**Plot Overview**

Gulliver’s Travels recounts the story of Lemuel Gulliver, a practical-minded Englishman trained as a surgeon who takes to the seas when his business fails. In a deadpan first-person narrative that rarely shows any signs of self-reflection or deep emotional response, Gulliver narrates the adventures that befall him on these travels.

Gulliver’s adventure in Lilliput begins when he wakes after his shipwreck to find himself bound by innumerable tiny threads and addressed by tiny captors who are in awe of him but fiercely protective of their kingdom. They are not afraid to use violence against Gulliver, though their arrows are little more than pinpricks. But overall, they are hospitable, risking famine in their land by feeding Gulliver, who consumes more food than a thousand Lilliputians combined could. Gulliver is taken into the capital city by a vast wagon the Lilliputians have specially built. He is presented to the emperor, who is entertained by Gulliver, just as Gulliver is flattered by the attention of royalty. Eventually Gulliver becomes a national resource, used by the army in its war against the people of Blefuscu, whom the Lilliputians hate for doctrinal differences concerning the proper way to crack eggs. But things change when Gulliver is convicted of treason for putting out a fire in the royal palace with his urine and is condemned to be shot in the eyes and starved to death. Gulliver escapes to Blefuscu, where he is able to repair a boat he finds and set sail for England.

After staying in England with his wife and family for two months, Gulliver undertakes his next sea voyage, which takes him to a land of giants called Brobdingnag. Here, a field worker discovers him. The farmer initially treats him as little more than an animal, keeping him for amusement. The farmer eventually sells Gulliver to the queen, who makes him a courtly diversion and is entertained by his musical talents. Social life is easy for Gulliver after his discovery by the court, but not particularly enjoyable. Gulliver is often repulsed by the physicality of the Brobdingnagians, whose ordinary flaws are many times magnified by their huge size. Thus, when a couple of courtly ladies let him play on their naked bodies, he is not attracted to them but rather disgusted by their enormous skin pores and the sound of their torrential urination. He is generally startled by the ignorance of the people here—even the king knows nothing about politics. More unsettling findings in Brobdingnag come in the form of various animals of the realm that endanger his life. Even Brobdingnagian insects leave slimy trails on his food that make eating difficult. On a trip to the frontier, accompanying the royal couple, Gulliver leaves Brobdingnag when his cage is plucked up by an eagle and dropped into the sea.

Next, Gulliver sets sail again and, after an attack by pirates, ends up in Laputa, where a floating island inhabited by theoreticians and academics oppresses the land below, called Balnibarbi. The scientific research undertaken in Laputa and in Balnibarbi seems totally inane and impractical, and its residents too appear wholly out of touch with reality. Taking a short side trip to Glubbdubdrib, Gulliver is able to witness the conjuring up of figures from history, such as Julius Caesar and other military leaders, whom he finds much less impressive than in books. After visiting the Luggnaggians and the Struldbrugs, the latter of which are senile immortals who prove that age does not bring wisdom, he is able to sail to Japan and from there back to England.

Finally, on his fourth journey, Gulliver sets out as captain of a ship, but after the mutiny of his crew and a long confinement in his cabin, he arrives in an unknown land. This land is populated by Houyhnhnms, rational-thinking horses who rule, and by Yahoos, brutish humanlike creatures who serve the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver sets about learning their language, and when he can speak he narrates his voyages to them and explains the constitution of England. He is treated with great courtesy and kindness by the horses and is enlightened by his many conversations with them and by his exposure to their noble culture. He wants to stay with the Houyhnhnms, but his bared body reveals to the horses that he is very much like a Yahoo, and he is banished. Gulliver is grief-stricken but agrees to leave. He fashions a canoe and makes his way to a nearby island, where he is picked up by a Portuguese ship captain who treats him well, though Gulliver cannot help now seeing the captain—and all humans—as shamefully Yahoolike. Gulliver then concludes his narrative with a claim that the lands he has visited belong by rights to England, as her colonies, even though he questions the whole idea of colonialism.

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Gulliver's Travels is an adventure story (in reality, a misadventure story) involving several voyages of Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon, who, because of a series of mishaps en route to recognized ports, ends up, instead, on several unknown islands living with people and animals of unusual sizes, behaviors, and philosophies, but who, after each adventure, is somehow able to return to his home in England where he recovers from these unusual experiences and then sets out again on a new voyage.

Book I: When the ship Gulliver is traveling on is destroyed in a storm, Gulliver ends up on the island of Lilliput, where he awakes to find that he has been captured by Lilliputians, very small people — approximately six inches in height. Gulliver is treated with compassion and concern. In turn, he helps them solve some of their problems, especially their conflict with their enemy, Blefuscu, an island across the bay from them. Gulliver falls from favor, however, because he refuses to support the Emperor's desire to enslave the Blefuscudians and because he "makes water" to put out a palace fire. Gulliver flees to Blefuscu, where he converts a large war ship to his own use and sets sail from Blefuscu eventually to be rescued at sea by an English merchant ship and returned to his home in England.

Book II: As he travels as a ship's surgeon, Gulliver and a small crew are sent to find water on an island. Instead they encounter a land of giants. As the crew flees, Gulliver is left behind and captured. Gulliver's captor, a farmer, takes him to the farmer's home where Gulliver is treated kindly, but, of course, curiously. The farmer assigns his daughter, Glumdalclitch, to be Gulliver's keeper, and she cares for Gulliver with great compassion. The farmer takes Gulliver on tour across the countryside, displaying him to onlookers. Eventually, the farmer sells Gulliver to the Queen. At court, Gulliver meets the King, and the two spend many sessions discussing the customs and behaviors of Gulliver's country. In many cases, the King is shocked and chagrined by the selfishness and pettiness that he hears Gulliver describe. Gulliver, on the other hand, defends England.

One day, on the beach, as Gulliver looks longingly at the sea from his box (portable room), he is snatched up by an eagle and eventually dropped into the sea. A passing ship spots the floating chest and rescues Gulliver, eventually returning him to England and his family.

Book III: Gulliver is on a ship bound for the Levant. After arriving, Gulliver is assigned captain of a sloop to visit nearby islands and establish trade. On this trip, pirates attack the sloop and place Gulliver in a small boat to fend for himself. While drifting at sea, Gulliver discovers a Flying Island. While on the Flying Island, called Laputa, Gulliver meets several inhabitants, including the King. All are preoccupied with things associated with mathematics and music. In addition, astronomers use the laws of magnetism to move the island up, down, forward, backward, and sideways, thus controlling the island's movements in relation to the island below (Balnibarbi). While in this land, Gulliver visits Balnibarbi, the island of Glubbdubdrib, and Luggnagg. Gulliver finally arrives in Japan where he meets the Japanese emperor. From there, he goes to Amsterdam and eventually home to England.

Book IV: While Gulliver is captain of a merchant ship bound for Barbados and the Leeward Islands, several of his crew become ill and die on the voyage. Gulliver hires several replacement sailors in Barbados. These replacements turn out to be pirates who convince the other crew members to mutiny. As a result, Gulliver is deposited on a "strand" (an island) to fend for himself. Almost immediately, he is discovered by a herd of ugly, despicable human-like creatures who are called, he later learns, Yahoos. They attack him by climbing trees and defecating on him. He is saved from this disgrace by the appearance of a horse, identified, he later learns, by the name Houyhnhnm. The grey horse (a Houyhnhnm) takes Gulliver to his home, where he is introduced to the grey's mare (wife), a colt and a foal (children), and a sorrel nag (the servant). Gulliver also sees that the Yahoos are kept in pens away from the house. It becomes immediately clear that, except for Gulliver's clothing, he and the Yahoos are the same animal. From this point on, Gulliver and his master (the grey) begin a series of discussions about the evolution of Yahoos, about topics, concepts, and behaviors related to the Yahoo society, which Gulliver represents, and about the society of the Houyhnhnms.

Despite his favored treatment in the grey steed's home, the kingdom's Assembly determines that Gulliver is a Yahoo and must either live with the uncivilized Yahoos or return to his own world. With great sadness, Gulliver takes his leave of the Houyhnhnms. He builds a canoe and sails to a nearby island where he is eventually found hiding by a crew from a Portuguese ship. The ship's captain returns Gulliver to Lisbon, where he lives in the captain's home. Gulliver is so repelled by the sight and smell of these "civilized Yahoos" that he can't stand to be around them. Eventually, however, Gulliver agrees to return to his family in England. Upon his arrival, he is repelled by his Yahoo family, so he buys two horses and spends most of his days caring for and conversing with the horses in the stable in order to be as far away from his Yahoo family as possible.

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**Character Analysis The Lilliputians**

The Lilliputians are men six inches in height but possessing all the pretension and self-importance of full-sized men. They are mean and nasty, vicious, morally corrupt, hypocritical and deceitful, jealous and envious, filled with greed and ingratitude — they are, in fact, completely human.

Swift uses the Lilliputians to satirize specific events and people in his life. For example, Swift's model for Flimnap was Robert Walpole, the leader of the Whigs and England's first prime minister in the modern sense. Walpole was an extremely wily politician, as Swift shows, by making Flimnap the most dexterous of the rope dancers. Reldresal, the second most dexterous of the rope dancers, probably represents either Viscount Townshend or Lord Carteret. Both were political allies of Walpole.

The articles that Gulliver signs to obtain his freedom relate the political life of Lilliput to the political life of England. The articles themselves parallel particular English codes and laws. Similarly, the absurd and complicated method by which Gulliver must swear to the articles (he must hold his right foot in his left hand and place the middle finger of his right hand on top of his head with the right thumb on the tip of his ear) exemplifies an aspect of Whig politics: petty, red-tape harassing.

Swift also uses the Lilliputians to show that English politicians were bloody-minded and treacherous. In detail, he records the bloody and cruel methods that the Lilliputians plan to use to kill Gulliver; then he comments ironically on the mercy, decency, generosity, and justice of kings. The Lilliputian emperor, out of mercy, plans to blind and starve Gulliver — a direct reference to George's treatment of captured Jacobites, whom he executed — after parliament had called him most merciful and lenient.

By the end of Book I, Swift has drawn a brilliant, concrete, and detailed contrast between the normal, if gullible, man (Gulliver) and the diminutive but vicious politician (the Lilliputian); the politician is always a midget alongside Gulliver.

**Character Analysis Lemuel Gulliver**

Gulliver is the undistinguished third of five sons of a man of very modest means. He is of good and solid — but unimaginative — English stock. Gulliver was born in Nottinghamshire, a sedate county without eccentricity. He attended Emmanuel College, a respected, but not dazzling, school. The neighborhoods that Gulliver lived in — Old Jury, Fetter Lane, and Wapping — are all lower-middle-class sections. He is, in short, Mr. British middle class of his time.

Gulliver is also, as might be expected, "gullible." He believes what he is told. He is an honest man, and he expects others to be honest. This expectation makes for humor — and also for irony. We can be sure that what Gulliver tells us will be accurate. And we can also be fairly sure that Gulliver does not always understand the meaning of what he sees. The result is a series of astonishingly detailed, dead-pan scenes. For example, when Gulliver awakens in Lilliput, he gradually discovers, moving from one exact detail to another, that he is a prisoner of men six inches tall.

In Book I, Gulliver's possesses moral superiority to the petty — and tiny — Lilliputians, who show themselves to be a petty, cruel, vengeful, and self-serving race. Morally and politically, Gulliver is their superior. Here, Swift, through Gulliver, makes clear that the normal person is concerned with honor, gratitude, common sense, and kindness. The representative person (a Lilliputian) is a midget, figuratively and literally, compared with a moral person (Gulliver).

In Brobdingnag (Book II), Gulliver is still an ordinary moral man, but the Brobdingnagians are moral giant men. Certainly they are not perfect, but their moral superiority is as great to Gulliver as is their physical size. In his loyalty to England, we see that Gulliver is, in deed, a very proud man and one who accepts the madness and malice of British politics and society as the natural and normal standard. For the first time, we see Gulliver as the hypocrite — he lies to the Brobdingnagian king in order to conceal what is despicable about his native England. Gulliver's moral height can never reach that of the Brobdingnagians. Swift reinforces the idea of the giant's moral superiority by having Gulliver identify the English with the Lilliputians. This association also makes Gulliver ridiculous. It demonstrates the folly and self-deception that Gulliver practices in identifying himself with the moral giants. Gulliver's pride is at the root of his trouble. Swift dramatizes this with the mirror Gulliver cannot bear to look into.

In Book IV, Gulliver represents the middle ground between pure reason (as embodied by the Houyhnhnms) and pure animalism (as embodied by the depraved Yahoos), yet Gulliver's pride refuses to allow him to recognize the Yahoo aspects in himself. Therefore, he identifies himself with the Houyhnhnms and, in fact, tries to become one. But the horses are alien to Gulliver; yet Gulliver thinks of the Yahoos as alien and animal. Separating himself from his naturally depraved cousins, the Yahoos, Gulliver also separates himself from the European Yahoos. He is near to madness — because of pride. Gulliver has "reasoned" himself into rejecting his species and his nature: Gulliver is virtually a madman. His attitudes when he arrives in London make him a source of derision, for Gulliver seeks to change his basic nature by thinking; reason becomes the sole guide of his life.

In the end, Gulliver is still trying to acclimate himself to life as — and among — the Yahoos. Concluding, he confesses that he could be reconciled to the English Yahoos "if they would be content with those Vices and Follies only which Nature hath entitled them to. I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a Lawyer, a Pick-pocket, a Colonel, a Fool, a Lord, a Gamster, a Politician, a Whoremunger, a Physician, . . . or the like: This is all according to the due Course of Things: but, when I behold a Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind, smitten with Pride, it immediately breaks all the Measures of my patience."

**Character Analysis The Brobdingnagians**

The Brobdingnagians are the epitome of moral giants. Physically huge — 60 feet tall — their moral stature is also gigantic. Brobdingnag is a practical, moral utopia. Among the Brobdingnagians, there is goodwill and calm virtue. Their laws encourage charity. Yet they are, underneath, just men who labor under every disadvantage to which man is heir. They are physically ugly when magnified, but they are morally beautiful. We cannot reject them simply because Gulliver describes them as physically gross. If we reject them, we become even more conscious of an ordinary person's verminous morality.

Set against the moral background of Brobdingnag and in comparison to the Brobdingnagians, Gulliver's "ordinariness" exposes many of its faults. Gulliver is revealed to be a very proud man and one who accepts the madness and malice of European politics, parties, and society as natural. What's more, he even lies to conceal what is despicable about them. The Brobdingnagian king, however, is not fooled by Gulliver. The English, he says, are "odious vermin."

Nevertheless, the Brobdingnagians are not without their flaws. Unlike Gulliver, who always considered the Lilliputians to be miniature men, the Brobdingnagians cannot think of Gulliver as a miniature Brobdingnagian. Even the King, who is sincerely fond of Gulliver, cannot view him as anything except an entertaining, albeit sly little fellow, one who is not to be trusted. The maids of honor in the Brobdingnagian court treat Gulliver as a plaything. To them, he is a toy, not a man, so they undress in front of him without a thought of modesty, and they titillate themselves with his naked body. Still, this "abuse" of Gulliver — denying his humanity and his man-hood — is done for amusement, not out of malice. Although they are not perfect, the Brobdingnagians are consistently moral. Only children and the deformed are intentionally evil.

In short, Swift praises the Brobdingnagians, but he does not intend for us to think that they are perfect humans. They are super humans, bound to us by flesh and blood, just bigger morally than we are. Their virtues are not impossible for us to attain, but because it takes so much maturing to reach the stature of a moral giant, few humans achieve it.

**Character Analysis The Houyhnhnms**

Gulliver's description of the horses, the Houyhnhnms, is almost idyllic: "The behaviour of these animals was . . . orderly and rational . . . acute and judicious." Indeed, it is a horse that rescues him from the Yahoos — not by any overt, physical action, but by simply appearing on the road — no physical action being necessary.

Houyhnhnms live simple lives wholly devoted to reason. They speak clearly, they act justly, and they have simple laws. Each Houyhnhnm knows what is right and acts accordingly. They are untroubled by greed, politics, or lust. They live a life of cleanliness and exist in peace and serenity. They live by the grand maxim: Cultivate Reason and be totally governed by it. So perfect is their society, in fact, that they have no concept of a lie, and therefore no word to express it. The only word for evil is "Yahoo."

Swift defines Houyhnhnm as meaning "perfection of nature." This definition establishes an important distinction. The horses are uncorrupted by passion — either base or noble. They are devoid, for example, of charity. Also, they are not subject to temptation. Swift, however, never suggests that the Houyhnhnms stand for perfected human nature; on the contrary, they manifest innocent human nature. What they do — and what they say and think — is akin to human nature, but the character of the Houyhnhnms is far from Gulliver's. They are ignorant of many things which most people would consider venial. They cannot, for example, understand lying — or even the necessity for lying.

Swift thus establishes a range, or spectrum, of existence. The horses are literally innocent, having never (in theological terms) "fallen"; the Yahoos are super-sensual and seem depraved. The Houyhnhnms are ice-cold reason; the Yahoos are fiery sensuality. In between these extremes is Gulliver.

**Character Analysis The Yahoos**

Yahoos are the human-like creatures that Gulliver first encounters in the Country of the Houyhnhnms. Not recognizing their link with humanity, Gulliver describes the Yahoos as animals: " . . . deformed . . . . Their heads and breasts were covered with thick hair . . . but the rest of their bodies were bare . . . . They had no tails and often stood on their hind feet . . . ." He concludes with, "I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal."

Although they are human in form and feature, the Yahoos are, indeed, animals. They are filthy and they stink. They are omnivorous but seem to prefer meat and garbage. (Significantly, they eat nearly everything prohibited by the biblical and Levitical food codes.) They are "the most filthy, noisome, and deformed animals which nature ever produced . . . " and they are "restive and indocible, mischievous and malicious."

The Yahoos, however, are not merely animals; they are animals who are naturally vicious and represent Mankind depraved. Swift describes them in deliberately filthy and disgusting terms, often using metaphors drawn from dung. In terms of their evolution, the words used to describe the Yahoos are "degenerating by degrees."

Swift positions Gulliver midway — figuratively and literally — between the super-rational, innocent horses (the Houyhnhnms) and the filthy, depraved Yahoos. Gulliver, however, reacts to the Yahoos with immediate and overpowering detestation and is horrified by the Yahoos' similarity to him. He lacks the humility to see himself as a sort of Yahoo. Rather, his pride leads him to try to become a horse. Gulliver will try with admirable determination to improve himself; he will try to change himself into a more horse-like state, but he will fail. He is, simply, more of a Yahoo than a Houyhnhnm.

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**Critical Essays Philosophical and Political Background of Gulliver's Travels**

Swift has at least two aims in Gulliver's Travels besides merely telling a good adventure story. Behind the disguise of his narrative, he is satirizing the pettiness of human nature in general and attacking the Whigs in particular. By emphasizing the six-inch height of the Lilliputians, he graphically diminishes the stature of politicians and indeed the stature of all human nature. And in using the fire in the Queen's chambers, the rope dancers, the bill of particulars drawn against Gulliver, and the inventory of Gulliver's pockets, he presents a series of allusions that were identifiable to his contemporaries as critical of Whig politics.

Why, one might ask, did Swift have such a consuming contempt for the Whigs? This hatred began when Swift entered politics as the representative of the Irish church. Representing the Irish bishops, Swift tried to get Queen Anne and the Whigs to grant some financial aid to the Irish church. They refused, and Swift turned against them even though he had considered them his friends and had helped them while he worked for Sir William Temple. Swift turned to the Tories for political allegiance and devoted his propaganda talents to their services. Using certain political events of 1714-18, he described in Gulliver's Travels many things that would remind his readers that Lilliputian folly was also English folly — and, particularly, Whig folly. The method, for example, which Gulliver must use to swear his allegiance to the Lilliputian emperor parallels the absurd difficulty that the Whigs created concerning the credentials of the Tory ambassadors who signed the Treaty of Utrecht.

Swift's craftiness was successful. His book was popular because it was a compelling adventure tale and also a puzzle. His readers were eager to identify the various characters and discuss their discoveries, and, as a result, many of them saw politics and politicians from a new perspective.

Within the broad scheme of Gulliver's Travels, Gulliver seems to be an average man in eighteenth-century England. He is concerned with family and with his job, yet he is confronted by the pigmies that politics and political theorizing make of people. Gulliver is utterly incapable of the stupidity of the Lilliputian politicians, and, therefore, he and the Lilliputians are ever-present contrasts for us. We are always aware of the difference between the imperfect (but normal) moral life of Gulliver, and the petty and stupid political life of emperors, prime ministers, and informers.

In the second book of the Travels, Swift reverses the size relationship that he used in Book I. In Lilliput, Gulliver was a giant; in Brobdingnag, Gulliver is a midget. Swift uses this difference to express a difference in morality. Gulliver was an ordinary man compared to the amoral political midgets in Lilliput. Now, Gulliver remains an ordinary man, but the Brobdingnagians are moral men. They are not perfect, but they are consistently moral. Only children and the deformed are intentionally evil.

Set against a moral background, Gulliver's "ordinariness" exposes many of its faults. Gulliver is revealed to be a very proud man and one who accepts the madness and malice of European politics, parties, and society as natural. What's more, he even lies to conceal what is despicable about them. The Brobdingnagian king, however, is not fooled by Gulliver. The English, he says, are "odious vermin."

Swift praises the Brobdingnagians, but he does not intend for us to think that they are perfect humans. They are superhumans, bound to us by flesh and blood, just bigger morally than we are. Their virtues are not impossible for us to attain, but because it takes so much maturing to reach the stature of a moral giant, few humans achieve it.

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In Books I and II, Swift directs his satire more toward individual targets than firing broadside at abstract concepts. In Book I, he is primarily concerned with Whig politics and politicians rather than with the abstract politician; in Book II, he elects to reprove immoral Englishmen rather than abstract immorality. In Book III, Swift's target is somewhat abstract — pride in reason — but he also singles out and censures a group of his contemporaries whom he believed to be particularly depraved in their exaltation of reason. He attacks his old enemies, the Moderns, and their satellites, the Deists and rationalists. In opposition to their credos, Swift believed that people were capable of reasoning, but that they were far from being fully rational. For the record, it should probably be mentioned that Swift was not alone in denouncing this clique of people. The objects of Swift's indignation had also aroused the rage of Pope, Arbuthnot, Dryden, and most of the orthodox theologians of the Augustan Age.

This love of reason that Swift criticizes derived from the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. John Locke's theories of natural religion were popularly read, as were Descartes' theories about the use of reason. Then a loosely connected group summarized these opinions, plus others, and a cult was born: They called themselves the Deists.

In general, the Deists believed that people could reason, observe the universe accurately, and perceive axioms intuitively. With these faculties, people could then arrive at religious truth; they did not need biblical revelation. Orthodox theology has always made reason dependent on God and morality, but the Deists refuted this notion. They attacked revealed religion, saying that if reason can support the God described by the Bible, it may also conclude that God is quite different from the biblical God. The answer depends upon which observations and axioms the reasoner chooses to use.

Even before he wrote the Travels, Swift opposed excessive pride in reason. In his ironical Argument Against Abolishing Christianity, he makes plain what he considers to be the consequences of depending on reason, rather than upon faith and revelation. Disbelief, he said, is the consequence of presumptuous pride in reasoning, and immorality is the consequence of disbelief. Swift believed that religion holds moral society together. A person who does not believe in God by faith and revelation is in danger of disbelieving in morality.

To Swift, rationalism leads to Deism, Deism to atheism, and atheism to immorality. Where people worship reason, they abandon tradition and common sense. Both tradition and common sense tell humankind that murder, whoring, and drunkenness, for example, are immoral. Yet, if one depends on reason for morality, that person can find no proof that one should not drink, whore, or murder. Thus, reasonably, is one not free to do these things? Swift believed that will, rather than reason, was far too often the master.

Alexander Pope agreed with the position that Swift took. In his Essay on Man, he states that people cannot perceive accurately. Our axioms are usually contradictory, and our rational systems of living in a society are meaninglessly abstract. People, he insists, are thoroughly filled with self-love and pride; they are incapable of being rational — that is, objective. Swift would certainly concur.

In Book III, Laputan systematizing is exaggerated, but Swift's point is clear and concrete: Such systematizing is a manifestation of proud rationalism. The Laputans think so abstractly that they have lost their hold on common sense. They are so absorbed in their abstractions that they serve food in geometric and musical shapes. Everything is relegated to abstract thought, and the result is mass delusion and chaos. The Laputans do not produce anything useful; their clothes do not fit, and their houses are not constructed correctly. These people think — but only for abstract thinking's sake; they do not consider ends.

In a similar fashion, Swift shows that philology and scholarship betray the best interests of the Luggnaggians; pragmatic scientism fails in Balnibarbi; and accumulated experience does not make the Struldbruggs either happy or wise. In his topical political references, Swift demonstrates the viciousness and cruelty, as well as the folly, that arise from abstract political theory imposed by selfish politicians. The common people, Swift says, suffer. He also cites the folly of Laputan theorists and the Laputan king by referring to the immediate political blunders of the Georges.

The Travels is structured very much like a variation on the question, "Why are people so often vicious and cruel?" and the answer, "Because they succumb to the worst elements in themselves." Man is an infinitely complex animal; he is many, many mixtures of intellect and reason, charity and emotion. Yet reason and intellect are not synonymous — even if they might profitably be; nor are emotion and charity necessarily akin to one another. But few people see Man as the grey mixture of varying qualities that he is. Man oversimplifies, and, in the last book of the Travels, Swift shows us the folly of people who advance such theories. In his time, it was a popular notion that a Reasonable Man was a Complete Man. Here, Swift shows us Reason exalted. We must judge whether it is possible or desirable for Man.

The Houyhnhnms are super-reasonable. They have all the virtues that the stoics and Deists advocated. They speak clearly, they act justly, and they have simple laws. They do not quarrel or argue since each knows what is true and right. They do not suffer from the uncertainties of reasoning that afflict Man. But they are so reasonable that they have no emotions. They are untroubled by greed, politics, or lust. They act from undifferentiated benevolence. They would never prefer the welfare of one of their own children to the welfare of another Houyhnhnm simply on the basis of kinship.

Very simply, the Houyhnhnms are horses; they are not humans. And this physical difference parallels the abstract difference. They are fully rational, innocent, and undepraved. Man is capable of reason, but never wholly or continuously, and he is — but never wholly or continuously — passionate, proud, and depraved.

In contrast to the Houyhnhnms, Swift presents their precise opposite: the Yahoos, creatures who exhibit the essence of sensual human sinfulness. The Yahoos are not merely animals; they are animals who are naturally vicious. Swift describes them in deliberately filthy and disgusting terms, often using metaphors drawn from dung. The Yahoos plainly represent Mankind depraved. Swift, in fact, describes the Yahoos in such disgusting terms that early critics assumed that he hated Man to the point of madness. Swift, however, takes his descriptions from the sermons and theological tracts of his predecessors and contemporaries. If Swift hated Man, one would also have to say that St. Francis and St. Augustine did, too. Swift's descriptions of depraved Man are, if anything, milder than they might be. One sermon writer described Man as a saccus stercorum, a sack filled with dung. The descriptions of the Yahoos do not document Swift's supposed misanthropy. Rather, the creatures exhibit physically the moral flaws and natural depravity that theologians say plague the offspring of Adam.

Midway between the poles of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos, Swift places Gulliver. Gulliver is an average man, except that he has become irrational in his regard for reason. Gulliver is so disgusted with the Yahoos and so admires the Houyhnhnms that he tries to become a horse.

This aspiration to become a horse exposes Gulliver's grave weakness. Gullible and proud, he becomes such a devotee of reason that he cannot accept his fellow humans who are less than totally reasonable. He cannot recognize virtue and charity when they exist. Captain Pedro de Mendez rescues Gulliver and takes him back to Europe, but Gulliver despises him because Mendez doesn't look like a horse. Likewise, when he reaches home, Gulliver hates his family because they look and smell like Yahoos. He is still capable of seeing objects and surfaces accurately, but he is incapable of grasping true depths of meaning.

Swift discriminates between people as they are idealized, people as they are damned, people as they possibly could be, and others as they are. The Houyhnhnms embody the ideal of the rationalists and stoics; the Yahoos illustrate the damning abstraction of sinful and depraved Man; and Pedro de Mendez represents virtue possible to Man. Gulliver, usually quite sane, is misled when we leave him, but he is like most people. Even dullards, occasionally, become obsessed by something or other for a while before lapsing back into their quiet, workaday selves. Eventually, we can imagine that Gulliver will recover and be his former unexciting, gullible self.

Swift uses the technique of making abstractions concrete to show us that super-reasonable horses are impossible and useless models for humans. They have never fallen and therefore have never been redeemed. They are incapable of the Christian virtues that unite passion and reason: Neither they nor the Yahoos are touched by grace or charity. In contrast, the Christian virtues of Pedro de Mendez and the Brobdingnagians (the "least corrupted" of mankind) are possible to humans. These virtues are the result of grace and redemption. Swift does not press this theological point, however. He is, after all, writing a satire, not a religious tract.

**Critical Essays Swift's Satire in Gulliver's Travels**

Gulliver's Travels was unique in its day; it was not written to woo or entertain. It was an indictment, and it was most popular among those who were indicted — that is, politicians, scientists, philosophers, and Englishmen in general. Swift was roasting people, and they were eager for the banquet.

Swift himself admitted to wanting to "vex" the world with his satire, and it is certainly in his tone, more than anything else, that one most feels his intentions. Besides the coarse language and bawdy scenes, probably the most important element that Dr. Bowdler deleted from the original Gulliver's Travels was this satiric tone. The tone of the original varies from mild wit to outright derision, but always present is a certain strata of ridicule. Dr. Bowdler gelded it of its satire and transformed it into a children's book.

After that literary operation, the original version was largely lost to the common reader. The Travels that proper Victorians bought for the family library was Bowdler's version, not Swift's. What irony that Bowdler would have laundered the Travels in order to get a version that he believed to be best for public consumption because, originally, the book was bought so avidly by the public that booksellers were raising the price of the volume, sure of making a few extra shillings on this bestseller. And not only did the educated buy and read the book — so also did the largely uneducated.

However, lest one think that Swift's satire is merely the weapon of exaggeration, it is important to note that exaggeration is only one facet of his satiric method. Swift uses mock seriousness and understatement; he parodies and burlesques; he presents a virtue and then turns it into a vice. He takes pot-shots at all sorts of sacred cows. Besides science, Swift debunks the whole sentimental attitude surrounding children. At birth, for instance, Lilliputian children were "wisely" taken from their parents and given to the State to rear. In an earlier satire (A Modest Proposal), he had proposed that the very poor in Ireland sell their children to the English as gourmet food.

Swift is also a name-caller. Mankind, as he has a Brobdingnagian remark, is "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." Swift also inserted subtly hidden puns into some of his name-calling techniques. The island of Laputa, the island of pseudo-science, is literally (in Spanish) the land of "the whore." Science, which learned people of his generation were venerating as a goddess, Swift labeled a whore, and devoted a whole hook to illustrating the ridiculous behavior of her converts.

In addition, Swift mocks blind devotion. Gulliver, leaving the Houyhnhnms, says that he "took a second leave of my master, but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honor to raise it gently to my mouth." Swift was indeed so thorough a satirist that many of his early readers misread the section on the Houyhnhnms. They were so enamored of reason that they did not realize that Swift was metamorphosing a virtue into a vice. In Book IV, Gulliver has come to idealize the horses. They embody pure reason, but they are not human. Literally, of course, we know they are not, but figuratively they seem an ideal for humans — until Swift exposes them as dull, unfeeling creatures, thoroughly unhuman. They take no pleasure in sex, nor do they ever overflow with either joy or melancholy. They are bloodless.

Gulliver's Travels was the work of a writer who had been using satire as his medium for over a quarter of a century. His life was one of continual disappointment, and satire was his complaint and his defense — against his enemies and against humankind. People, he believed, were generally ridiculous and petty, greedy and proud; they were blind to the "ideal of the mean." This ideal of the mean was present in one of Swift's first major satires, The Battle of the Books (1697). There, Swift took the side of the Ancients, but he showed their views to be ultimately as distorted as those of their adversaries, the Moderns. In Gulliver's last adventure, Swift again pointed to the ideal of the mean by positioning Gulliver between symbols of sterile reason and symbols of gross sensuality. To Swift, Man is a mixture of sense and nonsense; he had accomplished much but had fallen far short of what he could have been and what he could have done.

Swift was certainly not one of the optimists typical of his century. He did not believe that the Age of Science was the triumph that a great majority of his countrymen believed it to be. Science and reason needed limits, and they needed a good measure of humanism. They did not require absolute devotion.

Swift was a highly moral man and was shocked by his contemporaries' easy conversion to reason as the be-all and end-all of philosophy. To be so gullible amounted to non-reason in Swift's thinking. He therefore offered up the impractical scientists of Laputa and the impersonal, but absolutely reasonable, Houyhnhnms as embodiments of science and reason carried to ridiculous limits. Swift, in fact, created the whole of Gulliver's Travels in order to give the public a new moral lens. Through this lens, Swift hoped to "vex" his readers by offering them new insights into the game of politics and into the social follies of humans.