

# Department of English

Raja N.L. Khan Women's College (Autonomous)

Midnapore, West Bengal

Course material on

## ***Gulliver's Travels***

For

**English Hons.**

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## *Gulliver's Travels*

AUTHOR: Jonathan Swift	YEAR PUBLISHED: 1726
GENRE: Novel, Satire	PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR: <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> features a first-person narrator in Gulliver. As the only dynamic character in the novel, Gulliver provides the lens through which Swift filters his insights regarding England.
ABOUT THE TITLE: <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> takes its name from the novel's protagonist and narrator, Lemuel Gulliver, a trained surgeon who travels by sea to a number of strange lands.	FOUR BOOKS/ PARTS: BOOK-1: A Voyage to Lilliput BOOK-2: A Voyage to Brobdingnag BOOK-3: A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbudrib, and Japan BOOK-4: A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms

### **Biography of Author**

Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin, Ireland, on November 30, 1667. Swift's father died before he was born, and his mother left the young Swift in the care of his uncle. The family was not wealthy, but it had good connections. Swift attended secondary school at Kilkenny College in Dublin, earning his bachelor's degree from Trinity College. He then moved to England, where he

attended Hertford College at Oxford and earned a master's degree that would make him eligible to join the clergy, a backup plan to his political aspirations.

Swift was assigned a post as a parish priest for the Church of Ireland in Derry when he was 32, but he continued to work and write actively in politics. His first work of satire, *A Tale of a Tub*, was published anonymously in 1704 and expanded in 1710. This publication earned him the scorn of Queen Anne of England, who misunderstood the work, even though Swift was active in the English Tory party (political conservatives whose policies Anne supported) throughout the early 1700s, dividing his time between London and Ireland. He became dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin in 1713, but in the following year, the queen died. George I took the throne, the Whig party dominated the English government, and these events effectively ended Swift's hopes for advancement in the church or government. He returned to Ireland and focused on his writing, pouring many of his political opinions and experiences into his best-known work, *Gulliver's Travels*.

When it was first published in 1726, *Gulliver's Travels* became an immediate success with adults and children, requiring multiple reprints in its first few months on the shelves.

Adventure stories were all the rage at the time, made popular by the publication of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* a few years earlier. Almost 300 years later, *Gulliver's Travels* remains Swift's most famous work and is a staple of the English literary canon. The novel has remained in print consistently since 1726 and has been adapted to picture books, comics, and a number of films, including a 2010 adaptation starring Jack Black. The 1965 Japanese adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon* places the title's character in outer space.

The novel also introduced new terms into the English language. Lilliputian, derived from the six-inch-tall Lilliputians Gulliver visits on the island of Lilliput, is used as an adjective to describe things that are very small, and Brobdingnagian, derived from the 60-foot-tall giants Gulliver visits in the country of Brobdingnag, is an adjective to describe something that is very large. Yahoo, derived from the term the Houyhnhnm horses use to describe humans, is perhaps better known as an exclamation or an Internet search engine, but it is also used as a noun for "a person who is very rude, loud, or stupid" according to Merriam-Webster.

In Ireland, Swift remained politically active, writing pamphlets supporting Irish causes, such as Irish independence from British colonialism. The most famous of these, "A Modest Proposal," published in 1729, brought attention to poverty in Ireland with its outrageous and sarcastic suggestion that starving Irish families sell their children as food for the wealthy English. This and other writings established Swift as an Irish political hero. Swift's commitment to social good extended beyond his death, through the money he donated for the establishment of a mental hospital in Dublin; St. Patrick's Hospital, known in its early days as "Dr. Swift's," remains in operation today.

In his personal life, Swift cultivated friendships with other prominent literary figures, including poet Alexander Pope and playwrights William Congreve and John Gay. His lifelong friendship with Esther Johnson, better known as Stella, has inspired scholarly and non-scholarly speculation over the years. When Swift died on October 19, 1745, he was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin next to Stella.

## **Contextual Matters:**

### **Satire**

Jonathan Swift built a strong reputation as a satirist with publications such as *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and the essay *A Modest Proposal* (1729). As a genre, satire dates back at least as far as ancient Greece. The term is often confused with comedy. While satire can include humorous elements, it does not necessarily have to be funny. Rather, the term refers to a text that uses literary techniques to provide criticism of political and cultural practices in a society. Common techniques used in satire include parody, or imitation of another source, usually the target of the satire's criticism; hyperbole or exaggeration to highlight absurdity; understatement, which minimizes an issue to point out absurdity; irony, which emphasizes the gap between intent and reality; and sarcasm, which uses a biting tone to express that the intended meaning of words may differ from what is actually said.

*Gulliver's Travels* contains humorous moments, most memorably those related to bodies and bodily functions, but its criticism reaches across a number of topics and uses a number of other techniques. For example, portrayals of ruthless and self-centered monarchs in *Gulliver's Travels* use parody to address the chaos of English government during the 1700s. Intellectuals whose thoughts and experiments divorce them from reality illustrate the irony of academic studies during the 1700s, which provided some theoretical benefit but little practicality. Each society Gulliver encounters adheres to a different moral code, providing ample basis for comparison with English morality and its strengths and shortcomings. *Gulliver's Travels* also

addresses issues related to gender roles, war, religion, history, and literature itself.

While effective satire addresses issues specific to a particular time and place, the use of literature as the means of conveying criticism creates the potential for universal resonance. *Gulliver's Travels* directly criticizes the social and political problems of 18th-century England, but the novel has remained popular and relevant because so many of the issues it addresses—government corruption, needless war, academic ignorance—also remain relevant.

### **Historical Influences**

*Gulliver's Travels* contains several examples of the tyrannies of monarchs and other leaders. Many of these examples reference the English monarchy of the 1600s and 1700s. The Anglo-Irish Swift saw how English oppression affected lives in his home country, and he was driven from Ireland to England by the violence that erupted after the Catholic King James II was deposed (and fled to Ireland) and replaced with the Protestant William of Orange. Armed conflicts erupted between the Jacobites, who supported James II, and the Orangemen, who supported William. But these conflicts were simply the latest wave in the battle between Catholics and Protestants that had been raging since Henry VIII's break with the church in 1534. *Gulliver's Travels* makes repeated reference to the absurdity of religious conflict between Christian factions.

Likewise, conflicts between the Whig and Tory parties in English government in the early 1700s affected Swift's own career aspirations. He rose to the rank of Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, but no higher. The Whigs and Tories attacked each other through a series of infighting, double-dealing, and treachery that inspired much of the criticism in the novel of governments mired in their own corruption, unable to serve the common good.

The novel also takes aim at the burgeoning expansion of scientific and mathematical inquiry, largely inspired by the work and writings of Swift's contemporary, Sir Isaac Newton, some of which Swift took more direct issue with in his other writings. Swift also references the creation of the Royal Society in London in the 1660s, criticizing facile learning and abstractionism, leading to incomplete knowledge as a danger to society. Beginning with the Age of Discovery at the end of the 15th century, Europeans who traveled to unfamiliar worlds frequently wrote accounts of their experiences, called travel narratives; these were not always accurate and often contained grossly exaggerated stories about the strange people and beings that travelers encountered. The fantastic beings Gulliver meets on his voyages simultaneously reference and mock these travel narratives.

## ***Gulliver's Travels***

### **Chapter Summaries**

#### **Part 1, Chapter 1**

##### **Summary**

Mr. Lemuel Gulliver, the narrator of *Gulliver's Travels*, describes his career, education, and family. Gulliver is a surgeon in London. He has always wanted to travel, however, and becomes a surgeon traveling aboard different merchant ships. During this time, he reads extensively and learns many new languages.

Gulliver grows tired of sea travel. He takes a job on the Antelope, anticipating it will be his final voyage. But a violent storm causes the Antelope to crash into a rock. As the sole survivor of the wreck, Gulliver swims to safety, landing on the island of Lilliput and falls asleep. When he wakes, his body has

been tethered to the beach by the island's six-inch-tall residents, the Lilliputians. The Lilliputians climb on Gulliver and shoot tiny arrows at him. Gulliver could escape, but he is impressed by his captors' bravery and remains still. The Lilliputians bring Gulliver a meal, including a drugged drink that puts him to sleep, and transport his body on an "engine" (a giant cart) to meet the emperor. Gulliver is chained to an abandoned temple, which is the only building large enough to hold him.

### **Analysis**

Gulliver's wanderlust speaks to both the spirit of exploration and colonization that continued to dominate European culture in the early 18th century, following the "Age of Discovery," in which Europeans traveled to Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Middle East. Gulliver's desires also resonate with the type of adventure novel that had become popular around the time of publication; the shipwreck references Robinson Crusoe, the most famous of these novels. Gulliver feels no moral conflict about leaving his wife and his business in London to pursue his travels. His decision reflects a sense of opportunity, because his business on land is failing.

Although he planned his journey on the Antelope as his last, Gulliver expresses no regret about being stranded on Lilliput. Instead, he seems to relish the adventure and expresses curiosity and goodwill toward his captors, even though they have injured and restrained him. Having few alternatives—he has no boat in which to escape the island and, although he knows he could crush the Lilliputians, also acknowledges their greater numbers as a threat to his safety—he chooses to make the best of the situation.



## **Part 1, Chapter 2**

### **Summary**

On his first morning in the temple, Gulliver wakes up in chains, stands up, and admires the countryside. He relieves himself inside the building but feels guilty for doing so. He resolves to make his morning duties outside, away from the temple, so servants can carry away his waste.

The emperor arrives at the temple on horseback and speaks, but Gulliver cannot understand him. The emperor leaves, placing Gulliver under the watch of his guards, some of whom attack Gulliver. As punishment, they are given to Gulliver. He pretends to eat one soldier to scare the men, but he does not hurt them and gently releases them.

Gulliver's mercy impresses the emperor's court. He agrees to give Gulliver meals, servants, and a tutor to teach him the Lilliputian language. Gulliver learns quickly and asks to be free. The emperor refuses Gulliver's freedom but favors giving Gulliver accommodations. Gulliver cooperates with the emperor's order to search Gulliver for weapons. The emperor does not recognize Gulliver's pistol, so Gulliver demonstrates its function by firing into the air. Two officers make a detailed inventory of Gulliver's pockets. They allow Gulliver to keep most of his things, but he surrenders a knife, a razor, and the pistol.

### **Analysis**

Gulliver takes pains to describe the full state of his desperation to relieve himself as an explanation for his decision to do so inside his "house." The detail of his embarrassment demonstrates Gulliver's desire to appear civilized, both to the reader and to the Lilliputians; he wants to make a good impression, which is presumably why he did not go outdoors in the first place. Gulliver

does not acknowledge this directly, but it is clear the Lilliputians left him with no instructions or plans for dealing with his excrement. As satire, this incident highlights the way governments fail to deal with the unintended consequences of decisions, in this case the decision to keep Gulliver in chains in the temple. They have to clean up a literal mess because they did not anticipate it, and only after the worst has happened do they form a plan to deal with this problem.

Gulliver's facility with languages reveals his intelligence, and his treatment of the six guards who attack him reveals his gentle nature. He could not have known the decision to show the offending guards leniency would curry favor with the emperor. He does not know the Lilliputians well enough at this point to know he might not be punished for showing them mercy. His decision to let the men go is not a calculated move, but the act of a man who refuses to exploit the weakness of others. In contrast, the Lilliputians, with their searching of Gulliver's pockets and continued resistance to granting Gulliver's freedom, appear all too willing to exploit weakness—even though Gulliver's weakness is artificially imposed—in others.

### **Part 1, Chapter 3**

#### **Summary**

The Lilliputians begin to like and trust Gulliver. The emperor entertains Gulliver by showing him the rope-dancers, commoners who seek government jobs. They must dance on a rope 12 inches above the ground. Whoever jumps highest while performing wins the job. From time to time, current government officials must rope dance to show that they have not become complacent in their positions.

The emperor shows Gulliver another game in which he holds out a stick and government candidates either leap over or crawl under it. The top three

candidates who jump and crawl the longest are given special silks to wear around their waists. Gulliver creates a new way to entertain the emperor. He builds a platform out of his handkerchief and sticks. The emperor's troops train and perform mock battles on the platform until a horse rips a hole through the handkerchief and gets hurt. Gulliver decides the game might be too dangerous for the Lilliputians.

The Lilliputians find a giant black object on shore. Gulliver realizes the object is his hat, and it is returned to him in good shape. Two days later, the emperor asks Gulliver to wear the hat and stand like a giant statue so that the Lilliputian army can march beneath him. Gulliver is granted his freedom, but he has to follow certain conditions, including the following: he is forbidden to leave the island without permission; he must be an ally to the Lilliputians in wars; and he must help with construction projects.

### **Analysis**

The means by which government jobs are assigned and retained—through a series of dangerous physical challenges—reveals two problems with the Lilliputian government. The first problem is the seemingly arbitrary method used to assign such positions. The ability to walk on a tightrope appears to have little to do with character, ability, or other qualifications that might be useful in a government position. The task, however, symbolizes the balancing act government officials must perform to please those who employ them, whether that be satisfying the whims of a monarch or the desires of a fickle voting public.

The second problem in this system is the emperor's apparent lack of concern for the safety of the commoners seeking jobs in his government, or those already in his employ. The dangers of rope dancing—somewhat high off the ground for a six-inch Lilliputian—are not mortal, but it does pose the

potential for injury. The emperor does not seem to consider this or show any care about it if he does, but he does show the indifference those in positions of authority have for those below them in the hierarchy. Gulliver's decision to stop performances on his handkerchief platform after the horse is injured shows he has greater empathy for others than the Lilliputian government.

The terms of Gulliver's release also reveal the emperor's selfinterest. He grants Gulliver freedom of movement, but these terms reveal that the emperor has specific tasks in mind for Gulliver. Certainly, given the amount of food Gulliver consumes, he should be expected to earn his keep, but this could be adequately accomplished through Gulliver's assistance with construction and delivery of messages exclusively. The emperor, however, also wants to use Gulliver as a weapon against his enemies, showing little regard for Gulliver's safety or any possible moral objections to using his might against others.

## **Part 1, Chapter 4**

### **Summary**

Gulliver visits the Lilliputian capital city of Mildendo and the emperor's palace. He is later visited by Reldresal, an official in the Lilliputian government. Reldresal tells Gulliver about the religious and political division that has plagued Lilliput for years, which stems from a disagreement over the correct way to break an egg. According to a Lilliputian philosopher, "all true believers break their eggs at the convenient end." Tradition dictates that eggs are to be cracked on their bigger ends. But a Lilliputian emperor passed a law stating eggs could be cracked only on their smaller ends. This outraged "Big-endians" in Lilliput. Some rebelled and were executed. Others fled to the kingdom of Blefuscu, which led to a series of wars between Blefuscu and Lilliput. Gulliver learns that rebel Big-endians remain in Lilliput and another war is brewing. He agrees to help defend Lilliput against its enemies.

## **Analysis**

The controversy over which end of the egg is most favorable for breaking is a direct reflection of the conflicts between Catholic and Protestant groups in England that, at the time of the novel's publication, had destabilized the English government for well over a century. The tradition of cracking eggs at the bigger end is analogous to the traditional Christian teachings of Catholicism. The emperor who passed the law to crack eggs at the smaller end appears to be a reference to Henry VIII's literal break with the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Church of England. The subsequent outrage and rebellion can be traced in English history, and the scenario sets up Blefuscu as a symbol of France, a country to which many persecuted Catholics fled. This highlights how the conflict between two factions of the same religion were based on ultimately arbitrary and insignificant differences, given the number of lives lost as a result. It is noteworthy that, while Gulliver is hesitant to get involved with party disputes and agrees to help only in gratitude to the emperor, he also does not appear to find fault with the absurd egg-cracking conflict.

## **Part 1, Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

Gulliver honors his promise to defend Lilliput from a Blefuscu attack. He collects the entire Blefuscu naval fleet and brings it back to Lilliput. The emperor is pleased, and gives Gulliver the title of *nardac*, the highest honor in the kingdom. The emperor makes an ambitious plan to destroy Blefuscu, overtake its government, and execute any Big-endians. Gulliver disagrees with the emperor, however, as he thinks it is wrong to force people into slavery. This upsets the emperor and other officials in the government, so Gulliver falls out

of favor with the emperor. Three weeks later Lilliput makes a peace treaty with Blefuscu. Gulliver asks the emperor for permission to visit Blefuscu in the future. The emperor agrees but remains cold toward Gulliver.

A fire breaks out in the empress's apartment. Gulliver extinguishes the fire by relieving himself on the building. This disgusts the empress, as public urination is illegal in Lilliput. She vows revenge on Gulliver.

### **Analysis**

Gulliver fulfills his part of the agreement he has made with the Lilliputians by aiding in their defense and taking Blefuscu's fleet. The emperor, however, reveals his true intention to use Gulliver as a weapon against Blefuscu when he asks Gulliver to assist him in overthrowing Blefuscu and enslaving its people. Defense is not sufficient for the emperor; he wants to conquer. To Gulliver, this request is quite different from the agreement he entered into, and his moral objections to it cause him to lose favor at court. As shown in earlier chapters, the emperor places highest value on obedience, so Gulliver's resistance represents a great betrayal.

Gulliver further distances himself from the court, unwittingly, in his role as a fire extinguisher. In relating the story of the fire, Gulliver is clear that he had no other methods available. He left his coat at home in his hurry to assist, and the fire was spreading too quickly to summon sufficient water to extinguish the blaze. The empress's disgust is understandable, but her quarters would have been lost to fire anyway. The emperor and empress placed Gulliver in an impossible situation, as he would have been equally culpable had he allowed the fire to burn and consume the entire palace. The incident highlights the shortsightedness of leaders and their disregard of the big picture based on personal preferences and whims. It also draws attention to the randomness of "civilized" convention: Gulliver has saved the palace and

perhaps the lives of some of the Lilliputians, but the much higher good of his action is dwarfed by the Lilliputian disgust for bodily functions.

## **Part 1, Chapter 6**

### **Summary**

In Lilliput, everything exists in proportion to the Lilliputians, including their eyesight. Lilliputians are clearly able to see objects that are close but cannot see far away. Their writing system consists of words moving on a diagonal from corner to corner of the page, rather than left to right or up and down. Gulliver notes that this is like "ladies in England."

In the Lilliputian legal system, those found guilty of crimes are punished severely. Fraud and treason are the worst crimes one can commit. Lilliputians are also rewarded for law-abiding behavior. Government officials are chosen based on their morals, not abilities. Individuals who do not believe in Divine Providence—the Lilliputian idea of god—cannot hold office.

Parents in Lilliput do not rear their own children but send them to what they call public nurseries. These nurseries are schools divided by class and by gender. Parents are allowed to visit children at school twice a year, but they are not allowed to give gifts or show affection during these visits. Middle-class children are taught trades, and the lowest classes do not attend school at all. Girls are educated but are also prepared to become "reasonable and agreeable" wives.

Gulliver is invited to have dinner with the emperor. Flimnap, the royal treasurer, also attends the dinner. Flimnap dislikes Gulliver and complains that feeding and housing Gulliver is bankrupting the kingdom. Flimnap also accuses Gulliver of having a secret affair with his wife. Gulliver denies these accusations.

## **Analysis**

The description of the Lilliputians makes them literally shortsighted, able to see what is near but not what is far away. In the same way, these small creatures have a sense of their own importance that is disproportionate to their place in the world at large, a characteristic of many people who live in isolation or have great power in a small sphere of influence. The description of their writing, and the comparison to "ladies in England," also seems to minimize their scholarly accomplishments.

Indeed, the Lilliputians are not especially concerned with scholarly accomplishment, as indicated by the high premium they place on moral qualifications over other abilities. Both fraud and ingratitude are capital offenses in their legal system, and the liberal use of capital punishment still seems harsh even on balance with the rewards offered to law-abiding citizens. The educational system likewise hinges on the teaching of strong principles, especially in the upper classes, rather than academics.

Gulliver's own sense of honor emerges again when he exonerates the treasurer's wife from rumors of an affair. The rumor reflects how much weight gossip and hearsay can have at court and in determining public reputation. It illustrates how readily the public, or at least the court, will accept a negative rumor about anyone whose popularity is declining, no matter how absurd. An affair or "violent affection for [Gulliver's] person" on the part of a Lilliputian seems implausible, and a physical relationship would be impossible, but this does not stop the rumor mill from turning.



## **Part 1, Chapter 7**

### **Summary**

A government official tells Gulliver that members of the council, including Flimnap, have charged Gulliver with treason. The charges include public urination, refusing to destroy Blefuscu, and aiding the emperor of Blefuscu. The official says that Flimnap and other leaders want Gulliver to be executed for his crimes, but Reldresal, Gulliver's friend, has convinced the officials to impose a more lenient sentence: Gulliver is to be blinded and slowly starved to death, after which his skeleton will remain as a monument. Gulliver learns his sentence will be carried out in three days. He leaves Lilliput for Blefuscu, where its people welcome him.

### **Analysis**

Gulliver's "lenient" punishment is to be blinded and starved to death, which is far crueler than an execution. The people of Lilliput seem to know this, too, as Gulliver observes nothing could "terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his majesty's mercy; because it was observed, that the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent." While Reldresal may genuinely believe he is doing Gulliver a favor, the characteristic shortsightedness of Lilliputians—and governments in general—is again on display in his plea for "leniency." The Lilliputian belief that their emperor is merciful when in reality a more "merciful" punishment creates greater suffering for an alleged offender reveals how systems of crime and punishment may not account for true justice. Just as the decision to indict Gulliver for treason is based on the biases and preferences of a few of his enemies, accusations and punishments can be issued at will by the powerful.

## **Part 1, Chapter 8**

### **Summary**

After three days on Blefuscu, Gulliver spies an overturned boat at sea. With the help of Blefuscu's navy, he retrieves the ship and brings it to shore for repairs. Meanwhile, Gulliver receives orders to return to Lilliput for his punishment. The emperor of Blefuscu wants him to stay and help defend against a Lilliputian attack, but Gulliver decides to leave for home. Both Lilliput and Blefuscu find Gulliver's leaving an agreeable solution to their problems. He takes with him food, drink, and some tiny animals from Blefuscu. After two days at sea, he is picked up by a British vessel and returns to his family in England.

### **Analysis**

After his experience in Lilliput, Gulliver is reluctant to accept protection from the monarch of Blefuscu, even though it is offered to him. Gulliver resolves "never more to put any confidence in princes or ministers, where I could possibly avoid it" even though he believes the offer of protection is sincere. This statement represents commentary of governments as ultimately unreliable, which indicates a need for individual self reliance. The true intention of the Lilliputian allegations against Gulliver becomes clear in their response to his decision to leave the area: they agree to any course of action that absolves them from paying for his upkeep any longer.

## **Part 2, Chapter 1**

### **Summary**

After two months at home, Gulliver grows restless and returns to sea aboard the *Adventure*. A massive storm strikes, forcing the ship off its course. When the men spot an island in the distance, the captain sends a crew of 12 men,

including Gulliver, to search for fresh water. The island is called Brobdingnag. Once on land, Gulliver wanders off on his own. He returns to the crew and sees the men rowing frantically back to the ship as a giant creature chases them in the water.

Gulliver walks through the countryside, finding giant blades of grass and huge rows of corn. He sees several of the giants cutting down crops with scythes. Eventually, Gulliver is spotted by one of the "monsters," who are actually giant humans. A giant farmer inspects Gulliver closely and takes him home. Gulliver and the farmer's family share a meal, during which Gulliver notes the facial imperfections visible on the giants. After dinner, Gulliver sleeps in the bed of the farmer's wife. Two rats attack him, but Gulliver kills one and wounds the other with his sword.

### **Analysis**

For the first time in his journeys, Gulliver expresses regret for leaving home for another voyage when he discovers he has been stranded by his panicked crewmates in a land filled with giants. He fears for his life as he hides from the farm workers' scythes, and he comes to a new understanding of the Lilliputians' fear of his own bulk relative to theirs. The experience of Lilliput is now reversed for Gulliver, making him vulnerable and fearful as the Lilliputians must have been when they discovered a giant in their midst. Even after the farmer takes Gulliver home and provides him dinner with the family, Gulliver's experience is one of ongoing anxiety. He fears falling from the table, being attacked by the family cat, or becoming a plaything of the family's young son. Even in the farmer's wife's bed, he isn't safe and is forced to defend himself against rats the size of large dogs. Gulliver's transition from Lilliput to Brobdingnag reveals how dominance and safety are relative concepts, based on the place in the world one occupies and subject to change as that world changes.

## **Part 2, Chapter 2**

### **Summary**

The farmer's nine-year-old daughter is fond of Gulliver and cares for him. She sews him clothing, and teaches him the native language. Gulliver calls her Glumdalclitch, which means "little nurse."

The farmer's neighbors hear about Gulliver and want to see him. One of the neighbors suggests that the farmer should charge people to see Gulliver. Glumdalclitch doesn't like this plan, as she fears someone might hurt Gulliver or take him away. The next day, the farmer puts Gulliver on display at an inn. Many people come to see Gulliver. Realizing how profitable Gulliver can be, the farmer decides to take him on a tour of other cities. The farmer, Gulliver, and Glumdalclitch travel to Lorbrulgrud where Gulliver makes 10 public appearances in a single day.

### **Analysis**

Given the farmer's example, one thing the Brobdingnagians have in common with the Lilliputians is a drive to exploit the power they have over others for personal gain. In Lilliput, this kind of exploitation was generally illustrated in the ruling class, but here the drive to abuse power appears in a common farmer. This temptation to abuse power is part of human nature, regardless of class, social standing, size, or even personality. The farmer is initially kind to Gulliver for his own sake, but once he sees a profit to be made, his attitude toward Gulliver changes. He no longer cares about Gulliver's wellbeing; only what Gulliver can do for him. Glumdalclitch, however, shows that the abuse of power is not necessarily a given. She may have more control over Gulliver's life than any other character in Brobdingnag, but she is concerned only about his welfare.

## **Part 2, Chapter 3**

### **Summary**

Gulliver is made to perform for crowds to the point of exhaustion. He loses a lot of weight and is in poor health. The farmer takes Gulliver to visit the queen, who is delighted by his performance and wants to buy Gulliver. The farmer sells him for 1,000 pieces of gold. As part of the sale, Glumdalclitch is made part of the queen's court so she can remain with Gulliver. The queen takes Gulliver to meet the king, who thinks Gulliver is some sort of machine. Gulliver tells the king how he came to the land and that he comes from a land where everything is proportioned to his own size.

The queen has an apartment and fine clothes made for Gulliver. The queen likes Gulliver immensely and has him dine with her. The king joins them for dinner one night and asks about Europe. Gulliver tells him about customs, laws, and religion in England. The king laughs at Gulliver's stories. Gulliver feels his country has been slighted but does not argue with the king. The queen's dwarf grows jealous that Gulliver has become a court favorite and bullies him at meals.

### **Analysis**

When the king meets Gulliver, he thinks Gulliver is some kind of mechanical toy, and in some ways this is a fitting description of Gulliver's life in Brobdingnag. He is a toy for these large creatures. The farmer treats Gulliver more as a machine than as a living creature when he demands Gulliver perform for the public. He is sold to the queen as a piece of property only because the farmer thinks Gulliver will die soon, so he wants to make a final profit from Gulliver. Although Glumdalclitch and the queen treat Gulliver kindly and see to his every need, he is more like a doll to them than a human.

Even after Gulliver has proven to the king that he is, indeed, a living man with the capacity to think and speak, the king treats him as a novelty and cannot open his mind to entertain the possibility that Gulliver comes from a civilized country with its own laws, philosophies, and advancements, however different they may be from Brobdingnag's customs. In 18th-century Europe, it was common to go on tour with people from faraway places. These people, and their explanations of their cultures and customs, were treated as novel amusements rather than taken as seriously as the Europeans took themselves. Swift draws on this custom in his representation of Gulliver's life in Brobdingnag.

## **Part 2, Chapter 4**

### **Summary**

Gulliver describes Brobdingnag as a peninsula isolated from the rest of the continent by mountains. The city of Lorbrulgrud, and the royal palace are predictably enormous but also beautiful in their way. Gulliver travels inside a specially made box placed inside the royal coach. On one trip with Glumdalclitch, beggars approach the royal coach. Gulliver describes their shabby appearances, down to the lice on their clothes, which he finds revolting. The chapter ends with a description of the royal kitchen.

### **Analysis**

Brobdingnag's isolation from the rest of the world cannot be overstated. The country is presumably attached to North America, but the giants have no contact with other peoples, and they do not travel on the sea. This isolation accounts for the king's limited point of view when Gulliver describes life in Europe. In the same way, Gulliver's own experience is limited and isolated, as he sees the world from the confines of his box. Like Brobdingnag itself, the box is comfortable for its inhabitant but allows for little direct experience with anything else.

## **Part 2, Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

Gulliver has several accidents that nearly kill him in Brobdingnag. The queen's dwarf drops a barrel of apples on him; he's nearly squashed in a hailstorm; the gardener's dog retrieves him in its mouth; a kite (bird of prey) almost carries him away in its talons; and he falls inside a molehill. The queen's maids of honor play with Gulliver as if he is a toy. The maids often strip naked in front of him and strip him naked as well. Gulliver is repulsed by their strong smell and the sight of their bare bodies. Gulliver is taken to witness the execution of a criminal. Normally, he is not interested in such spectacles, but he is curious to see an execution on a giant scale.

The queen has a rowboat and pool made for Gulliver's exercise and entertainment. A frog jumps into his pool and almost capsizes his boat, but Gulliver fights it away with his oars. A monkey gets loose in the palace, carries Gulliver to the roof, and feeds him like a baby. Gulliver almost chokes from the food. Glumdalclitch saves him in time and forces him to vomit. The king asks Gulliver what he would have done had a monkey attacked him in England. Gulliver says there are no monkeys there, but if a giant creature attacked he would use his sword. The king laughs at Gulliver's response. Glumdalclitch takes Gulliver to the countryside, where he walks knee-deep into a pile of cow dung. The story amuses members of the royal court.

### **Analysis**

The dangers Gulliver faces in Brobdingnag illustrate the vulnerabilities of the human condition and how easily human dignity can be lost. Even though the king and queen favor him, that favor cannot save Gulliver from the hazards of

nature, such as a dog's instinct to retrieve a small object, a bird of prey's instinct to catch small creatures, a weather event, or a monkey's instinct to parent its young. Royal favor cannot save Gulliver from the dwarf's jealousy or the maids' desire to treat Gulliver as a toy. Their favor and care cannot even prevent Gulliver from walking into his own accidents. The world is a dangerous place, and any protection derived from high-level associations is an illusion.

Paradoxically, while the king and queen favor Gulliver on a personal level, they too treat him as something of a joke. The entire court is amused by Gulliver's run-in with the cow dung, and the king refuses to accept the possibility of Gulliver being able to defend himself in his home environment. The king's power and isolation have closed his mind to seeing Gulliver from any point of view other than his own, even though the king has also seen Gulliver hold his own against all the attacks and dangers life in Brobdingnag has thrown his way. The king illustrates how powerful men can be inflexible in their thinking, even on trivial matters, because their personal experiences are likewise limited to their own spheres. Leaders may become more effective by broadening their experience and understanding of the world.

## **Part 2, Chapter 6**

### **Summary**

Gulliver fashions a comb from a piece of wood and pieces of the king's beard stubble. He weaves a chair from the queen's hair. He makes a purse from her hair as well, and gives it to Glumdalclitch with the queen's permission. Gulliver entertains the king by playing a spinet, or piano, for him. The spinet is large, so Gulliver can't press the keys, so he strikes them with giant sticks as he runs along the keyboard.

Gulliver explains the structure of English government to the king. The king asks him many questions about England's economy, politics, and society.



The king is surprised to hear about violent rebellions and revolutions in British history. From his conversation with Gulliver, the king concludes that the English must be "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

### **Analysis**

Gulliver's intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity are on full display as he crafts items that are useful to himself and others from the materials available to him. He also shows tremendous respect for his benefactors, refusing to sit in the chair he made from the queen's hair and asking permission to give the purse to Glumdalclitch. These activities also show Gulliver's desire to keep himself busy and do something useful with his time. Likewise, he demonstrates his resourcefulness alongside his musical talents when he devises a way to play the piano. In spite of these accomplishments and demonstrations, and a detailed understanding of English history and politics, the king continues to dismiss Gulliver's value as anything more than a novelty item. Gulliver even plays into this to a certain extent by producing miniature novelties for his "owners" and performing for them. When the king calls the English a "pernicious race of little odious vermin," he is saying this of Gulliver as well. Certainly Gulliver comes from a flawed society, but the king seems unwilling to recognize those flaws may be balanced by virtues, and he does not entertain the idea that Brobdingnag may have flaws of its own.

### **Part 2, Chapter 7**

#### **Summary**

Gulliver is upset that the king holds a low opinion of England. He fears his summary of England's history may have represented the country unfairly. Gulliver attempts to win the favor of the king by offering to teach him how to make gunpowder, but the king is horrified to hear of something so destructive

and commands Gulliver to never speak of it again. Gulliver explains that the king seems to know very little about politics and does not seem to respect the process or demands of dealing with other countries. He does describe Brobdingnag's militia, indicating that the country has had internal struggles in the past. Gulliver criticizes the education of people in Brobdingnag for being limited to only a few subjects, even though Gulliver reads books in the kingdom.

### **Analysis**

Gulliver naturally feels a need to defend his home country and seems nearly desperate to show the king that he comes from a civilized society. Gulliver also wants to show the king that he, and his background, can be of use to the king, so the king's horror at the suggestion of gunpowder is dispiriting. Brobdingnag's isolation comes into play as the king has no understanding of the political negotiations that take place between nations. The country's history of unrest comes from within. When Gulliver says that "the nobility often contending for power, the people for liberty, and the king for absolute dominion" led to three civil wars, it shows a need for the king to open his thinking about political processes, but the king dismisses these as well. The concept of voting, even in a limited sense, would threaten his "absolute dominion." Government in Brobdingnag is kept simple, with the laws short and never criticized, which further illustrates the narrowness of the king's and the people's thinking. All learning (even poetry and mathematics) is ultimately for practical use, and the Brobdingnagians are uninterested in philosophical or conceptual learning. Many societies—perhaps those of Europe included—can benefit from practicality, and Swift believed that Enlightenment philosophers were too deliberately obscure and theoretical in their thinking. But in Brobdingnag, the emphasis on practical knowledge is taken to an extreme, and ultimately impractical, level.

## **Part 2, Chapter 8**

### **Summary**

After two years in the kingdom, Gulliver hopes to leave but does not have the means. Gulliver goes with the king and queen to a royal estate near the sea. Gulliver wants to visit the ocean. Glumdalclitch carries Gulliver in his traveling box to the beach and leaves him in the care of a servant. A bird picks up the box while the servant is away and Gulliver is napping. The bird drops the box in the sea, and Gulliver is set adrift over the ocean. He worries for Glumdalclitch, knowing she will be punished for losing the queen's favorite pet.

After a few hours, Gulliver feels a tugging on his box. The box strikes the side of an English vessel, and the crew pulls Gulliver to safety. The captain speaks to Gulliver, but thinks him mad after hearing stories of Brobdingnag. Over dinner, the captain tells Gulliver how his "swimming house" was discovered at sea. The captain asks if Gulliver was a criminal exiled to death at sea. Gulliver shows the captain some items he has from his time in Brobdingnag, including a giant tooth that belonged to one of Glumdalclitch's men. The captain encourages Gulliver to write down his stories when he gets to land. Gulliver returns home to his family.

### **Analysis**

The same dangers of nature that have made life in Brobdingnag difficult and unsustainable for Gulliver become the means of his escape when his box is taken by a bird and dropped into the sea. While Gulliver appreciates the kind treatment he has received in Brobdingnag, he also knows this treatment has come at the expense of his humanity. When the king imagines capturing a ship and possibly finding a woman for Gulliver to breed with, Gulliver's feelings about his captivity become clear. He has no desire to procreate and have his

offspring suffer the same fate he has as, essentially, a caged pet. At the same time he desperately wants to live among people who are his equals.

Even though he craves the company of equals, when Gulliver is rescued, he finds those equals almost unreal to his sight. His perspective has changed during two years in Brobdingnag, so he imagines himself larger than he is and the other men on the rescue ship smaller than they are. Unlike Gulliver, these men have no fantastic experiences and know only regular-sized people. Gulliver's behavior is so odd, as are the circumstances of the rescue, that the captain's inquiry about Gulliver being a convicted criminal seems a natural one. Through the process of telling his story to the captain and offering proof of where he has been, Gulliver begins to regain the perspective on his own human world and recover from his captivity.

## **Themes**

### **Abuse of Power**

Gulliver encounters a number of monarchs and leaders, from tiny to giant, from practical to esoteric, and they all take advantage of their superior position in some way. They either demand absolute obedience from their subjects through humiliating rituals, as is the case with the king of Luggnagg who makes his subjects lick the floor, or they exhibit extreme incompetence, as is the case with the Lilliputian king who engages in an ill-conceived war with his neighbors. Even Houyhnhnms, whom Gulliver idealizes, exploit the lesser species of their island, the Yahoos, through extreme prejudice.

### **Cerebral versus Real World**

The cultures Gulliver encounters in his travels either take practicality to an extreme, rendering their practicality impractical, or focus on abstract ideas and

pure reason in ways that make life difficult, for their own people or for others. For example, the Laputans are the most scientifically and mathematically advanced culture Gulliver encounters, yet they are unable to craft a decent suit of clothes, and their knowledge of the universe causes them tremendous anxiety.

Likewise, the Houyhnhnms' focus on pure reason as the governing principle of their society causes them to miss out on some of the emotional experiences, love in particular, that give life meaning.

### **Society versus Individual**

All of the cultures in the countries Gulliver visits demand a certain level of conformity from their citizens, whether that means following the rules set up in the royal courts or adhering to broader social conventions. These rules often create problems for people who break them, or for those who want to break the conventions but feel pressure that prevents them from doing so. For example, Gulliver faces censure and an eventual death sentence in Lilliput because he breaks the rules of court by behaving sympathetically toward the enemy country's ambassadors. Although the Houyhnhnms do not have a royal hierarchy, the master's family faces pressure from friends and neighbors to exile Gulliver for being a Yahoo.

### **Perspective**

Nothing in the world of *Gulliver's Travels* is purely objective, not even the size and shape of human beings. These differences in perspective are made literal in the appearance of the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians, but each land Gulliver visits reveals a society firmly enmeshed in its own point of view with little interest in exploring alternatives. The Laputans see the universe only through the perspective of mathematical probability; the Houyhnhnms limit

their perspectives to cold reason, never emotion. All reality is filtered through the lens of each specific society, rendering all understanding of the world—even Gulliver's—totally subjective.

### **Motifs:**

#### **Bodies**

Variations in physical form are used to illustrate larger differences in cultural philosophy between the different nations Gulliver visits. Bodily functions and sickness, and how different cultures deal with these issues, also provide a telling glimpse at their ways of thinking.

#### **Language**

Gulliver has a great facility with languages, which serves him well as he visits new lands. The language barrier allows Gulliver and his hosts to discover one another more slowly and drives conflict, but the learning of languages also bridges the divides between cultures.

#### **Reversal**

Reversals of the normal order of things drive the changes in perspective that allow Gulliver to learn from his travel experiences and experience growth. Reversals are driven by differences in physical size, as in the lands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, and by intellectual differences, as seen in Laputa and Balnibarbi. Gulliver's time with the Houyhnhnm reverses the established order between man (Yahoo) and horse (Houyhnhnm).

***Suggested Reading***

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