguous treatment of cultural diversity in Miśkiewicz and Bednarek’s adaptation certainly stimulates self-reflection in the spectators and makes them more alert to other instances of race and culture representation in the play.

This becomes particularly useful in the opening of Act II, which starts with a screening of scenes from *La Croisière Noire* (1926), the documentary of a French expedition which traversed Africa by car from north to south in 1924–25. The aim of the film when it was shot was evidently to record and then exhibit the ‘otherness’ and ‘primitivity’ of Africa and to stress the contrasting technological advancement of the French team, with their cars, cameras and tailored clothing. The native people recorded appear to cheerfully oblige the travellers with shows of ritual dancing and mock fighting, which must have neatly fitted the already established notions shared by the prospective European audience.⁴² Viewing the recording in the twenty-first century, however, as part of the Krakow adaptation of *Gulliver’s Travels*, encourages a shift in perspective: the clichéd reduction of the indigenous people to a spectacle of primitivity evokes a feeling of embarrassment rather than self-satisfaction in the European audience. In a very Swiftian move, it transfers the gaze from the recorded to the recorders and redirects the sting of censure from the patronized to the critic. It is the French documenting team that now astonish the viewer with their arrogance and self-complacency. Their evident pride in their automobile and equipment appears almost as pitiful as Gulliver’s boast about gunpowder, the Europeans’ only technological advantage over the giant Brobdingnagians. The technique also echoes that of Swift in the gunpowder episode, for when the King of Brobdingnag—having learnt of the destruction that may be wreaked with the use of gunpowder—refuses to learn about the technology of its production, Gulliver comments disparagingly on his ‘narrow Principles and short Views’ and asks the reader to make allowances for

the ‘Defect . . . arisen from Ignorance’ (125–26). Of course, at this point, the reader is far more likely to ascribe the ‘Defect’ to Gulliver than to the King. The anthropophagic structure of the Krakow play, therefore, which combines extracts from *Gulliver’s Travels* and *La Croisière Noire*, exposes new dimensions of both: *La Croisière*, with its team’s apparent inability to understand or appreciate the culture with which they come into contact, becomes a direct continuation of eighteenth-century travellers’ racist accounts, such as those that informed the composition of *Gulliver’s Travels*; at the same time, Swift’s work emerges as a text in which colonialism and racism become primary concerns.

Problems of colonialism and racism are viewed as crucial, too, in the interpretation of *Gulliver’s Travels* put forward by Clement Hawes, who reads Gulliver’s character as an exploration of the colonized mind. Hawes argues that as the story progresses, the seemingly down-to-earth Englishman becomes ‘entrapped in an increasingly dehumanizing plot [and loses] his own perspective’.⁴³ Indeed, already in Lilliput, Gulliver displays the symptoms of the colonized mind. He quickly assimilates into the social structures he encounters and becomes absurdly proud of his elevated title of the *Nardac*, only to—humiliatingly—refer to the Brobdingnagian farmer who had found him in a corn field as his ‘master’. The most painful to witness is, of course, Gulliver’s identification with the Houyhnhnms, whom he can neither perfectly imitate nor persuade to adopt him fully. The images conjured by Swift of Gulliver’s studied canter and the neighing ‘accent’ of his English (256) present a pathetic picture of his vain endeavours to shed his own identity and assume that of the internalized ‘superior other’. They can be seen, Hawes argues, as an exaggerated rendition of the ‘psychopathology’ exhibited in assimilated colonized people—at best, confused as to their cultural allegiances, at worst, alienated from their own culture and experiencing self-hatred at the remnants of it in themselves.⁴⁴

While the basis for the interpretation of *Gulliver’s Travels* proposed by Hawes becomes fully apparent only towards the end of Swift’s text, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek, who appear to offer a similar reading, suggest it in the opening of the play. The actor who will later portray Gulliver performs at the start of the production ‘Angelitos Negros’, an anti-racism protest song based on the poem ‘Pintame Angelitos Negros’ by the Venezuelan poet and politician Andrés Eloy Blanco Meaño.⁴⁵ The song is performed in Spanish:

Pintor nacido en mi tierra
 Con el pincel extranjero
 Pintor que sigues el rumbo
 De tantos pintores viejos

[Painter, born of my land
 With the foreign brush
 Painter, you who follow the path
 Of so many great artists

Aunque la virgen sea blanca	Even if the virgin is white
Píntale angelitos negros	Paint the angels black
Que también se van al Cielo	So that may go to heaven
Todos los negritos buenos . . .	All the good black children

Siempre que pintas iglesias	Whenever you decorate churches
Pintas angelitos bellos	You paint beautiful angels
Pero nunca te acordaste	But you have never considered
De pintar un ángel negro	Painting a black angel] ⁴⁶

Within the anthropophagic structure of the play, the song's lament that angels are never depicted black poignantly stresses the manner in which the subjugated and assimilated 'other' can never gain full admittance into the culture of the colonizers; it also foreshadows Gulliver's plight in the land of the Houyhnhnms. The fact that it is Gulliver who sings the song anticipates the ensuing scenes of the play, in which the colonized and the colonizer are presented as being far from stable categories, which, in turn, cannot be determined by such superficial differences as skin colour.

'Embodying' and 'Disembodying'

Another form of dialogue into which the Krakow Sary Theatre production enters with Swift's text is to be found in the adaptation strategies related to sex and gender. In Linda Hutcheon's terminology, these fall under the categories of 'embodying' or 'disembodying' techniques and refer to the methods of adaptation which either focus on the gendered body or work to obliterate gender differences.⁴⁷ Once more, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek employ both strategies: at some points in the play, the all-female cast makes it easier to drop gender differences and explore the problems of (or posed by) humanity in general; at other times, the sexualized feminine body is highlighted in order to zero in on the misogynist overtones in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and to neutralize their purport.

The fact that the cast is all female only initially surprises the spectator, and it soon functions in a manner that Hutcheon predicts of the 'disembodying' technique: with only women on stage, no gender-related tensions, power struggles or 'othering' is suggested between the characters. The costumes suggestive of eighteenth-century men's outfits—wigs, waistcoats and breeches—obscure the actors' bodies and help the audience to view them as people: both women and men. This is especially useful at the opening of Act II, when the play's first voyage, to Lilliput, begins. It starts *in medias*

res as the actors debate the feasibility of specific numbers occurring in the future:

Philosopher: Twelve!

Mathematician: How many?

Philosopher: Twelve! . . .

Old Man: What? Yees . . .

Oracle: Yes, yes, there will be twelve . . .

Oracle: And then there will be no waters on which Gulliver can sail . . .

Mathematician: About 7 billion, I'll bet.

Old Man: That's a lot!

Oracle: There will be more, and then will come the end . . .

Philosopher: Thirty-two.

Mathematician: How come? This can't be right . . .

Old Man: And would you say that seven billion could fit in?

Oracle: And there will be more . . .

Mathematician: When?

Oracle: Soon.⁴⁸

These numbers, it soon transpires, refer to the predicted growth of the human population on the planet. As Gulliver, meanwhile, arrives on stage and describes the tiny inhabitants of Lilliput as swarming ants, the audience is conditioned to view them as all the people on Earth. In this context—and, we realize, in Gulliver's eyes—the individual Lilliputians' gender is of little consequence. Nor is Gulliver's gender important when the council of Lilliputians consider his prodigious needs, which drain their country of resources.

Cassandra: Here's the great project that bleeds our land . . . They want to drain all marshes and empty the seas so that Gulliver may eat!⁴⁹

Both Gulliver and the Lilliputians, the audience understands, embody the overpopulation problems facing today's world. The images of insect-like droves infesting the landscape and a monstrous giant devouring all its produce become two sides of the same coin: the shifting perspectives merge into a hybrid image of human exploitation of the planet. Swift's memorable 'little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth' (123) combines with the monstrosity of the gigantic body and is, then, used to comment on a problem very much of our own time but which would not necessarily have occurred to Swift or his contemporaries. At other points in the play, however, a different perspective is put forward,

and the question of the gendered and sexualized body shows that there are still unresolved social problems that were also significant in Swift's day.

Swift's treatment of the gendered body in *Gulliver's Travels* has, of course, received due critical attention. Like many other of his works, *Gulliver's Travels* contains much material that could be read as a misogynist critique of women. Feminine physicality is depicted as particularly repulsive and echoes Swift's poems, such as 'The Progress of Beauty', 'Strephon and Chloe' or 'The Lady's Dressing Room', written around the same time. Especially during his trip to Brobdingnag, Gulliver suffers from the nauseating proximity of women's bodies and all the more acutely for their colossal size. Gulliver's aversion, however, as has been noted, is clearly coupled with fascination. Within the first hours of his stay in the country, Gulliver is both awed and repelled by the monstrous bare breast of a peasant woman nursing an infant. Later, in a particularly morbid fantasy, he imagines himself crawling into the diseased breast of a beggar. In another memorable passage, Gulliver recalls how the maids of honour would undress themselves in front of him and take off his own clothes and how one of the particularly 'frolicksome' girls would mount his own naked body on her nipple, 'with many other Tricks, wherein the Reader will excuse me for not being over particular' (111). Gulliver describes himself as 'displeased' (111) by the sport, but it is clear, nonetheless, that he performs the 'tricks' required of him.

As Gulliver vacillates between his attraction and repugnance towards the feminine body, he apparently loses all agency and becomes instead an instrument, a 'sexual toy' for teenage girls.⁵⁰ The image of the objectified Gulliver is further emphasized by the descriptions of *Glumdalclitch* (his 'little' nurse) treating him like a favourite doll to be dressed, undressed and shown around. The relationship that Gulliver forges with women in Brobdingnag has prompted critics to suggest that Gulliver functions in Swift's text in a position typically reserved for women in other eighteenth-century works.⁵¹ Indeed, Gulliver is kept for display, provided for, but also sexually abused. The threat of sexual assault is enacted again in the land of the Houyhnhnms, where a lustful female Yahoo attempts to rape Gulliver. Damian Grant goes so far as to suggest that Swift's eponymous hero 'becomes an honorary woman'.⁵² However, I find Grant's other claim more convincing, namely, that Gulliver 'crosses the binary divide'.⁵³ As a character, he both represents and mocks the features conventionally labelled as masculine and feminine in eighteenth-century culture. He is 'manly' and Robinson-like—industrious, able-bodied and inventive—but also submissive, objectified and displayed.

It is precisely this interchangeability—and, at points, also hybridity—of conventional gender roles in *Gulliver's Travels* that is picked up and amplified in Miśkiewicz and Bednarek's production as the adapters switch from

the ‘disembodying’ to the ‘embodying’ strategy. As the cast of all-female actors play mostly male parts, they also use masculine word-endings in Polish, thereby referring to themselves as male. This hybrid effect of ‘male’ language filtered through a woman’s body is then used at certain points in the production to bring out the tensions around the sexualized feminine body. The scene depicting the intrigues of women on the flying island of Laputa provides a good example. In Swift’s text, Gulliver reports the story of a prime minister’s wife who had run away to the mainland to become the mistress of ‘an old deformed Footman’ (154). In the play, the story is told by an inhabitant of Laputa who, as can be seen, quotes the text of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* with very few changes. The passage included here quotes the whole story in Swift’s text and the lines not spoken in the play are indicated by square brackets. Words and phrases added in the play are marked by round brackets. The ‘however’ inserted in the first sentence underlines the contrast between the lively Laputan women and the men, who are entirely lost in abstract thoughts on music and mathematics and appear incapable of going through the most basic social interactions without the help of ‘flappers’, that is, personal attendants who alert them as to what to do next. The men seem to have no interests unrelated to science and certainly very little interest in their wives:

The Women of (our) Island have (however) abundance of Vivacity; they contemn their Husbands, and are exceedingly fond of Strangers, [whereof there is always a considerable number from the Continent below, attending at Court, either upon Affairs if the several Towns and Corporations, or their own particular Occasions, but much despised, because they want the same Endowments.] Among these the Ladies choose their Gallants[: but the Vexation is, that] they act with [too] much Ease and Security, for the Husband is always so rapt in Speculation, that the Mistress and Lover may proceed to the greatest Familiarities before his Face, [if he be but provided with Paper and Implements, and without his Flapper at his side.

The Wives and Daughters] (The Ladies greatly) lament their Confinement to the Island, [although I think it the most delicious spot of Ground in the World; and although they live here in the greatest Plenty and Magnificence, and are allowed to do whatever they please,] they long to see the World, and take the Diversions of the Metropolis, which they are not allowed to do without a particular Licence from the King; and this is not easily obtained, because [the People of Quality] (the Husbands) have found by frequent experience, how Hard it is to persuade their Women to return from below. [I was told of a] (One) great Lady[, who had several children, is] married to the Prime Minister[, the richest Subject in the Kingdom, a very graceful Person, extremely fond of her,

and lives in the finest Palace of the Island,] went down to Lagado, on the Pretence of Health, there hid herself for several Months, till [the King] (a warrant was) sent [a warrant] to look for her, and she was found in an obscure Eating House all in Rags, having pawned (all) her Clothes to maintain an old deformed Footman, who beat her every Day, and in whose Company she was taken much against her Will. And although her Husband received her with all possible Kindness, and without the least Reproach, she soon after contrived to steal down again[, with all her Jewels,] to the same Gallant, and hath not been heard of since.⁵⁴

This passage exemplifies the manner in which the text of *Gulliver's Travels* is used in the play. The changes and cuts made for the production are minor and only subtly enhance or alter the meaning of the quoted passage. For instance, the first omission in the excerpt was no doubt made for the sake of the clarity and brevity of the story told; the same seems true of the short passages about 'Paper' and 'Jewels' later on. The sections in Swift's version describing the ladies' comforts on the island and the prime minister's situation are clearly there to emphasize how overwhelming the Laputan women's need for attention from men must be if they are ready to leave such luxury behind. It also shows how entirely beyond the comprehension of the male inhabitants such a need appears to be. Both these points are highlighted in the play through performance, as will be discussed. Two other elements of Swift's text—the fact that the escaped lady is a mother and that the whole situation is vexing to the men in Laputa—seem to have been cut in the play to subtly sharpen the critique of Laputan men and soften that of the women. The fact that the runaway wife is also a mother of several children could make her less excusable in her choices in the eyes of today's audience, who may be less aware of the realities of child rearing in eighteenth-century Britain, when aristocratic women rarely breastfed their children and, in general, would have little to do with them beyond cursory inspection until they were old enough to converse with. Cutting this information, therefore, removes an element that might otherwise detract from the point of the Laputan women's unmet need for physical and emotional contact. The fact that women's conspicuous infidelities upset the Laputans in Swift's text suggests that at some level at least, these escapades are noticed, even if they touch only the men's pride rather than their hearts. Omitting the passage about the 'Vexation' in the play, therefore, suggests that the men are entirely oblivious to the decay in their marriages and to the mutual abasement the spouses inflict on each other. The cut, thus, adds more of an edge to the critique of the Laputan men's inability to satisfy the emotional needs of their wives. On the whole, however, the changes are small and do not challenge the meaning of Swift's text in any significant manner. This challenge is effected through performance, as will be shown.

In Swift's text, Gulliver concludes the tale of the prime minister's wife with disparaging comments on 'the Caprices of Womankind', which 'are not limited to any Climate or Nation' (154). The satirical sting here is double-pointed: it is directed both at women and at men who censure women. On the one hand, the ladies' escapades with their 'gallants' are berated and their sexual desires represented as uncontrollable: they must be appeased at whatever cost, even in the most debasing circumstances. On the other hand, the Laputan women's choice to be beaten rather than to be ignored shows their desperate alienation on the island where their husbands pay attention only to the condition of the sun and the movements of the spheres. Gulliver's unreflective identification with patriarchal discourse in reporting this episode, therefore, makes him another butt of satire in the scene, together with the fine ladies sleeping with abusive footmen.

In the Krakow Sary Theatre production, the two perspectives—that of the disgusted Gulliver and that of the women who escape Laputa—are integrated in the person of a single actor performing a monodramatic scene with the effect of amplifying and disarming the misogynist discourse. As the actor—impersonating a Laputan man, which is highlighted by the grammatical choices in Polish—tells the story of the absconding wife, she dwells on it with exaggerated disdain. Simultaneously, however, she enacts the wife's impetuous yearning for physical contact: she throws off her wig and in a frenzied manner takes off her sailor's clothes to end up in just underwear. In the background, some of the other actors also take off their wigs, let their hair down and slowly undress in a suggestive manner. The performance directly contradicts the spoken words: as tears of desperation can be seen on the leading actor's face and her movements in undressing become more frantic, the disparaging tone of the comments she makes becomes crueller. In the play, therefore, women's right to feel sexual desire and to act so as to have their emotional needs met is asserted in a manner not to be found in Swift's text. At the same time, the misery that is experienced at the loss of these rights is stressed. In Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the feminine sexual urge is merely reported secondhand and with scorn; in the Krakow production, it becomes literally 'embodied', to use Hutcheon's term, and celebrated in performance, especially by the actors in the background (Figure 7.2). The scene is also a vivid example of the ways adaptations may apparently communicate the adapted text almost *verbatim* and yet, through performance, challenge the text's message and so highlight the social changes that have made it possible.

It is important to mention at this point that with scenes such as the one describing the escapades of Laputan ladies, the Krakow Sary Theatre adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels* responds to gendered hostilities in the Polish environment and the recent cultural conflict over women's reproductive rights. Since 2016, Poland has experienced the so-called 'black protests'



Figure 7.2 Paulina Kondrak (in the middle) in the National ‘Stary’ Theatre production ‘Gulliver’s Travels. A story of the World’ by Joanna Bednarek and Paweł Miśkiewicz. Photo: Katarzyna Paletko.

and ‘Women’s Strike’ with thousands of people expressing their objection to the near total ban on abortion.⁵⁵ Ever since, the public discourse tackling the subject has become increasingly brutalized, with conservative politicians suggesting, for instance, that the low birth rate in Poland should be blamed on young women debauching themselves instead of setting up families.⁵⁶ Retransplanting *Gulliver’s Travels* into this context brings out and amplifies the misogyny both in Swift’s text and in Polish public discourse. It may also be viewed as a defiant social intervention.

Conclusions

In considering the adaptation techniques employed in transplanting *Gulliver’s Travels* across time and space, it is crucial to note Swift’s own invitation to readers that they may implement changes in the text as they see fit to make it a better tool for social change. In the prefatory ‘Letter from Captain Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson’, the motive for publishing the account of the voyages is identified as the ‘Public Good’ (6), thereby suggesting the text’s didactic purpose. At the same time, the integrity of the published version of the *Travels* is undermined. The letter insists that the text as it stands contains passages that were not originally there, ‘omit[s] some material Circumstances, or mince[s] or change[s] them in such a Manner that [the author] do[es] hardly know [his] own work’ (5). The complaint does not specify, however, what exactly is incorrect or where

such freedoms have been taken.⁵⁷ Instead, it concludes that the writer ‘shall leave that Matter to my judicious and candid Readers, to adjust as they please’ (7). Miśkiewicz and Bendarek, acting tongue in cheek, include this citation in their play.⁵⁸ With Swift’s encouragement, therefore, the doors appear open for the readers-adapters to use the text as they consider it to be most beneficial for creating a theatrical production as social intervention.

The Krakow Stary Theatre play, seen as social intervention and as a work of cultural anthropophagy, reveals the features it shares with similar artistic products, created typically as both responses to and attempts to bring about cultural colonization. One effect of this hybrid strategy, as Bernard Schütze shows, is that it anatomizes ‘an open process of dynamic transformations in which identity is never fixed but always open to transmutations’.⁵⁹ This transmuting of identity applies to the cannibalized-transplanted text as well as to the audience who participates in the anthropophagic ritual. The identity of *Gulliver’s Travels* becomes reformulated within the Polish environment as a work for adults rather than children and one that challenges its audience with questions about the colonial history of the global West and gender inequality. The adapters’ employment of seemingly dichotomous ‘indigenizing’ techniques encourages the audience to note the complexity of historical events and processes and to view them in the light of more general patterns of power relations between individuals and communities. In this sense, Bednarek and Miśkiewicz’s play seems to recognize that *Gulliver’s Travels* should be read as a text which, as Clement Hawes points out, shows ‘an ongoing and emotionally supercharged . . . history, indeed “historical”—but in a . . . more urgent sense’,⁶⁰ where history must be revisited and continually re-examined.

As the spectators of the Krakow production become confronted with meaning—of the literary text and of historical events—as something mutable rather than fixed, they may also reflect on their own identity or that of their community as subject to transformations. A challenge in viewing communal and individual (or textual) identities as processes of change rather than static fixtures lies in the fact that this often serves to amplify their internal paradoxes. While this is certainly true of the textual identity of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift’s work also, as John Richardson once put it, ‘exemplifies—one might even hesitantly say “teaches”—the one responsible and difficult way of living with our inevitable inconsistencies—by unremitting, painful, ironic recognition’.⁶¹ This valuable ‘lesson’, to follow Richardson’s phrasing, or ‘Public Good’, to use Gulliver’s own words, that can be gained from reading *Gulliver’s Travels* is also offered by Miśkiewicz and Bednarek in their adaptation of Swift’s work. The Krakow adapters take their spectators on a journey of just such ‘unremitting, painful [and] ironic’ introspection of ‘inconsistencies’, ‘adjusted’ to the needs of the audience, as Gulliver’s letter to Sympson suggests should be undertaken. It is a journey deeply indebted to Swift’s text and one that is equally rewarding.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 Joanna Bednarek and Paweł Miśkiewicz, ‘Podróże Guliwera. Opowieść o świecie’ [Gulliver’s travels. A story of the world] (unpublished manuscript); Throughout the play, Miśkiewicz and Bednarek cite the anonymous 1784 translation of *Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. Jan Kott (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1949).
- 2 See Ignacy Krasicki, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, trans. Thomas H. Hoisington (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992).
- 3 The anonymous translator seems to have used the adaptation by Pierre-François Desfontaines, first published in Paris in 1727.
- 4 For instance, in *Historia na dwie księgi podzielona* [History in two volumes]. See Zofia Sinko, *Powieść angielska osiemnastego wieku a powieść polska lat 1764–1830* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1961).
- 5 Most notably in the works of Tadeusz Dymitr Krajewski, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, and Jędrzej Śniadecki. See Romana Kozicka, ‘Wokół motywów swiftowskich w literaturze polskiej’ [On Swiftian motifs in Polish literature], (PhD diss., University of Silesia, 2008), 156–85.
- 6 Kozicka, ‘Wokół motywów swiftowskich’, 190–93.
- 7 See Kozicka, 209–13.
- 8 *Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego* [Encyclopedia of the Polish theatre] lists thirteen subsequent productions in theatres around Poland, including Miśkiewicz and Bednarek’s adaptation of the Krakow Stary Theatre. See <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/sztuki/wyszukaj?search=Podr%C3%B3%C5%BCe+Guliwera&pr emiere=&author=>
- 9 The same, of course, could be said for other literary canons. See, for instance, Hermann J. Real, ed., *The Reception of Jonathan Swift in Europe* (New Yorks: Continuum, 2005).
- 10 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), 199–204.
- 11 The term *schismogenesis* was coined by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson in the 1930s. See Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 56.
- 12 Graeber and Wengrow, 180–99.
- 13 See Marta Grzechnik, ‘The Missing Second World: On Poland and Post-Colonial Studies’, *Interventions* 21, no. 7 (2019): 998–1014.
- 14 See Łukasz Wójcik, ‘PiS przesuwa Polskę z zachodu na wschód’ [PiS is moving Poland from the West to East], *Polityka*, January 26, 2016, accessed April 5, 2023, www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1648320,1,pis-przesuwa-polske-z-zachodu-na-wschod.read; Piotr Kraśko and Andrzej Halicki, ‘PiS ciągnie Polskę na wschód’ [PiS is pulling Poland to the East], *Poranek Radia TOK FM*, December 29, 2016, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://wyborcza.pl/10,93568,21178510,pis-ciagnie-polske-na-wschod.html>.
- 15 See Ladislav Cabada, ‘Central Europe Between the West and East’, *Politics in Central Europe* 16, no. 4 (2020): 419–32. See also Bartosz Lewicki, ‘Ziobro: To co robi Jourova jest nawoływaniem polskich sędziów do anarchii’ [Ziobro: Jourova is instigating anarchy among Polish judges],

- Dziennik.pl*, November 30, 2021, accessed April 5, 2023 <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/swiat/artykuly/8303436,viera-jourova-komisja-europejska-praworzadnosc-zbigniew-ziobro-wymiar-sprawiedliwosci.html>.
- 16 Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 158–67.
 - 17 Denis Donoghue, 'Swift's Perspective', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 56, no. 223 (1967): 251.
 - 18 John Richardson, 'Christian and/or Ciceronian Swift and Gulliver's Fourth Journey', *Cambridge Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2001): 49.
 - 19 Simone Murray, *The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6, quoted in Carol Poole and Ruxandra Trandafoiu, 'Migration, Symbolic Geography, and Contrapuntal Identities: When Death Comes to Pemberley', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs, and Eckart Voigts (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 195.
 - 20 Poole and Trandafoiu, 'Migration, Symbolic Geography, and Contrapuntal Identities', 195.
 - 21 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 'Podróże Guliwera. Opowieść o świecie', 4–6. This and all subsequent translations of the play's text from Polish are mine with the exception of the instances where Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is quoted in the play.
 - 22 Dominic Johnson, 'The Subtle Aggressors: Julia Bardsley and Simon Vincenzi in Conversation with Dominic Johnson', in *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. Margherita Laera (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 110.
 - 23 Chris Funkhouser, 'Augusto de Campos, Digital Poetry, and the Anthropophagic Imperative', *Ciberletras*, July 17, 2007, accessed March 12, 2023, www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/funkhauser.htm.
 - 24 Caetano Veloso, *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music & Revolution in Brazil* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 155, quoted in Funkhouser, 'Augusto de Campos, Digital Poetry, and the Anthropophagic Imperative'.
 - 25 Olga Katafisz, 'Gatunek (nie)zagrożony' [(Un)endangered species/genre], *Teatralny.pl*, July 24, 2019, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://teatralny.pl/recenzje/gatunek-niezagrozony,2792.html>.
 - 26 See, for instance, Clement Hawes, 'Gulliver Effects', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. J. A. Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 187–204.
 - 27 Hutcheon with O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 158–60.
 - 28 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 27. The text adapts with few changes the Polish anonymous translation of J. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Jan Kott (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1949). Only the text in parentheses is not part of Swift's text. The edition quoted throughout this essay is Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Robert Demaria, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 118–19.
 - 29 Hutcheon with O'Flynn, 160–64.
 - 30 Laura Brown, 'Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23, no. 4 (1990): 425.
 - 31 Wolfgang Zach, 'Jonathan Swift and Colonialism', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 36.
 - 32 Ian McBride, 'Swift Against Empire', www.history.ox.ac.uk/event/swift-against-empire-prof-ian-mcbrides-inaugural-lecture
 - 33 For more on the colonial discourse in Swift's lifetime, see especially Claude Rawson, *God, Gulliver and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination*,

- 1492–1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Clement Hawes, ‘Three Times Round the Globe: Gulliver and Colonial Discourse’, *Cultural Critique* no. 18 (1991): 187–214.
- 34 Aileen Dougals, ‘Borders: Reading *Gulliver’s Travels* in 2020’, *Journal of Irish Studies* 35 (2021): 6. See also Rawson, *God, Gulliver and Genocide*, 3.
- 35
 Their bodies are covered with thick hair but are otherwise bare, so that I might see their Skins, which were of a brown Buff colour . . . They climbed high trees . . . for they had strong extended Claws before and behind . . . They would often spring, and bound, and leap with prodigious agility.
 (Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, 207). In all subsequent quotations page numbers will follow in brackets.
- 36 See Rawson, 92–182; Hawes, ‘Three Times Round the Globe’, 194.
- 37 McBride, ‘Swift Against Empire’.
- 38 Rawson, 8.
- 39 Ayanna Thompson, *Blackface* (New York, London, and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 19.
- 40 Thompson, *Blackface*, 34.
- 41 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 13.
- 42 For an exploration of the cultural significance of *La Croisière Noire*, see Alison Murray Levine, ‘Film and Colonial Memory: *La Croisière Noire* 1924–2004’, in *Memory, Empire and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism*, ed. Alec G. Hargreaves (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 81–97.
- 43 Hawes, ‘Three Times Round the Globe’, 199.
- 44 Hawes, ‘Three Times Round the Globe’, 203–10.
- 45 The poem was first set to music in 1942 by the Mexican composer to be performed by Toña la Negra (1942). In 1948, it was sung by Pedro Infante in the Mexican film *Angelitos Negros* (1948) and has since been covered by many singers, including Eartha Kitt and Roberta Flack. The rendition in the play seems especially indebted to la Negra and Kitt.
- 46 The Spanish text opens the unpublished manuscript of the play. The translation into English is mine.
- 47 Hutcheon with O’Flynn, 164–67.
- 48 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 13–15.
- 49 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 17.
- 50 Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 108.
- 51 Damian Grant, ‘The Peace of the Augustans and the War of the Sexes. What Gender Is Gulliver?’ in *Guerres et paix: La Grande-Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle, I-II*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Bounce (Paris: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1998), 6.
- 52 Grant, ‘The Peace of the Augustans and the War of the Sexes. What Gender Is Gulliver?’, 21.
- 53 Grant, 21.
- 54 Swift, 154; Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 29–30.
- 55 The protests were noted also in the press outside of Poland. See, for instance, Masha Gessen, ‘The Abortion Protests in Poland Are Starting to Feel Like a Revolution’, *New Yorker*, November 17, 2020, accessed November 13, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-abortion-protests-in-poland-are-starting-to-feel-like-a-revolution>
- 56 ‘Polish Politician Blames Low Birthrate on Young Women Drinking’, *The Guardian*, November 7, 2022, accessed November 13, 2022, www.theguardian.com.

- com/world/2022/nov/07/polish-politician-blames-low-birthrate-on-young-women-drinking-jaroslaw-kaczynski.
- 57 Except, of course, the fact that the name Brobdingnag is explained to be spelt erroneously, and that the correct spelling would be Brobdingrag.
- 58 Bednarek and Miśkiewicz, 23.
- 59 Bernard Andreas Schütze, 'COL Cannibals On Line', *The CIAC's Electronic Art Magazine* 10 (2000), quoted in Funkhouser.
- 60 Hawes, 'Three Times Round the Globe', 189.
- 61 Richardson, 'Christian and/or Ciceronian Swift and Gulliver's Fourth Journey', 49.