Journal of Humanistic Mathematics

Volume 9 | Issue 1 January 2019

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Cover Page Footnote

The author thanks Nicholas Mignanelli at The University of Miami for his insightful comments on this work.

Sándor Szathmári's *Kazohinia*: Mathematics and the Platonic Idea

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Abstract

In this article I analyse Sándor Szathmári's utopian, satiric novel, *The Voyage to Kazohinia*, as an exercise in the portrayal of Platonist ideas. Through a discussion specifically of Szathmári's portrayal of the way mathematics is conceived in two different, imaginary societies, I aim to reveal his preoccupation with exploring a solution to the essential political and moral problem of the alienation of interests between the individual and the group. This analysis locates Szathmári's ideas within the Platonic tradition as well as within the context of 20th century philosophical ideas, particularly those of Georg Lukács. Szathmári's portrayal of two worlds, one with mathematics and one without, is used to show that man craves an objective reality outside of himself, by which humans can escape from the subjective, psychological torments and uncertainties that assail all our lives. Mathematics, in the sense that it is stable and eternal (at least according to Plato) is both a means towards and evidence of the possibility of an eternal and knowable Good upon which a truly just society may be built.

Keywords: *mathematics, Plato, Kazohinia, Hungarian literature*

Introduction

What would a world without mathematics look like? This question is explored in a little known Hungarian utopian satire, *The Voyage to Kazohinia*, by Sándor Szathmári [22]. In portraying the dystopian, chaotic world of the Behins, the dark sister world of the hyper-rational Hins, Szathmári interweaves deftly several Platonic concepts with a Robinson Crusoe-type narrative about a British Navy castaway named Gulliver.

In both societies, Gulliver finds himself most distressingly an outsider and, eventually, prey. In the world of the Hins, he seeks in vain the human soul, which prevents him from ever connecting to the Hins' communal truth, the kazo, in which mathematics is implicit. Unsuccessful in penetrating the truth of that society, he tries his luck in the world of the detested minority Behins, who live walled off from the rest of the phalanstery. Gulliver comes gradually to realize that the Behins' total disregard of what 'every British schoolboy knows to be true' about mathematical concepts results in a violent, dark world indeed, a world in which there can never be unity built on shared understanding of the Good. In a shocking denouement, Gulliver approves of the Hins' total extermination of the Behins as unworthy of existence because of their disordered thinking but is then forced to flee from the Hins, having also been labelled, like the Behins, atavistic and unworthy of life.

The Plot

I. Among the Hins

The narrator, the coyly-named Gulliver, is a doctor in the British navy. While on maneuvers in the Indian Ocean, his ship is torpedoed. Finding himself still alive, he swims to the nearest shore. When he comes to, he finds himself in a wondrous land, with fine roads, beautiful promenades, identical concrete and glass houses, rice paddies and fields of vegetables and fruits. Starving, he is tempted to pick a ripe pear from a nearby tree but is conflicted, his British sense of propriety and property staying his hand temporarily. He is soon picked up by men in a silver car and undergoes a series of confusing interactions with the people. They have no concept of currency, they rarely speak, and both sexes, though different from the other, look identical. To his total humiliation, a woman pulls off his soaked pants in public and outfits him in new clothes. He is seen to by a doctor in a futuristic hospital with elements of what we might today call virtual reality. He is given a comfortable bed in one of the houses. Industries, farm machinery, and transportation are all run by electricity and hum along efficiently. Factories produce goods but nobody receives payment for labor, raw materials, or the finished product. Indeed, when Gulliver proffers notes and coins for services and food, he is met with blank stares. One man even pantomimes putting the coin in his mouth as if to show that the coin is not useful, even for eating. Goods lie stockpiled in warehouses for one and all and everyone takes as much as he or she wishes. No one owns anything except his own body.

At first Gulliver assumes that Kazohinia might be some sort of parliamentary democracy, given what he observes as the equality of all persons and the comfortable lifestyles. However, no government exists either to make or enforce law. The narrator is impressed by their unusual language which he finds to be designed quite rationally. He writes: "their words are extremely brief ... the character of the word can be established by considering its first letter ... all nouns begin with b such as ba and bola ... personal names commence with Z and attributes with k, while with initial vowels they indicate verbs. The face that the indicator of the character word stands in front makes speech more easily comprehensible as the listener's attention is better distributed within the word" [22, page 42].

Gulliver is assigned a mentor named Zatamon who does his best to explain to him the life of the Hins. Zatamon helps him to acquire a 'Belohin' ('below Hin') certificate which also allows him to ask questions of others. Hins themselves speak only when absolutely necessary and consider that those who speak without a need to be 'kazi' (crazy). To his comments and questions to the inhabitants Gulliver either receives silence or something so cryptic he cannot process it. When he questions why the Hins were not suspicious that people would take the streetcar without paying and ride around aimlessly, a Hin replies, "That would be kazi. Why would anyone do that when everyone has the opportunity to spend his time in a useful occupation?" [22, page 53]

At first Gulliver believes that the Hins are all generous and good people, albeit silent and diffident. Yet, after more exploration and questioning, he finds that the Hins have no 'soul' — they are completely materialist. "I may say it was strange to my European eyes, seeing this society where every member was rich without having a single penny. As if the whole society had formed a single household within which there were no financial problems, no written regulations, no prohibited areas and no work status problems, but where the members of the family went about freely, helping each other with the housework, and helping themselves from a dish set in the middle of the table. ... at the same time everyone was a stranger; not a single greeting was to be heard. Each person simply did not exist for the other." [22, page 61] Yet, each person is perfectly content.

Only that which is real exists for the Hins. Hence there is no history, religion, nor art, among other intangible facets of human life. Photography, on the other hand, is admired because, in their view, that portrays reality.

They have neither pleasant nor unpleasant emotions; no hatred or jealousy but no love, surprise or joy either. Gulliver tries to explain to Zatamon the fullness of life back at home, with its love affairs, Christmastime gift-giving, charity, Jesus, and the cherished nuclear family. To this Zatamon replies: "Why should a wife or lover be valued above the merit of her existence when every woman has the same organs; and as far as I can see you make a distinction among children, according to whether or not they originate from yourselves; whereas those children who came from the seed of others also exist. You however, call the former your own — although every person belongs to himself, as his life was born to him and not to the father. And for those children you buy gifts at Christmas, but for the others, nothing." [22, page 82] Things begin to unravel the more that he questions and observes. Gulliver is horrified when he sees at the hospital technicians removing the still useable organs from people who, having been deemed beyond medical help, have either been allowed to die or assisted medically on their last journey. Nothing is wasted and the bodies are unceremoniously incinerated. He thinks to himself that, in this society, the end of life is "[t]o die ... like a dog, to be processed" [22, page 157].

Stupefied by both the lack of the need to overcome even the smallest of obstacles in daily life and distraught by the lack of human warmth (which the Hins understand only as temperature), the narrator is increasingly disturbed. At one point, he even takes a car and crashes it just for the novelty of having something new happen in this monotonous, albeit perfect material world.

Gulliver finally lashes out at the woman, Zolema, with whom he is engaging in sex, when she reveals that she has been with many men in 'sex work.' He realizes that, despite his own possessive, romantic feelings for her, she feels nothing except physical satisfaction. He is merely a male body which she uses in an utilitarian way. This realization causes him to lash out by slapping her across the face. With this, he is brought to his lowest point psychologically, lamenting, "I was in a prison with closed walls, where I cried in vain but there was no understanding" [22, page 143].

To save his sanity and, heedless of the Hins' warning about the dangerous nature of the Behins, he resolves to scale the literal wall that separates the two populations. This despised Behin minority are sealed off from the Hins with a permanent barrier to avoid contact and contamination.

Upon first arriving there, Gulliver sees a man tapping out some tunes on glasses filled to different levels with water. His heart leaps for joy in the hope that he may find the kind of human interactions and nonmaterial experiences — such as music — that did not exist among the Hins. Yet, he is soon disabused of the notion that this society resembles anything of the civilization in which he has grown up. In fact, it is bedlam.

II. Among the Behins

Like the Hins, the Behins have unique words, many of them beginning with the letter b, such as 'bivak' and 'burhu.' Gulliver also acquires a mentor, Zemoeki, from among the Behins, just as he had been given one in the land of the Hins. Yet, things are quite different here. The Behins engage in many strange behaviors, such as greeting others with the words 'prick-pruck' and scratching their behinds. As Gulliver soon finds out, there is no connection between what is said and what is thought. Words have no connection to reality. The two groups of Behins, the kona and the kemon, engage in continual violence due to their offense at ill-spoken words or actions. As one Behin explains helpfully to Gulliver, "borema is a word for which, if directed at you, you are bound to stab him who says it" [22, page 177]. They have certain beliefs, but these can change in a moment, leading to many conflicts. Rules about what must be said and done change constantly, as in the conversation below between Gulliver and a man who dangles copper cubes on his legs.

> Gulliver: Tell me why the betik is interested in the growth of our noses.
>
> Cooper Cubes (a Behin): Not the betik but the elak betik.
>
> Gulliver: But you said betik.
>
> Copper Cubes: Yes, I did say that. But if you refer to him, you must call him the elak betik. [22, page 178]

According to Gulliver, Behins do not expect kindness and morality of each other but they do not mind, and even approve of both lying and being lied to. A superior concept called the 'grand boeto' exists but, Gulliver remarks, "nobody knew what it was" [22, page 208]. However, there is the 'systematic' study of it which is called 'boetology.'

Chair seats which have thorns placed on them are 'kipu,' which connotes approval, or at least so Gulliver surmises at first. Certain individuals must put yellow pebbles under their armpits for nourishment. Ramshackle houses are built of mud and wood. Yet, the Behins insist that their houses are built of iron and rock. They burn them down constantly and purposefully.

After a number of days among them and, unable to figure out, let along comply with all the rules of what must be said, not said, done and not done, Gulliver can no longer function, He has no place to sleep, no food, and is infected with lice and scabies. The Behins eventually charge him with the offense of having asked a woman for some food. For this he is to be burned at the stake. He is charged with many other offenses as well. "You incited against common sense!" "You claimed the circle was round!" "You slandered the spirituality giving betik!" "You fed a woman!" "You didn't feed a woman." [22, pages 312–313]

Just in the nick of time, cars containing the Hins arrive and employ nozzles spewing poison gas against the howling mob. The dead and the injured are taken back to the land of the Hins for treatment and processing. A grateful Gulliver now takes his place back in that now seemingly wonderful land from which he had so foolishly fled. "At night I retired to a soft bed — satisfied and clean, in a silent and electrically heated room. I may safely say it was the happiest day of my life" [22, page 316]. The Hins go back later to finish off the job, this time exterminating all the Behins for good.

Literature Review

Kazohinia is an almost unknown novel outside of Eastern Europe, although it has been available in English since 1975. Its author, Sándor Szathmári, lived through the wrenching 20$^{\text{th}}$ century political and social upheavals of his homeland, Hungary [18]. His father had been an official in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the family moved several times during Sándor's childhood, exposing him to many different language groups within the Empire. The peace of WWI, which was brought about in part through the Treaty of Trianon, meant that his homeland region became suddenly part of Romania. As a result of the treaty, which reduced drastically the size of Hungary, Hungarians like the Szathmáris found themselves a disliked minority in Romania. Favoring ethnic Romanians, the government discriminated against ethnic Hungarians in employment and in education. However, despite the difficult conditions, the Szathmáris were still able to educate their children.

Excelling in mathematics as a child, Szathmári was trained as a mechanical engineer and worked in a number of industrial plants, including the Hungarian State Wagonworks. His political life ranged from participation as a young man in the Anti-Habsburg League to sympathies with Christian socialism to communism later in life, although he quit the Communist Party in 1948. He produced works in both Hungarian and Esperanto, the latter due to an interest which no doubt his childhood in a polyglot empire had inspired. In fact, during his lifetime he was the managing president of the Hungarian Esperanto Society. A trilogy of novels, of which *Kazohinia* is the third part, a mathematics textbook, short stories and an Esperantist translation of a children's book help comprise some of his literary oeuvre. Many of Szathmári's works, according to a reviewer, were futuristic and often "flail[ed] human society without ideological reserve" [24].

Kazohinia was written first in Hungarian in 1935, but also published in the latter 1950s in Esperanto and much later in English. As might be expected, much of the commentary on it is in Hungarian. Still varied analyses in English have been written.

Kazohinia has been described as a stern warning against communism, a portrait of "a technocratic, collective civilization, as terrible and unbearable to live in".[1] In a related vein, Zsolt Cziganyik asserts that the two societies, Hin and Behin, portray not communism but fascism and anarchism respectively, both powerful and popular ideologies of 1930s Europe [7]. Szathmári's experience as a Christian socialist between the two world wars may have led other critics to contend that the main theme of the work is the rejection of materialism as the basis for human existence. One American psychologist even attempts to analyze its two groups of divergent characters by comparing them with individuals with mental disorders, specifically autism and schizophrenia [4]. For this analyst, the Hins exhibit the characteristics of autism while the out-of-control Behins are classic schizophrenics.

Seeming to discount any deeper philosophical or political content, John Fekete classifies *Kazohinia* as a work of science fiction, linking it to other Hungarian works of science fiction of the 20th century; he calls it merely a "fantasy for its own sake" [11]. Szathmári himself claimed as his key influence

[1] According to Kerestury, this is a fundamental misinterpretation. See [14].

the science fiction writer Frigyes Karinthy who, according to Fekete, "opened an epoch of surrealist Science Fiction." Frigyes's affinities, he writes, were with "Swift and Wells, Capek and Pirandello, with Borges, Beckett, Grass and Vonnegut, Cortazar and Pynchon." Amazingly, some of the Hin technology that Szathmári invents presages developments of the latter 20^{th} century, attesting to his well-deserved status in this literary genre. These include glass doors that open automatically, organ transplants, an automated post office, medically-induced comas, driverless electric trains, an MRI body scanner, and moving sidewalks.

Is Kazohinia a Marxist Work?

Marxist literary theory, more recently called Critical Studies, emerges from basic Marxist theory. As developed by Marx and Engels, Marxist theory contends that societies consist of a base, constituted of the form of the means of production (feudalism, capitalism, etc.) and a superstructure, which is made up of all the elements of a society that the base determines [16]. These elements include: law, politics, religion, morality, family structure, technology and even the arts, including literature. Very simply, literary texts, like other elements of the superstructure, reflect the economic conditions in a given society. According to Marxist theory, humanity progresses through four distinct stages of history, class configuration and conflicts, beginning with feudalism, to capitalism, then socialism, and then the final stage, communism. This last stage, a worker's paradise, is one that presumptively will last indefinitely and is characterized by the humanity's conquest of resource scarcity and industrial overproduction, the creation of a common pool of capital and, importantly, the full equality and dignity of persons and their labor.

The first person to apply Marxist ideas to literary texts was none other than Leon Trotsky in his work, *Literature and Revolution* [23]. He was followed in this endeavor by many others, including Theodor Adorno [1], Georg Lukács [15], Max Horkheimer [13], Louis Althusser [2, 3, 6], and Terry Eagleton [9, 10], among others. The view that literature, including content and even style, was determined by economic arrangements at a given point in history is referred to as Reflectionism and is often associated with Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács. Traditional Marxists originally devalued literature, viewing it as a tool of class oppression and a type of elevated culture that did not reflect the lives or concerns of the working masses.

Walter Benjamin, later in the 20th century, added the insight that market forces influence directly what gets written and published [5]. He also maintained that literary texts have an identity of their own and, in addition to reflecting the base, can actually help to influence economic arrangements. This so-called Production theory elevated the importance of literature. What writers write and how they write it now became critically important and, in fact, encouraged, as long as it met Marxist objectives. Throughout much of the 20th century, Marxists preferred realist fiction, believing it the only valid form which could convey the true, human experience, or "man, nature, and history", as was sometimes said. In the Soviet era, this idea of socialist realism extended to other arts as well, including music, sculpture and painting. Abstract art, for example, was seen as subversive as it did not exalt the working class and was open to a variety of interpretations.

As a work of utopian science fiction, *Kazohinia* undoubtedly lacks the vaunted, realist approach. Yet, there is perhaps much within it that a Marxist literary critic might approve. As noted, those who hold this approach to examining literature are less interested in the aesthetics of a work than in the biases or consciousness of its author as shaped by history, economic class and culture. They are also keen to examine how well the creative works portray the perennial concerns of Marxists. Among these are class struggle and worker exploitation, historical progress, high versus low culture, colonialism and social, political, and economic inequalities. Viewed though a certain lens, Szathmári's work is not only an acceptable piece of fiction but one to be admired. First, Szathmári was a communist for much of his adult life, from around 1935 until becoming disillusioned with the party in 1948, long after he finished this work. The book, apparently acceptable to the censors, was reprinted several times during the Communist period in Hungary. Second, the contents of the work may be construed as portraying the 'heaven on earth' that Marxists believe is the inevitable destiny of mankind. In the land of the Hins, at least, class struggle has ceased, and the problems of excess production and worker exploitation have been vanquished. Men and women labor in useful occupations but enjoy many amenities and much leisure. Technology has freed humans from the drudgery and toil endured by their many generations of ancestors. Inequalities of any sort simply do not exist. Even gender equality in the enjoyment of sexual pleasure is the norm. Although children exist in this world, neither nuclear nor any other types of family rear them.

Government has faded away, having been made irrelevant and unnecessary by the instinctive, complete cooperation of individuals with one another. Religion, too, is gone as its comforts and promise of a better life in death hold no allure when life in Kazohinia is so fulfilling. No longer does any 'high' art, such as classical music and painting, hold a privileged nor, in fact, any place in this society. Yet, photography is exalted, because it captures only the images of reality. This most democratic of arts is accessible for anyone who sees. Szathmári also presents the inevitable clash of cultures with the most highly evolved Hins exterminating the Behins, thanks to their unified will and advanced technology. Admittedly, categorizing this collision of societies as one between recognizable economic classes is a stretch. Yet, the inexorable march of history is on the Hins' side. Even the colonizing nature of the British comes in for satiric ridicule, for good measure.

In sum, Marxist literary critics must concede that Szathmári ticks many of the thematic boxes that good literature must by portraying a seemingly flawless and, most importantly, attainable communist society. Intelligent readers should come away from the book with the stark realization that their own world of capitalism and liberal democracy is but a sham. As a reviewer in an iconic Marxist publication put it, the book forces readers "to confront the ways citizens accept as truth those precepts that define and enable the society's existence, even at the expense of the individual" [17]. But were these Szathmári's goals in writing the book? While it is true that Szathmári did once state that he viewed the Hins' world as a positive utopia [8], it is entirely possible that his aim as an author was more ambitious than simply providing a Marxist portrait of humanity's future.

A Platonic Analysis

Perhaps the most persuasive analysis of the author's aims comes from Hungarian critic Deszõ Kerestury [14]. Kerestury maintains that the author's intent was to take philosophical concepts and illustrate them through utopian satire. Indeed, in the novel, Szathmári's protagonist, in discussion with his mentor Zatamon, even lists a number of philosophers that he maintains have made Western and especially British life intellectually rich and enlightening, enabling man to progress towards "eternal peace" and a "just material life" [22, page 160]. These include Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Prudhomme, Marx, Lenin, and Adam Smith, among others. Although Kerestury is somewhat vague about identifying specific concepts, a close reading uncovers some of them. These concepts are, at their heart, Platonist.

Kerestury contends that Szathmári, like Plato, wanted to explore the possibility of knowing that which is eternally and unchangingly true, or what Plato termed the Good [14]. The Good is opposed to all on earth that is ephemeral and changeable, and man can never achieve true happiness (knowledge and truth) on earth until he comprehends that all that he sees and experiences in life is but a shadow. As Plato writes of the soul in *The Republic*, "When its gaze is fixed upon an object irradiated by truth and reality, the soul gains understanding and knowledge and is manifestly in possession of intelligence. But when it looks towards the twilight world of things that come into existence and pass away, its sight is dim and it has only opinions and beliefs which shift to and fro and now it seems like a thing that has no intelligence" [20, page 219].

That Szathmári was influenced by Platonist ideas would not be surprising. Writing between the wars, Hungarian philosophers were overwhelmingly Platonist [12]. Among them was the aforementioned Georg Lukács, a preeminent, influential Hungarian philosopher [19]. Szathmári would have surely known some of his work.

Lukács was a Marxist who, as noted, was very interested in studying literature from a Marxist perspective. More importantly for this discussion, he was also a Platonist who was known as an anti-psychologist. In this Platonist vein and as part of a critique of the modern world, Lukács posits that man's preoccupation with pleasing himself alone in physical, emotional, and faux spiritual ways impedes his true happiness. What is really needed is the abandonment of our quest to "be ourselves, to think of our individual needs and desires, which is always inherently subjective" [21]. Satisfying one's soul leads only to frustration and disconnection from true happiness. Rather, humans need to seek to connect to the "objectivity of cultural forms", these forms which approximate the Good. For this he looks back to the ideal of Homeric Greece, where he maintains that no gap existed between individual consciousness and objective meaning (form) in the world. Lukács does not deny that culture creates these forms and thus differs among societies, which would surely differentiate him from Plato, but holds that that culture is more than the sum of individual and group interactions in particular historical contexts. For Lukács, reason alone is insufficient to discover the Good. Rather, its retrieval is accomplished by seers, mystics, and poets, not scientists and intellectuals. Such people are better able to tap into the Good and promote and sustain the group consciousness of it.

One significant Platonic idea presented in the novel is the key role of the sun. As Plato writes in *The Republic*, it is the sun, the offspring of the Good, which makes all things visible in the world [20, page 219]. The sun brings them into existence but also gives them nourishment. In Christian theology, of course, God stands in for the sun, but Kazohinia is no Christian paradise. Gulliver's mentor, Zatamon, addresses and explains the fundamental role of the sun in the Hin world. "[I]t is a fact that cosmic rays emanate from the sun, while the brain functions as an antennae, and when affected by these rays it realizes its aim of furthering life, which you call natural instincts. In nature there is no contradiction, as everything that exists has developed by itself over millions of years and the rough edges of the components of the overall mechanism have been worn down to work together smoothly. So the sun's cosmic rays induce the functioning of natural life through the antennae that is the brain" [22, page 220]. He explains further that, in Hins, the brain is perfectly attuned to the sun but, in the Behins, the brains are "overexcited", oscillating so that the waves from the sun it receives are distorted. Thus the sun is used to explain the fact of existence of both populations, Hin and Behin. Yet, most importantly, it allows the Hin brain to connect to the ultimate Good, the reality of the kazo.

Likely drawing inspiration from both Plato and Lukács, Szathmári's creation of the kazo is significant. This kazo or "pure reason" by which the Hins have ordered their lives, and which the Behins lack, exemplifies the Eternal Good or Idea, or what Lukács would term the objective cultural form. Without the interaction of their brain with the Sun's rays, no Hin could ever experience the kazo. Just as Plato wrote that the sun makes all things in the visible world knowable, the Sun makes the kazo knowable. Although the narrator struggles to understand the kazo, his mentor Zatamon explains that it does not have to be understood — it just IS. It does not have to be taught. It is not as narrow as a set of norms or morals, as Gulliver first posits [22, page 48]. Says Zatamon: "the kazo is neither a law nor a custom but the reality of the universe itself, with which it is essentially identical. Everything that exists in the world exists in accordance with the kazo as the kazo is reality" [22, page 96]. Gulliver tries his best to explain it to his readers in his memoir: "kazo is pure reason that perceives with mathematical clarity, in a straight line, when and how it must act — so that the individual, through society, reaches the greatest possible wellbeing and comfort" [22, page 44].

Zatamon reminds him that the kazo a communal concept, not an individual one, and that “kazo-ness" is the same for each individual [22, page 45]. In its essence, the kazo allows the solution to the problem of alienation that the Greeks identified: how to make congruent that which both individuals and their communities want? How can one be a part of a community in which not only is one fully oneself but also fully integrated with and nurtured by others?

Kerestury's thesis gains more validity, if one examines the way in which Szathmári portrays Gulliver as an outsider both among the Hins as well as later among the Behins, primarily because he is so much “in his own head". Szathmári exposes the effect that this outsider status, caused by Gulliver's subjective psychological state, has on the ability of man to connect to the true idea of the Hins. Similarly, his frustrating search for the seemingly nonexistent Good among the Behins is also psychologically motivated and, ultimately, psychologically damaging to him. On the one hand, Gulliver rejects and thus cannot connect to the objective cultural form of the kazo, finding it produces a society that is soulless, materialist, and cold. He prefers his own subjective conceptions of beauty, art, history, love, and family, though they produce personal pain, heartbreak, and unrequited longings. On the other hand, in the world of the Behins he strives mightily, against all odds, to find at least one unifying principle of existence, some stable objectivity, among these strange people. Yet, no Behinian equivalent of the kazo exists. Gulliver finds only violence, irrationality, and the kipu.

When at first he hears about the kipu, Gulliver is hopeful that this might serve as the Behin equivalent of the kazo. A Behin explains the concept to him as “that which is pleasant” [22, page 232]. When Gulliver tries to get clarification by asking the Behins to define that which they find pleasant, the tautological and most unhelpful response is “that which is kipu” [22, page 232]. Upon hearing this response, Gulliver realizes that kipu is not a stable, objective Good that might in some way ground the Behins. What any individual Behin finds pleasant varies from moment to moment. Worse, often the most pleasant activity for each is engaging in violence with one another over some nonsensical breach of Behin spoken or behavioral etiquette. He comments that even those who profess to know that something is kipu even seconds later deny that it is. In the end, he concludes, the kipu is “accumulated idiocy" which, in turn, means eternal uncertainty [22, page 236].

Szathmári thus again uses the despondent Gulliver to address that essential tension of man, which Plato discerned so long ago — the desire of man to be both an individual who lives in the present, experiencing sensual pleasures and thinking his own thoughts but the opposite urge as well— to reach beyond the immediate to know, in common with his fellows, that which is unchangeable and eternal.

For Plato, of course, mathematics, especially geometry, partakes of the Good because mathematical objects are eternal and unchanging. As Plato writes in *The Republic*, "Geometry is knowledge of the eternally existent" [20, page 244]. Mathematics is not the Good itself, although the fact that numbers only be conceived of by pure thought is essential training for man's discovery of the Good, which requires thinking beyond that which one experiences in life on earth. "Mathematics will drag the prisoner out of the darkness to the point at which he can look at the shadows and reflections of the real things, but not yet at the things themselves," writes Plato [20, page 251]. Classicist Cornford also points out that Plato saw pure mathematics as a part of what he called Unity, one aspect of the Good [20, page 251]. In fact, training in mathematics is an essential part of the education of the Platonic Guardians who alone will be fit to rule in Plato's ideal state. These Guardians are the leaders who will know the Good and thus be able to lead the polis into a state in which no alienation exists between the people and the polis. This polis alone will be perfectly just, unlike any that are based on the leader's lack of knowledge of the Good. Ruled by wise Guardians, citizens individually will desire only that which will also be good for the polis.

To elucidate these ideas, Szathmári allows mathematics to play an important role in the story. Not surprisingly, in the world of the Hins, governed by true reason, mathematics is implicit in the kazo. As Zatamon, Gulliver's mentor, explains, "What exists needs no explanation. What sense would there be in explaining, for example, that the circle is round? And if a figure is described as round and then as square, this is possible only if the figure doesn't exist, because if it does exist it is either one or the other." [22, page 7] The Hin library, which contains no literature, art books, or history, contains mainly works about reality — "chemical constructional formulae and mathematical deductions" [22, page 71]. Zatamon again explains, "I repeat, the kazo does not have to be understood, for it is so by itself. One plus one equals two, and the expression 1 + 1= 5 is not only senseless but doesn't even exist.

It's kazi. The kazo is what exists and the kazi is what does not exist, and he who wants to live in a kazi manner is no longer alive." [22, page 331] When Gulliver argues that the Behin do not live by the kazo but are alive, Zatamon responds, "But in a disharmonious way. And disharmony eventually liquidates itself." Because they live according to the kazo, in which mathematics resides, the Hins live an ordered, egalitarian lifestyle. Cooperative behavior is innate, resources are freely available or produced as needed, and unhappiness, violence, and conflict are unknown. The Hin system produces a level of material comfort and security that would put even today's Scandinavian countries to shame. Yet, it is completely without the warmth of human connections.

Although at first Gulliver is hopeful that the Behin society will prove to more emotionally and spiritually rich than the Hins', he is soon disappointed. As he comments, in order to even attempt to fit in he had to learn the most important rule: to forget mathematics [22, page 241]. The Behins were crazy, he realizes, pushed, as he surmises, by some invisible force. Their mathematical absurdity is the most compelling evidence of their derangement [22, page 206]. They build houses only to tear them down again, they explain, "so that people should not be homeless" [22, page 207]. In the same vein, they throw away food, even though some are starving, because "there is too much of it". For Gulliver these phenomena not only horrify him but they also chillingly represent in its most blatant form the "mathematics" of the Behins [22, page 215].

He is appalled especially at the 'education' of the children, which he sees as the crippling of the mind which, in his view, wages war against both nature and mathematics. He observes a Behin teacher, the proko, telling his young charges that the circle has two foci and the sum of the radius vectors is constant, a patently untrue statement [22, page 222]. Gulliver is aghast at this. He knows from his own mathematical education that these are true of the ellipse, not the circle. The proko then adds another rule — that it is forbidden to say [of the circle] that the points of the circumference are at an equal distance from the center. Gulliver tries to insist that geometric realities remain unchanged no matter what, but the Behins scoff. "A pure kona, they insist, must not call the circle round." His Behin mentor, Zemoeki, explains that, if the masses learned that the circle is round, this would lead to the greatest upheaval.

Gulliver sums it up: "Simple mathematical and geometrical truths that are known and openly and proudly voiced by schoolchildren in country, these they denied because 'this is what must be said'." In the world of the Behin, believing replaces thinking, and believing in that which is false and nonsensical is the norm.

How the Behins abuse geometric figures to foment conflict is also disturbingly nonsensical to the narrator. In this society someone is called a "drawer of squares". The person who has this job is well paid and respected among the Behins. One of the two warring factions would surreptitiously draw squares on the walls or draw diameters into the circles, by which they would have "outraged" the circle [22, page 233]. But the kona square drawers are often beaten up by the other faction, the kemons, for this action. The kemons, in turn, venerate the circle drawers who sneak into the konas' neighborhoods, drawing circles on their walls and drawing diameters into the squares. In sum, the utter mangling of mathematical concepts and their provocative application attest to the idiocy of their society, the inconstancy of their reality, and their inability to partake of what Lukács calls "an objective cultural form". It is a society where "logic and self-evident truths were not accepted" [22, page 228]. Gulliver explains: "Each group has a set of monomanias and this is what on the surface distinguishes it from others. That is only the surface appearance. The truth is they do not fight for monomanias but concoct monomanias to fight for." [22, page 278] Worse still, this chaotic, warlike condition of all against all is permanent: "There was no field of life in which you could cut yourself of from their madness. They came after you until you did what they said." [22, page 231]

As if to stress the vitality to human life of a connection to others and, with and through them to the Good, the narrator feels its absence in the bedlam of the Behins. Just as he had experienced in the land of the Hins, the status of outsider engenders isolation and consequent self-loathing. This is so even in a society where people dangle copper cubes on their knees, drill holes in spoons and make imaginary knots in the air (in order to keep the knots off the seats of the chairs of course!). Even though Gulliver is aware that the Behins have no unifying principle of existence, such as the kazo provides for the Hins, this knowledge doesn't stop him from seeking one among the insanity. "Little by little I was consumed by the feeling that I was the one who was worth nothing and could not be used for anything.

There was something they all knew, and I was the only one unable to learn it, because I was without some particular faculty. They had a special feature that belonged only to them and that I did not possess, so that in this respect they were superior to me. Although inwardly I felt resistance against these idiocies, I believed more and more that this resistance served to conceal my own inadequacy and that it was in fact contempt for myself." [22, page 227] His desire to merge himself into the community is so strong that he admits there were times when he "yearned that my mind become deranged so that I would be similar to them and I should always know when white should be called black and when yellow" [22, page 300]. In short, here nothing stable exists with which a human can connect and find meaning in his/her life. In the land of the Behins the storm of passions and desires inside individual heads produces only chaos and violence. And yet Gulliver desires desperately to belong.

Of course, near the end, when he is rescued by the Hins and the Behins have been slain via poison gas, Gulliver finds himself agreeing with the decision to eliminate them. His entrenched British morality would never have countenanced this prior to his shipwreck. But his moral code is no longer applicable. He writes, "Something may have been gnawing at their nerves, making the living of life impossible for them. Their lives were without meaning, just like their words and struggles. Indeed, it was better this way and only this way did it make sense." [22, page 327] Their being without mathematics was symptomatic of this fundamental void, he realizes. Towards the end of his time there, he expresses his frustration with the fact that he could never make them understand that "two times two is four" [22, page 228]. Despite his British sense of fair play, towards the end of the bizarre experience Gulliver comes around to accept what has become the Hin majority's position. The kazo worldview is the only horizon in which the mass gassing of hundreds of human beings is seen as not only necessary but humane.

But again, in an ironic twist, after the narrator's narrow escape from the Behins and finally, the Behin holocaust, his Hin mentor shockingly turns the tables. While at first welcoming him, Zatamon's tone changes abruptly: "You also have come to us in vain. You are unaware of reason. You are an atavistic, transitional species that must at first drive itself out of the existing world so that the kazoo can assume harmonic form." [22, page 336]

The sane community, to which he has so recently and gratefully returned, now plans not only to deprive him of residence among this community but to extinguish him as unworthy of life.

The Return and Conclusion

Literally no room exists for Gulliver to live in either part of the phalanstery. He realizes immediately that his only recourse is to escape and go back to a place where he belongs, where he understands its premises, logic, mores, and culture. He constructs a boat, cadging the building supplies from various factories. Fortunately for him, it is easy to take the required materials right out from under the noses of the Hins as, having no sense of private property, they have no concept of theft. Once at sea, he is saved miraculously by a passing British naval ship. While at first the sailors appear to believe him and laugh uproariously at the 'bikbam', the 'ketni', and the 'kipu', among other absurdities, the story is so fantastic that the admiral suggests that his recollections are addled. The commanding officer cannot believe that "a bestial bloodshed' would ensue because of "soft-headed obsessions and geometrical figures" [22, page 349]. Nevertheless Gulliver's heroism and salvation are toasted by all. He recovers fairly well from his ordeal and returns home to continue to regale family and friends with the bizarre tale. The one persistent ailment which he attributes to his castaway experience is eye strain. He chides himself, a trained medical professional, for causing it. Perhaps "human eyes", he reflects, "were not created for looking into so intense a light" [22, page 349].

Is Gulliver's return to Britain really a satisfying solution? Hasn't the author cast doubt on the British world? Or, more disturbingly, on all of human civilization as we know it? Perhaps by learning about the light of the kazo-enabling sun and living in the society it produced, he has gained some inkling, however small, that life without such a unifying, communitarian principle is only a half-life. Though he himself was unable to connect with it due to his psychological resistance, he was exposed to a higher, eternal idea of the Good. This Good, the kazo of the Hins, made possible the fusion of individual and community interest and, in so doing, provided a truly just regime. Yet, for the rescued Gulliver, it's back to the endless quest for individual satisfaction of the soul through erotic love, art, music, and faith in a society in which the all and the one can never be united.

On the rescue ship, the admiral proclaims that "there was no more elevating awareness than to serve under the British flag, as this was what led to true perfection of the soul" [22, page 350]. But can this be true if Gulliver is returning to a lifetime of trying to possess happiness and to satisfy his unquenchable soul, a happiness that will elude him and all others endlessly? Isn't it a world with laws and government that exists to coerce people into doing that which they would otherwise not want to do in order to serve the interests of others? Gulliver is returning to a complex, highly-developed society that nevertheless is premised on the alienation between the individual and the group. Though the world has mathematics, unchanging and eternal, it is not at the core of the civilization as it had been in the land of the Hins. No kazo or its equivalent, which can reconcile that alienation, exists for modern man. Perhaps mathematics is merely an exercise for British schoolboys, nothing more. Once they are grown, they forget their sums and their geometry. Humans can neither conceive of nor order their lives according to some eternal perfection, a perfection of which mathematics is both a part and evidence.

Perhaps to hammer home this point, Szathmári shows us that plenty has changed for Gulliver when he arrives back in his homeland. Expecting to rejoin his family in his once idyllic, domestic life, anxious to devote his life to his wife and to his country, he is far from welcomed. His wife, thinking him dead at sea after such a long time, has taken up with another man and cashed out his insurance policy. She suggests to him that perhaps he ought to go back to Kazohinia and stay there until the thirty-year statute of limitations on insurance fraud has tolled. He demurs and "with my tactful and determined attitude also made 'the gigolo' leave my house" [22, page 352].

Acknowledgments. The author thanks Nicholas Mignanelli at The University of Miami for his insightful comments on this work.

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