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The Stochastic Traveler: Misreading and Mimesis in *Gulliver's Travels* and Artificial Intelligence Discourse

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Abstract: This paper argues that Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* prefigures a core problem in modern AI discourse through the archetype of the "stochastic parrot." By "stochastic parrot," I mean an entity that mimics patterns without understanding them. Situating Swift's work within the tradition of travel writing, this paper reads travel both as movement across space and as an interpretive and epistemological practice. I argue that Gulliver is a "stochastic traveler." His journeys unfold as a sequence of flawed mimetic performances: he replicates the Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Laputans, and Houyhnhnms, yet consistently fails to grasp their underlying values. His accounts generate profound misreadings, while the societies he encounters also misread him—as a useful tool to be exploited, as a fascinating but insignificant curiosity, and as an irrational threat. Gulliver, in turn, internalizes each society's perception of him. As a

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travel narrative, the text exposes how cultural encounters can produce imitation without comprehension. Swift presents a skeptical theory of knowledge: what we call “understanding” is often just superficial mimicry. The same cycle of mimicry and misreading in *Gulliver’s Travels* also defines the relationship between humans and Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI, like a literal stochastic parrot, does not understand human intentions. Conversely, humans speculating about AI supremacy misread the technology, attributing consciousness to a statistical process. By identifying Gulliver as a stochastic traveler, we can better diagnose the epistemological confusions both in Swift’s satire and in our contemporary technological moment. This perspective shifts the focus from fearing AI to critically examining our own interpretive failures.

Keywords: Jonathan Swift; AI discourse; *Gulliver’s Travels*; stochastic parrot; stochastic traveler; mimesis; misreading

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Introduction

In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Lemuel Gulliver’s journeys reveal a fundamental failure of comprehension. Whether navigating the petty politics of Lilliput or aspiring to the pure reason of the Houyhnhnms, he consistently replicates the forms of the societies he encounters without grasping their substance. He becomes a mimic whose actions are devoid of true understanding. This dynamic of flawed imitation and mutual misreading between the traveler and the worlds he visits provides a powerful template for analyzing contemporary anxieties: just as Gulliver and the civilizations he meets misinterpret each other, so does modern discourse misread the nature of Artificial Intelligence. This problem of misreading is not unique to Swift’s satire; it is central to the tradition of travel writing itself. Recent scholarship emphasizes that travel narratives are shaped by unequal encounters and interpretive limits. Charles Forsdick (2014, p.

318) shows that travel writing often reveals how travelers misread places through inherited frameworks rather than direct understanding. Similarly, Quaireau and Ounoughi (2020, p. 203) argue that travel writing frequently constructs exceptional spaces that invite distortion and misunderstanding. These insights frame *Gulliver's Travels* as a text deeply invested in the problem of interpretation. Although Gulliver travels widely, his encounters remain filtered through rigid assumptions. His observations, though seemingly confident, repeatedly fail to apprehend the values of the societies he visits. Swift thus exposes travel as a site where misreading is produced and perpetuated. At the level of practice, travel writing also foregrounds mimicry. Scholars highlight how travelers often imitate local customs without fully understanding them. Marfè (2012, p. 191) describes this process as a form of narrative mimicry shaped by power relations and displacement. Tarkka and Martin (2023, p. 266) further emphasize that travel writing is relational, involving both the traveler and the travellee, who is interpreted, categorized, and spoken for. Gulliver exemplifies this pattern. He adopts the languages, manners, and values of each society he encounters, yet his performances remain shallow and unstable. He mimics without comprehension, making him a "stochastic traveler" (Bender et al., 2021, p. 617) whose movements reproduce patterns rather than generate understanding. Swift's satire thus aligns with travel writing scholarship that views travel as a practice prone to repetition, projection, and epistemological failure.

This paper argues that Gulliver is the original "stochastic traveler," a literary precursor to the modern "stochastic parrot" (Bender et al., 2021, p. 617). The term "stochastic parrot" describes a system that mimics language without understanding it, operating by reassembling patterns from its training data. Gulliver's satirical journeys reveal how the perceived threat of AI is often a narrative construct, much like the giants of Brobdingnag, who exist as a product of interpretive fallacy. He parrots the customs and arguments of the Lilliputians or the Houyhnhnms, yet consistently fails to grasp their deeper meaning or context. He is, in effect, a stochastic traveler, whose journeys consist of performances based on surface-level observation rather than true

comprehension. This parallel illuminates contemporary discourse surrounding AI: the anxiety is not about the technology itself, but about human misreading and the age-old tendency to misinterpret what merely mimics understanding. This paper first establishes the theoretical link between mimesis and the stochastic parrot. It then traces Gulliver's role as a stochastic traveler through his key journeys, examining his mimetic failures in Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and Houyhnhnm-land. The analysis subsequently turns to modern AI, reframing fear of it as a Gulliver-like misreading. Finally, I argue for a shift in perspective: rather than succumbing to anxiety, we should cultivate critical agency, drawing on the insights of Swift's enduring satire to guide a more reflective engagement with technology.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Current scholarship on Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* consistently highlights the theme of misreading and flawed imitation. Critics demonstrate how Gulliver's journey is a sequence of imperfect mimetic performances, in which he replicates the customs and logics of the societies he encounters without grasping their underlying values. This scholarly conversation provides a critical foundation for connecting Swift's eighteenth-century satire of superficial understanding to contemporary anxieties about artificial intelligence, revealing a shared epistemological problem: both Gulliver and modern AI discourse are entangled in a cycle of mimicry and misreading. The works of Janelle Pötzsch (2015, p. 263) and Dongshin Yi (2018, p. 170) illustrate how Swift constructs Gulliver's failure of understanding by interrogating human exceptionalism. In her 2015 article, "Kantian Ethics in *Gulliver's Travels*: Are the Houyhnhnms Role Models?", Pötzsch argues that the perfectly rational Houyhnhnms contrast sharply with humans, whose lives require balancing reason with imperfection—a balance Gulliver fails to achieve through slavish imitation (Pötzsch, 2015, p. 259). Similarly, Yi, in "Gulliver, Heidegger's Man: Swift's Satire of Man in Captivation," contends that Gulliver's sense of smallness arises from operating an anthropological machine: a process of anxiously defining his humanity by creating an abyss between himself and others (Yi, 2018, p.

170). For Yi, Gulliver's grasp of his own humanity is fragile, maintained only through flawed imitation.

Ian Higgins (2019, p. 23) frames Swift's satire as a project that exposes the ethical confusion underlying human judgment, while Abby Coykendall (2020, p. 328) interprets *Gulliver's Travels* as dismantling human self-importance through a dystopian lens that critiques Enlightenment ideals of normalization. Jeremy Chow (2020, p. 316) and James Horowitz (283–285) further explore physical and social misreading, showing how Swift uses bodily vulnerability to undermine Gulliver's social and masculine identity. Alberto Lázaro-Lafuente (2020, p. 21) emphasizes that the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos challenge human moral and mental hierarchies, while Hamdi Ali Serdar (696–697) highlights the psychological fallout of this challenge. Angus Fletcher (2021, p. 115) situates Swift's method neurologically, describing *Gulliver's Travels* as a “bias-busting blueprint” that creates a “weird neural experience” to expose human perceptual fragility. Recent scholarship also links Swift's satire to modern technological anxieties. Horzum (2025, p. 226) and Schultz (2025, p. 8) connect Laputans, unstable hybrids, and giants to critiques of scientific overreach, digital identity, and corporate power, showing that Swift's satire offers a durable framework for diagnosing contemporary fears of powerful and alien systems. The critical discourse on Artificial Intelligence provides a pressing context. Bender et al.'s landmark paper, “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots,” identifies large language models (LLMs) as “stochastic parrots,” systems that haphazardly reassemble language from training data without understanding or communicative intent (Bender et al., 2021, p. 617), producing an illusion of coherence. However, Bender et al. (2021, p. 619) do not examine the literary precedent for the human role in this cycle of mimicry—a gap that this study addresses.

This paper argues that a specific cognitive failure connects eighteenth-century satire and twenty-first-century technology. This failure is first identifiable in Gulliver, who repeatedly misreads the societies he encounters. He observes, for instance, that his “own diminutive eyes see objects very differently from the giants of Brobdingnag”

(Swift, 2005, p. 103), a physical metaphor for broader interpretive limitations. Bender et al.'s concept of the stochastic parrot provides a contemporary analogue: AI, like Gulliver, mimics patterns without understanding them (Bender et al., 2021, p. 617). Gulliver is the original "stochastic traveler," whose journeys are a series of performances based on surface-level observation rather than true comprehension. He parrots the customs and arguments of the Lilliputians or the Houyhnhnms but consistently fails to grasp their deeper meaning or context. By positioning Gulliver as the human component in a dysfunctional feedback loop with stochastic machines, this framework illuminates the epistemological errors that arise when humans misread the mimic. The theoretical lens thus connects Swift's satire to contemporary AI discourse: just as Gulliver's flawed imitation exposes the limitations of human understanding, modern anxieties about AI reflect a persistent misreading of systems that operate without comprehension. This perspective shifts the focus from fearing technology to critically examining the interpretive failures that both humans and machines reproduce.

Gulliver As a Stochastic Traveler

Gulliver's initial encounter with the Lilliputians establishes his fundamental failure to comprehend a society that operates on a scale and logic alien to his own. When he awakens to find himself bound by countless tiny ropes, he does not react in existential terror but with self-centered annoyance, performing a tactical assessment of their military capabilities. He describes the "confused noise" and the "shower of arrows" that prick him "like so many needles" (Swift, 2005, p. 17), his primary concern being his own discomfort and whether his "buff jerkin" could protect him (Swift, 2005, p. 18). He observes the Lilliputians' intricate efforts to communicate and transport him with the detached curiosity of a naturalist studying insects, never grasping the monumental national effort his presence demands. More profoundly, he misses the existential crisis he represents: his narrative frames them as curious objects of study rather than a complex society responding rationally to an unprecedented catastrophe. This failure of perspective is what postcolonial scholar Amitav Ghosh terms a failure of "narrative" (p.

19)—the traveler imposes a familiar story of colonial encounter where a radically different framework of understanding is required (Ghosh, 2016, p. 39). Gulliver's reading of the situation is that of a man dealing with a novel but manageable problem, when it should be that of a monster who has stumbled into a fragile world. This failure is rooted in his method of observation: he records data but consistently misses underlying meaning, describing the Lilliputians' actions in sterile and mechanical terms. He frames their ingenious efforts as mere curiosities rather than evidence of a sophisticated society, noting the engine built to transport him in mathematical terms—"raised three inches from the ground, about seven feet long, and four wide, moving upon twenty-two wheels"—without recognizing the immense collective effort and coordination it represents. His detachment is equally clear in his account of their communication: he describes hearing a "confused noise" about him and a long speech from a person of quality "whereof he understands not one syllable."

Gulliver's narration consistently enacts a failure of interpretation: he dismisses the Lilliputians' language as "incomprehensible sound" rather than evidence of a complex social order, reduces their strategic response to his presence to a simple calculation of force, and presumes himself a match for the greatest army they could muster. This superficial reading extends to his documentation of their customs. He describes the hundreds of little carriages drawn up and down his body to deliver food as a logistical oddity rather than a monumental feat of national cooperation. In every case, whether observing the politically symbolic "dancing on the rope" (Swift, 2005, p. 23) or the Emperor's strategic decision to grant him the title of nardac (Swift, 2005, p. 24), Gulliver sees the what but not the why. He makes a mockery of their institutions by reducing their rational, culturally rich actions to a series of quaint facts, utterly failing to discern the human intellect and historical context that animate them. He observes political rituals as isolated absurdities rather than as products of a specific history and culture. Candidates for high office, for instance, dance on a "slender white thread" (Swift, 2005, p. 23), which he treats as a mere test of agility, without considering what this ritual might symbolize—balance, grace under pressure, or a tradition evolved over

time. Likewise, he reduces the political split between the High-Heels and Low-Heels to a simple dispute over shoe preference (Swift, 2005, p. 25), making no effort to uncover the deeper ideological, economic, or historical divisions that the footwear represents. By taking these practices at face value, Gulliver denies the Lilliputians a rational and complex inner world. His narration thus becomes a satire of superficial observation, through which Swift holds a mirror to the reader, suggesting that our own political conflicts might seem equally arbitrary to an outside observer who does not understand their history.

Gulliver's tendency to project familiar frameworks onto the Lilliputians finds a direct parallel in contemporary discourse surrounding artificial intelligence. We anthropomorphize AI, endowing it with a human-like mind—a fundamental misreading akin to Gulliver's error. Judging the Lilliputians only by his own world, he failed to understand their true context. Similarly, we witness pattern-matching and call it thought. Bender et al. (2021, p. 619) term AI a “stochastic parrot,” one that merely repeats patterns from its data without any understanding of meaning or reality. When a system like ChatGPT generates coherent text, we are tempted to see a reasoning mind, yet AI scholar Gary Marcus (2001, p. 19) argues that such systems are fundamentally “brittle” and lack “deep understanding,” analyzing only the “shadows left by the words” through co-occurrence statistics rather than possessing genuine conceptual knowledge (Marcus, 2001, p. 105). Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal (2019, p. 77) identify this act of projection as a central issue in AI narratives, where the “humanoid template” leads us to imagine AI as either savior or destroyer—projections that reveal more about our own hopes and anxieties than about the technology's actual capabilities (Cave & Dihal, 2019, p. 75). As Kate Crawford compellingly argues in *Atlas of AI*, we must understand AI as a “political and social phenomenon,” an extractive technology embedded in material realities and human labor, which we mistakenly endow with a false agency (Crawford, 2021, p. 12). Our speculations about a conscious, agential AI thus become a modern form of Gulliver's travelogue: a compelling but fundamentally flawed narrative that tells us more about the observer's own framework than the true nature of the observed

phenomenon. In Brobdingnag, the sizes are swapped, and Gulliver becomes the miniature creature. His misjudgments now stem from his physical vulnerability: he cannot recognize how his own limited, small-scale viewpoint distorts his perception. Subjected to the same microscopic, objectifying scrutiny he once applied to the Lilliputians, he now occupies the position of the minuscule curiosity.

Gulliver's account of Brobdingnag is filled with visceral, grotesque descriptions that highlight his vulnerability and the sheer, overwhelming physicality of its inhabitants. He describes the Maids of Honor who, finding him entertaining, would often "strip him naked from top to toe, and lay him at full length in their bosoms"; he was much disgusted because "a very offensive smell came from their skins" (Swift, 2005, p. 87), an effect he attributes solely to his own more acute senses due to his littleness. What he demonstrates here is a failure of reflexivity: he never truly considers that from the Brobdingnagian perspective, his own body, viewed at their scale, might be equally flawed or repulsive. He remains trapped in his subjective experience, interpreting their actions as personal indignities rather than recognizing his status as a fascinating but insignificant specimen in their world. This failure of perspective reaches its zenith when Gulliver proudly describes England to the King of Brobdingnag. He launches into a patriotic panegyric, detailing its government, military, and history with evident pride (Swift, 2005, p. 95), expecting awe and admiration. But the King, operating from a macro-scale and objective viewpoint, reframes Gulliver's nation through a lens of moral and political critique. After a series of probing questions, the King delivers his devastating verdict: Gulliver's countrymen appear to be "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth" (Swift, 2005, p. 97). Gulliver's account of this moment is one of offense and disbelief; he fails to see the profound truth in the King's assessment. His narrative thus becomes a mockery of human vanity and national pride, demonstrating how our self-aggrandizement appears when viewed from a detached and critical distance. He becomes an unwitting pawn in Swift's satire, his earnest defense of humanity serving only to highlight its anomalies. Gulliver's experience in Brobdingnag

directly mirrors the potential outcome of humanity's encounter with its own creation, advanced algorithmic systems. Just as Gulliver misjudges the Brobdingnagians by applying his own limited scale of values, we misjudge AI by projecting human-like agency and understanding onto systems that operate on a fundamentally different, statistical design.

Zerilli et al. argue that the “control problem” (2019, p. 555) in AI is often misconceived because it overestimates the system's agency; the real issue lies in designing reliable tools whose decision-making processes are transparent and aligned with human values. We are like Gulliver boasting to the King: we marvel at the output of a large language model without comprehending the alien “reasoning” behind it. This is the core of what Meredith Broussard (2018, p. 25) terms “artificial unintelligence”—the fundamental gap between the literal, procedural operation of computers and the nuanced, contextual understanding of the human world (Zerilli et al., 2019, p. 556). When an AI makes a decision that seems irrational or biased to us, it is not a moral failure but a systemic one, reflecting the limitations and biases encoded in its data and architecture. Our speculations about AI “taking over” are a Gulliver-like fantasy, a projection of our own competitive and agential nature onto a technology. Broussard insists that AI is ultimately just “a machine that does exactly what we tell it to do, even when what we tell it to do is not what we actually want” (2018, p. 112). The true danger is not a superintelligent overlord but our own continued failure to understand the “Brobdingnagian” scale of data and computation we have created, and our failure to take responsibility for building systems whose outputs we can truly trust and comprehend.

In his visit to the flying island of Laputa and the Grand Academy of Lagado in Balnibarbi, Gulliver encounters a society so consumed by abstract theory and speculative research that it has become utterly detached from practical reality and common sense. The Laputians are so absorbed in mathematics and music that they require “flappers” to bring them back to conversation, while the Projectors of the Academy are engaged in a series of spectacularly absurd experiments. Gulliver recounts

these endeavors with a tone of earnest, wide-eyed reportage, describing, for instance, a project to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, “to be put into phials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement summers” (Swift, 2005, p. 159). He observes another scholar attempting to reduce human excrement back to its original food, and a builder constructing houses from the roof down to the foundation. Presenting these as fascinating local customs, he fails to mark them as savage intellectual follies. His inability to recognize the profound absurdity of research divorced from empirical grounding and tangible human benefit makes him a perfect conduit for Swift’s satire, highlighting how easily grand intellectual ambition can curdle into pure, unproductive nonsense. This misreading intensifies as Gulliver fails to grasp the corrosive societal implications of this misguided research program. The land of Balnibarbi, which supports the Academy, is described as lying in ruin, with “houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a people whose countenances and habit expressed so much misery and want” (Swift, 2005, p. 173). The direct causal link between the Academy’s resource-draining, fruitless projects and the nation’s poverty is stark, yet Gulliver reports it as a simple observation rather than a damning critique. He marvels at the blind commitment to a priori reasoning, such as the Projector who insists that all scientific experiments must be conducted without using any materials from the natural world, thereby ensuring their total irrelevance. By taking the Projectors’ “genius” at face value, Gulliver’s account becomes a powerful mockery of humanity’s capacity for self-deception in the name of progress, demonstrating how an obsession with theoretical novelty and complex methodology—unmoored from the goal of creating useful knowledge—leads to societal decay and intellectual bankruptcy. The comedy and tragedy arise from the reader’s ability to see the systemic failure that Gulliver only vaguely perceives.

Gulliver’s credulous tour of the Academy of Lagado finds a chillingly precise parallel in certain strands of contemporary AI research, where a similar disconnect between theoretical ambition and grounded understanding prevails. Just as the Projectors sought to build houses from the roof down or derive nourishment from

excrement, some AI approaches attempt to construct intelligence from the top down, focusing on massive-scale statistical pattern matching in text without a foundational model of the physical world. This forms the core argument of Bisk et al., who contend that “true language understanding is grounded in embodied experience” and “cannot be learned from text alone,” as “current text-only models lack the rich and perceptual context that shapes human language acquisition and use” (2020, p. 5, p. 8). Similarly, Lazaridou and Baroni’s work on multi-agent communication reveals that while AI systems can develop functional communication protocols, these are often optimized for task success without developing a shared, human-like understanding of meaning or intent, operating instead as “a functional optimization, not based on shared human-like understanding” (2020, p. 2). When we marvel at the fluent prose of a large language model without recognizing its lack of embodied grounding, we are like Gulliver marveling at the Projector’s intricate apparatus for sunbeam extraction: we risk building a towering edifice of “intelligence” that, like the houses of the Balnibarbian builder, is constructed from the roof down—impressive in its complexity but fundamentally unstable and disconnected from the solid ground of reality and embodied experience. To speculate that pure text can lead to true understanding is to commit a modern form of the Laputian fallacy, mistaking the manipulation of symbols for genuine comprehension of the world they are meant to represent. This pattern of misreading reaches its most profound and catastrophic extreme in Gulliver’s encounter with the Houyhnhnms, where he completely internalizes the worldview of the rational, speech-using horses. In his desperate desire to belong among them, he comes to view his own species with unmitigated loathing, embracing their reductive and sterile philosophy without recognizing that their perfect rationality—devoid of passion, lies, or complex emotion, constitutes its own form of emotional and ethical sterility, lacking compassion, art, and the very complexities that make humanity vibrant, albeit flawed. When Gulliver tells his Houyhnhnm master about European society, including its wars, law, and politics, the master concludes that humans have just enough reason to amplify their natural corruptions, making them worse than the brutish Yahoos. Gulliver does not

merely report this judgment but absorbs it entirely, stating that “he fell to groaning with a despondency and melancholy that he could no longer support” upon realizing his own Yahoo nature (Swift, 2005, p. 235). His misreading is one of total ideological capture: he mistakes the manipulation of symbols for genuine comprehension of the world they are meant to represent.

This process of ideological capture unfolds in Gulliver’s confessional dialogues with his master. Gulliver himself reinforces the Houyhnhnm critique, describing his own kind as “fellows of desperate fortunes” (Swift, 2005, p. 237) and criminals; his account of European warfare leaves his master in “amazement and indignation” (Swift, 2005, p. 238). The master’s judgment is absolute: humans, whom he calls Yahoos, “were observed to be the most unteachable of all brutes” (Swift, 2005, p. 239). He articulates the core of Gulliver’s eventual self-loathing, observing that humans possess only a “glimmering of reason” (Swift, 2005, p. 241) which they employ merely to augment their vices, and declares, “I dreaded lest the corruption of that faculty might be worse than brutality itself” (Swift, 2005, p. 242). Gulliver does not dispute this but internalizes it entirely, begging his master “to conceal the secret” of his having “a false covering” to his body (Swift, 2005, p. 243). His identity fractures as he begins to see himself through the horse’s eyes; he fully accepts that he is, at his core, a Yahoo. This misreading culminates in a tragicomic crisis of mimesis, wherein Gulliver’s attempt to mimic the Other shatters his own identity. Upon his forced return to England, he is physically repulsed by his family, regarding his wife as an “odious animal” (Swift, 2005, p. 275). He unrepentantly narrates: “The very smell of them was intolerable; much less could I suffer them to eat in the same room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my bread, or drink out of the same cup, neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the hand” (Swift, 2005, p. 275). He attempts to walk and neigh like a Houyhnhnm and spends hours in conversation with his horses, believing them the only creatures capable of true reason. In his futile pursuit of pure rationality, he loses his very humanity. Swift’s mockery here is devastating: the ultimate human folly lies not merely in failing to understand the Other, but in being so consumed by the Other’s perspective

that one rejects the core of one's own being. Gulliver becomes a living allegory for the dangers of an uncritical, mimetic adoption of an alien value system—a fallacy that proves how the pursuit of a perceived superior rationality can lead to profound and tragic self-alienation.

Gulliver's tragic fate in Houyhnhnmland serves as a powerful allegory for a modern risk, yet it is only one of several. His entire journey charts a spectrum of misreadings, each offering a different lesson for our interaction with AI. In Lilliput, Gulliver misreads his size as superiority—a risk of arrogance: we may similarly overestimate our control over AI, assuming our human logic can fully govern its statistical scale. In Brobdingnag, physically vulnerable, he finds his proud stories judged harshly by the King; so too can AI act as a mirror, exposing and magnifying the flaws in our social logic. In Laputa, Gulliver misreads absurd experiments as genius, admiring projects disconnected from reality—an error we risk repeating when we build complex AI models empty of true understanding. But in Houyhnhnmland, Gulliver makes his worst mistake: he does not merely misread the horses' logic but internalizes it, adopting their sterile worldview and rejecting his own humanity. This is the mimetic danger.

Today, we face all these risks. Just as Gulliver mistook the Houyhnhnms' cold logic for a superior form of being, we risk attributing a human-like sentience to AI. Murray Shanahan carefully distinguishes that the impressive performance of large language models should not be conflated with the philosophical notion of “understanding” (2022, p. 1); such models lack the embodied and situated cognition that grounds human thought (2022, p. 2). Luciano Floridi reframes this distinction, arguing that these systems exhibit agency but do not exhibit intelligence in the human sense—they are “intelligent without being intelligent” (2023, p. 21). Our speculation about AI can lead us, like Gulliver, to devalue human intuition and creativity. The danger is that we will unconsciously adopt a sterile and statistical worldview, and in a futile attempt to emulate a perceived superior intelligence, lose sight of the messy and

complex qualities that define our humanity. We must learn from all of Gulliver's errors in all his journeys.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Gulliver stands as a profound archetype of a stochastic traveler. His journeys constitute a sequence of flawed mimetic performances: he replicates the customs and logics of the societies he encounters yet consistently fails to grasp their underlying values. Read through the lens of travel writing, Gulliver's mobility does not generate knowledge; rather, it magnifies the limits of interpretation. Surprisingly, almost all he sees and interacts with in the remote lands feed his misanthropy. Ultimately, his tendency to like others and willingness to be like others do not correspond to wisdom. Instead, these blind streams of unconsciousness distinguish him in a negative way: he becomes self-derogatory and a nuisance to his own kind, humanity. I have further contended that this eighteenth-century satire offers a powerful lens for diagnosing a modern confusion. Just as Gulliver misreads the alien societies he encounters, we consistently misread artificial intelligence: we anthropomorphize statistical models, attributing consciousness and intent to what is, at its core, a pattern-matching process. This misreading mirrors the epistemological failures long identified in travel writing, where imitation and narrative confidence often substitute for understanding. In doing so, we risk replaying Gulliver's error, devaluing human consciousness by overvaluing our own sophisticated creations. The implications of this parallel are, I propose, both critical and corrective. For literary studies, it provides a new framework for analyzing travel writing, colonial encounters, and the perils of superficial cultural mimicry. For our technological moment, it shifts the imperative: the central challenge is not to control an alien intelligence but to master our own interpretive habits. By recognizing the stochastic traveler in ourselves—as readers, travelers, and users of intelligent systems, we can cultivate a more literate and

discerning relationship with the technologies we create, ensuring that our quest for knowledge does not end, like Gulliver's, in isolation and error.

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