

Section 1 – The Novel in the 18th Century and Jonathan Swift

The novel as we know it today developed during the 18th century. Many causes led to this development: expansion of the reading public, growth of a new middle class, economic reasons etc. Publishing became a profitable business thanks to the spread of literacy and of reading as a form of entertainment among the wealthy middle class. The creation of the circulating libraries led to an increase in the reading public. The 18th century novel was also called the realistic novel as is evident from its concern with the realistic depiction of middle class life, values and experience, showing the development of individual characters. Ian Watt in his influential account of the emergence of the novel connects it with the growth of the middle classes in the eighteenth century which created a readership anxious to read of itself and its values. This is evident in the works of the most important novelists of the time - Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne. Some of them were devoted to writing because, as an effect of the *Test Act of 1673*, being Roman Catholics or Dissenters, they were forbidden to hold any important position in society and chose to become novelists or journalists. The age also saw the rise of female writers among whom Aphra Behn is credited to be the first woman writer to earn a living by her pen. Other female writers include Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Carter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Wollstonecraft et al. The decline of drama in the eighteenth century was also partly responsible for the rise of the novel. After the Licensing Act of 1737, drama lay moribund. The poetry of the age too, except for the brilliant example of Pope's works, was in a state of some disarray.

The 18th century was one in which wit and reason came to the forefront of literature in the form of satires. Satirical literature exposed the superficial follies and moral corruption of the society during the neoclassical period in Britain. Satires during this period aimed at pointing out the shortcomings of society through ridiculing accepted standards of thought, exposing Britain's flaws and chastising the hypocrisy of the time. Enlightenment writers Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift used different mediums of satire, different types of logic and different targets of ridicule in order to shine a light on separate aspects of British society. This provided a much-needed criticism of the profuse moral corruption of a society that sometimes seemed to forget the true ideals of its Enlightenment age where rationality was supposed to reign over fanaticism.

Jonathan Swift was born on November 30, 1667, in Dublin though both his parents were English. At the age of fourteen he enrolled in Trinity College, Dublin, from which he received his B.A. degree in 1686. Swift was studying for his master's degree when political unrest prompted him to leave Ireland for England in 1688. He obtained the position of secretary to the English Whig politician Sir William Temple. In 1694, Swift was ordained as a priest in the Church of Ireland and

worked as a country parson in Northern Ireland. In 1696 he returned to Moor Park, where he remained until Temple's death in 1699. In autumn of the same year, he took up a post in Ireland as chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley. Swift's poems mainly consist of odd verses to his friends, attacks on his political and private enemies, etc. His *Cadenus and Vanessa* (1712-13) deals with his affection for Esther Vanhomrigh. His first noteworthy work was *The Battle of the Books* published in 1704. The theme of his work was the dispute between the ancient and the modern authors. The famous passage where the bee argues down the bitter remarks of the spider is one of Swift's most well-regarded efforts. *A Tale of a Tub*, also published in 1704 (though it was written in 1696) is regarded by many as his best work. It reveals his power at its highest. Between 1701 and 1704 Swift paid several visits to Leicester and London where he became the friend of Addison, Pope and Steele. Together they formed a literary club, the Martinus Scriblerus Club, to satirize the abuses of modern learning. *Book III* of *Gulliver's Travels* was later to result from this project. During his stay in London, Swift wrote a number of pamphlets on Church questions and some poems on London life which were published in the *Tatler*.

Though Swift had written pamphlets in support of the Whig party, he fell into conflict with the party and changed his allegiance to the Tory party in 1710. He attacked the Whigs in the *Examiner* (a Tory periodical founded by Viscount Bolingbroke) and in a series of pamphlets. To this period belongs the *Journal to Stella*. It gives us glimpses of the inner Swift who was vain, arrogant, ambitious, crafty but none the less a generous and considerate friend and a loyal ally. When the Tory government fell from power in 1714, Swift's writings lost popularity and he went to Dublin, where he became Dean of St Patrick's. There he devoted much energy to Irish affairs and in the course of time attained extraordinary popularity. His *Drapier's Letters* (1724) made him famous in Ireland. In 1726 Swift published *Travels Into Several Remote Nations Of The World*, which later became known as *Gulliver's Travels*. It was so controversial that it was not published in a full, uncensored version until ten years later. Alexander Pope's observation on the reception of *Gulliver's Travels* was: "It is universally read, from the cabinet council to the nursery," and it is widely believed that it has never been out of print since then. The British author George Orwell declared it to be among the six indispensable books in world literature. Swift took up the cause of the impoverishment of Ireland by England, and wrote pamphlets such as the satire *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in which he suggests that the problems of famine and overpopulation in Ireland could be solved by selling the babies of poor Irish people as food for the rich.

Swift's friends remarked that he grew increasingly bitter with age. He suffered from congenital deformity and abnormality in the brain and became insane in the end. Swift died in Dublin on October 19, 1745. He wrote his own obituary, "Lines on the Death of Dr Swift," which contained

the following lines: "He gave the little wealth he had / To build a house for fools and mad, / And showed by one satiric touch / No nation needed it so much."

Section 2 – *Gulliver's Travels* – Summary

The novel *Gulliver's Travels* is divided into four parts, each dealing with a unique island which the narrator Lemuel Gulliver reaches by chance. A married surgeon from Nottinghamshire, England, Gulliver has a taste for traveling. On the first voyage on the ship *Antelope*, he is washed up on an island called Lilliput which is inhabited by tiny people about 6 inches tall. They capture Gulliver as he sleeps and carry him to their capital city, where they keep him chained inside a large abandoned temple outside the city walls. Gulliver becomes a great friend of the Emperor of Lilliput, who introduces him to many of their customs. For example, the Emperor chooses his officials based on who performs best at a special kind of rope dancing. The Emperor asks Gulliver to help him in his war against Blefuscu, the neighbouring kingdom. Gulliver agrees and uses his huge size to capture all of Blefuscu's navy. The jealousy of admiral Skyresh Bolgolam and the treasurer Flimnap forces Gulliver to escape to the island of Blefuscu in order to save his life. Fortunately for him, a human-sized boat washes ashore on Blefuscu and he rows in it to safety. He is picked up by an English ship and returns to England.

On his second voyage, Gulliver ends up on the island of Brobdingnag. The Brobdingnagians are giants 60 feet tall and they treat him like an attraction at a fair. Gulliver comes to the attention of the Brobdingnagian Queen, who keeps him as a pet. She is amused by his tiny size and his behaviour. She employs Glumdalclitch, the farmer's daughter, to look after Gulliver and to teach him their language. While Gulliver lives at the palace, he is constantly in danger: bees the size of pigeons almost sting him, a puppy almost tramples him to death, a monkey mistakes him for a baby monkey and tries to force feed him. These incidents result in him losing some of the pride and self-importance he had gained in Lilliput. The Brobdingnagian King reinforces this new sense of humility. After Gulliver describes to him all that he can think about English culture and history, the King decides that the English sound like tiny little pests. He absolutely refuses to accept Gulliver's gift of gunpowder because such weapons will inevitably pave the way to horrible violence and abuse. Finally, Gulliver leaves Brobdingnag by a strange accident and returns home to England.

During his third voyage, Gulliver gets marooned on a small island by pirates. As he is sitting on this island, he sees a shadow passing overhead: a floating island called Laputa. He signals the Laputians for help and is brought up by rope to their island. The Laputians are dedicated to only two things:

mathematics and music. But their love of equations makes them really incompetent at practical things like making clothes or building houses. As a result of the Laputians' abstract science, the residents of the continent below, Balnibarbi, have been steadily ruining their farms and buildings with new-fangled "reforms." Gulliver also visits Glubbudrib, an island of sorcerers where he gets to meet the ghosts of famous historical figures, and Luggnagg, an island with an absolute monarchy and also some very unfortunate immortals, who never age. He makes his way to Japan and then back to England.

His final voyage takes Gulliver to an island which is home to two kinds of creatures: the beastly Yahoos who are violent, lying, disgusting animals and the Houyhnhnms, who look like horses. The Houyhnhnms govern themselves with absolute reason. They do not even have words for human problems like disease, deception or war. The Yahoos are human beings. They are just like Gulliver, except that Gulliver has learned to clip his nails, shave his face, and wear clothes. In Houyhnhnm Land, Gulliver finally realizes the true depths of human nature, culture and society. He grows so used to the Houyhnhnm way of life that, when the Houyhnhnms finally tell him to leave, he immediately faints. Gulliver obediently leaves the land of the Houyhnhnms, where he has been very happy, but he is so disgusted with human company that he nearly jumps off the Portuguese ship carrying him home.

Once Gulliver returns to his family, he feels physical revulsion at the thought that he had sex with a Yahoo female (his wife) and had three Yahoo children. He can barely be in the same room with them. We leave Gulliver slowly reconciling himself to being among humans again, but he is still sad on not being with the Houyhnhnms. In fact, he spends at least four hours a day talking to his two horses in their stable.

Section 3 – Form and Literary Devices

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* uses the form of popular travelogues of the time. Thus the popularity of this novel, at the time of its publication, lay in the contemporary readers' avid consumption of travel writings. Swift uses a lot of nautical jargon and descriptions modelled on ship-logs to create an atmosphere of reality. He even places the locations of his fictitious journeys in regions visited by the most famous travel writer of the period, William Dampier. *Gulliver's Travels* shares some of the excitement of a real traveller's tale. The narrator, Lemuel Gulliver is a seaman in his own right. He starts out as a ship's surgeon and goes on to become the captain of different ships by the end of the novel. This quality made the novel a children's classic as the basic plot arouses in us a curiosity to

know what happens to Gulliver and what he will find next. Travelogues also provide the readers with a chance to know the culture and life of other nations and to make a comparison with one's own country. A savage may be more civilised than the so-called civilised voyager. Gulliver's progressive disillusionment with his own society and his preference for the Houyhnhnms' civilised world is an extreme example of this thought.

Gulliver's Travels is essentially a satire on human follies. Satire is a genre in which human or individual vices are exposed by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, with the intention of bringing about improvement. It is usually witty, and often very funny. However, its purpose is not to make readers laugh but to criticise an event, an individual or a group in a clever manner. John. M. Bullitt in *Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire* (1966) says that, "In its most serious function, satire is a mediator between two perceptions-the unillusioned perception of man as he actually is, and the ideal perception, or vision, of man as he ought to be,". According to J. A. Downie(*Jonathan Swift: Political Writer*, 1984), while in the first and second voyages the focus of the criticism is on the English society and man within this society, the third and fourth voyages deal with human nature itself. However, all these ideas overlap as the journey progresses. Much of the Lilliputian adventure is focused on the king's court and courtly favours. The fickle-mindedness of the king comes out in the scene where Gulliver refuses to help him in his thirst for power. The courtiers are willing to jump over a rope to attain royal favours. The two political parties are differentiated on the basis of the heels of the shoes. This shows how little the difference between the Whigs and the Tories was. The Christian religious differences about whether the host was actually transubstantiated and became flesh or was a symbol is reduced to the petty quarrel between the Big-Endians and the Small-Endians. Though Lilliput has a set standard like any other country, Swift likens them to humans when they do not live up to their standards by exhibiting ingratitude for Gulliver's help and accuse him of high treason. This incident provides the most bitter satiric attack on hypocrisy, ingratitude and cruelty. In the Brobdingnagian voyage, human pride in physical appearance is attacked through Gulliver's perspective of the Brobdingnagians. The narrator's own pride in himself and his country is reduced to ashes. Gulliver's offer of gunpowder underlines the fact that he is a typical member of his race. He cannot understand the Brobdingnagian king's refusal to accept his offer which will help him in overcoming his enemies. Here Swift alludes to the eagerness with which European nations would leap at such an offer as an aid to waging war against their neighbors.

Ricardo Quintana in his work *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* (1965) mentions that the satire in the third voyage attacks both the deficiency of common sense and the consequences of corrupt judgment. The Laputan voyage mainly focuses on the criticism of intellectuals such as scholars,

scientists, philosophers et al who are so caught up in theories and theoretical knowledge that they forget the practical side of life. The misuse of reason is elaborately described in the chapters referring to the experiments conducted at the Grand Academy of Lagado. The subject of immortality is brought out through the case of the Struldbrugs. According to Swift to live in perpetuity is equal to a living death. He affirms that superior reason and pride will not protect humans from the natural laws of physical death. Swift points to the fact that reason is not enough and immortality will only make things worse. The final voyage to the Houyhnhnms seems to argue that it is only properly developed reason that can uplift humans to their true potential. Ironically, it is the horse-like Houyhnhnms who possess this rather than the human Yahoos. Thus in the last voyage, "Swift is attacking the Yahoo in each of us", says Ernest Tuveson in the edited work *Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1964). This voyage also takes a dig at war, lawyers, money and most important of all – Imperialism. Swift implies that the real goal of imperialism is greed and not the upliftment of the less fortunate races and peoples. Thus by using the medium of satire, Swift wants the readers to be shocked out of their pride at being the so-called superior race.

Section 4 – Characterization

Gulliver's Travels is strewn with different people who symbolically represent different aspects of humanity. Moreover as George Orwell mentions in his essay, "Politics vs. Literature: An examination of *Gulliver's Travels*" (1946), "In *Gulliver's Travels* humanity is attacked, or criticized, from at least three different angles, and the implied character of Gulliver himself necessarily changes somewhat in the process."

Lemuel Gulliver, the narrator, is the embodiment of a middle-class Englishman who is morally upright and honest. It is through his eyes that the reader sees and judges the people he encounters. But as his journey progresses, he becomes less tolerant and more judgmental of the nations he visits and consequently, of his fellow human beings.

William Bragg Ewald states in *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (1954) that, "As a satire, the main purpose of *Gulliver's Travels* is to show certain shortcomings in 18th century English society...". Though small in size, the Lilliputians as a race are pompous, hypocritical, self-important, cruel and dangerous. They represent the pettiness and small-mindedness of the English, in particular and humankind in general. Several persons and incidents from the English political life are believed to be referred to in this section. Flimnap, the Lord High Treasurer and most agile of the rope-dancers is thought to be modeled on Sir Robert Walpole who was the leader of the Whig Party and the first Prime Minister of England. The Lilliputian King is a tyrant. He is willing to execute his subjects for trivial reasons and has no qualms in the sudden shifting of his loyalty. His agreement to Gulliver

being blinded and starved, which he claims exemplifies his mercy and justice, is a satirical reference to King George I's treatment of captured Jacobite rebels. King George had them executed after he had been lauded in Parliament as merciful. Reldresal, Lilliput's Principal Secretary of Private Affairs and Gulliver's friend, embodies the treachery of politicians. It was he who came up with the plan of blinding and starving Gulliver to death in order to get rid of him. This plan is ironically represented as an example of mercy. The Lilliputian political parties - the Low Heels and the High Heels- represent the Whig and Tory parties of Swift's time. By making the Lilliputians tiny, Swift is trying to puncture the self-importance of England and humankind.

The Brobdingnagians represent the goodness in mankind. They are big not just physically but also morally, large-hearted in spirit and soul. Vice has not yet spread to their government system. The Brobdingnagian King is shocked by Gulliver's account of English politics and society and calls them 'the most pernicious Race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the Earth'. He refuses Gulliver's offer of gunpowder as he cannot see any good coming out of it. Though the Brobdingnagians treat Gulliver kindly, yet they see him as an exhibit. This points to the relative and unreliable nature of power. William. A. Eddy in *Gulliver's Travels: A Critical Study* (1963) says about this power equation, "The effect of reducing the scale of life in Lilliput is to strip human affairs of their self-imposed grandeur. Rank, politics, international war, lose all of their significance. This particular idea is continued in the second voyage, not in the picture of the Brobdingnagians, but in Gulliver himself, who is now a Lilliputian." Thus the powerful Gulliver of Lilliput is powerless in Brobdingnag. Probably this was a warning of Swift to the English of his time that the arrival of a larger or more powerful country's force could easily put an end to their dominance on the world stage.

The Laputans, engrossed only in mathematics and music, pay no attention to practical matters. The only result of their expertise in astronomy is their great fear of cosmic accidents. Their inattentiveness to their environment makes them incapable of normal conversation. Hence they require servants with "flappers" who strike their ears and mouth to alert them to listen or speak. The Laputan King lives on the floating island and does not care at all about what is happening in the country below. The Academy Professors of Balnibarbi plan reforms without considering their effects in the real world. The model for these professors are the scientists of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge as many of the experiments Swift mentions were either carried out or proposed by these scientists. Lord Munodi is the traditionalist who is against the unreliable theories of the Academy. Hence he has a fine, strong house and his estate and tenants are flourishing as opposed to the others who had followed the Academy's reforms. The Struldbrugs

are an immortal race of humans who age without dying, thus they instruct humans regarding the undesirability of immortality.

Reason and virtue are represented by the Houyhnhnms, the horses. They subjugate their individuality for the good of the race as a whole. They do not have individual names or characteristics and treat each other with respect and kindness. Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master is not given a name and is portrayed as a wise, compassionate and just man who welcomes him to his family. Unfortunately, he is left with no choice but to ask Gulliver to leave the island as he is not a Houyhnhnm but only a superior sort of Yahoo. Houyhnhnm reason does not allow Gulliver to become a part of their culture. Though the Yahoos are humans, they represent the bestial nature of man. They are greedy, violent, avaricious and destructive. They are kept as slaves by the Houyhnhnms and do the harder, baser work. An important distinction drawn between them and humans is the fact that humans are endowed with reason unlike the Yahoos. But even with reason, humans have a tendency to choose evil over good. Thus the Yahoos represent humans at their worst.

Don Pedro de Mendez is an important character in the novel. He is the captain of the ship that picks up Gulliver after he leaves the island of the Houyhnhnms. He is kind, generous, courteous and offers Gulliver his best suit of clothes. He is a representation of the best in mankind. It is important to note that Swift chose a member of the Catholic nation to represent the positive qualities of mankind at a time when England defined its friendship based on the adherence of other nations to the Protestant religion. However Gulliver turns a blind eye to the goodness of Don Pedro de Mendez seeing him only as a Yahoo.

Section 5 – Themes

One of the major themes in *Gulliver's Travels* is the use and abuse of power. Despite their smallness, the Lilliputians wield considerable power over Gulliver. They take advantage of his kind, non-aggressive and gullible nature. The Lilliputian king is a vain, glorious and despotic ruler who executes people for trivial matters. His ministers are selected based on their ability to leap and creep. The Brobdingnagians, on the other hand, can dominate others through their superior size, but they do not do so. Except for the farmer who was willing to work Gulliver to death for his personal gain, the Brobdingnagians do not abuse their power. The king only wishes to work for the good of the people. He rejects the offer to know the secret of making gun powder on humanitarian grounds. Swift also questions the right of certain people to hold power over others. The Laputan king is of the opinion that since he is well versed in theoretical knowledge, he has a right to rule the Balnibarbians. But to the readers he appears as a ridiculous man who is not fit to rule a country.

According to J. A. Downie (1984), the Laputan society is an example of Swift's point that an excess of speculative reasoning can also be negative by cutting one off from the practical realities of life which, in the end, doesn't serve learning or society. Lord Munodi's common sense and practicality makes him an ideal character for a ruler. But the Laputans view him as hopelessly backward and unfit to take care of his own property. The qualities possessed by the Houyhnhnms which give them the power to rule over the Yahoos can be seen in a different light when one thinks about the debate in the council over the very existence of the Yahoos.

Pride forms another important theme in the novel. According to John M. Bullitt (1966) pride is what enables man to "deceive himself into the belief that he is rational and virtuous when, in reality, he has not developed his reason, and his virtue is merely appearance". The Lilliputians are proud of their military. But a simple invasion by the humans can totally crush them. The absurdity of their misplaced pride is shown in the incident in which they arrange a military parade in view of Gulliver's exposed nether regions. The stay with the Brobdingnagians shows the destruction of human pride and vanity in appearance. When Gulliver sees the bodily features and functions at a close range, he understands the unattractiveness of the human body with its pores and pimples. As William A. Eddy (1963) says, "all the transactions of life, all passion, and all social amenities, which involve the body, lose their respectability in Brobdingnag." The Laputans are proud of their knowledge in mathematics and music but they are impractical in doing everyday things like building a house, tailoring clothes or even in ruling the country. Their pride makes the countrymen starve to death. Their wives wait for a chance to escape from the floating island to the land below. Towards the end, Gulliver himself becomes a victim of pride when he rejects humanity on the ground that they are Yahoos. He turns a blind eye to the virtue of Don Pedro and he cruelly rejects his wife and family.

In the whole text of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe never mentions his hero's bodily functions. But Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* places considerable emphasis on the bodily and excretory functions of the hero. This provides a satirical counterweight to the tendency of his age which championed man as a rational creature. Swift was quick to remind humanity that they were made of the same skin, blood, and bone as the animals, and shared their basic needs, appetites, and functions. The rationality and superiority based on that are just layers of pretensions that cover this truth.

In *Gulliver's Travels* Swift raises the question of the conflict between the individual and the society. During most of his travels, Gulliver does not become one with the society that he visits. Even when he returns to England, he is not interested in staying and leaves as quickly as possible. It is only in the country of Houyhnhnms that he wishes to stay, and be assimilated in to it. The Houyhnhnm country is unique because it subjugates the individual for the good of the society as a whole.

Nobody can become attached to their children because they may be assigned to another family that has a shortage of children. Here mates are chosen for the good of the race and not by individual preference. In his essay, George Orwell (1946) refers to the Houyhnhnm system as an anarchist society where everyone has to comply to the exhortations of the General Assembly. Orwell further says that Swift approves of this kind of thing because among his many gifts neither curiosity nor good-nature was included. Thus the hero Gulliver ridiculously tries to become one with this society where reason rules by imitating the gait and speech patterns of the Houyhnhnms. But they decide that he is not one of them and expel him. When Gulliver is saved by the merchant ship, he tries to escape from it. He even refuses to wear the clothes provided by Don Pedro and feels comfortable in his Houyhnhnm clothes.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift emphasizes that knowledge is not equivalent to wisdom. Though Lilliputian politicians have knowledge, they have to creep and leap to gain power. Another example of faulty reasoning can be seen in the Egg incident. The Laputans have theoretical knowledge but they do not have the wisdom to combine it with practical situations. Hence the people whom they rule starve. A man's education is incomplete if he cannot combine knowledge with wisdom.

Section 6 – Conclusion

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire which dissects humanity and lays bare the pettiness of the humans. It is the most savage attack upon humanity ever made in literature. It was Swift who said, "I heartily hate and detest that animal called man," and in *Gulliver's Travels* he goes on to prove it. He magnifies man into a giant in Lilliput and then in the second voyage diminishes him to a play thing. In Laputa man is at the pinnacle of his wisdom but is still a fool. In the last book, Swift finds charity and sagacity in animals rather than in man. Thus he denounces man forever. The first two voyages have a charm that then transforms into brutality as the story progresses. But apart from this bitter satirical attack, *Gulliver's Travels* is still very popular as a children's story. It is also at once a folk-myth, a fantasy and a classic in the realism genre.

Since its publication, *Gulliver's Travels* has polarised people's opinion into the two extremes of warm admiration or utter disgust. The immediate response by Swift's friends on its publication was one of praise and admiration. The enthusiasm of his fellow Scriblerus Club members like Alexander Pope, John Gay and John Arbuthnot comes as no surprise since they shared his sense of satire. The group who was against it consisted of the church-goers who felt that Swift had depreciated the works of God in his work and his political rivals like Lady Montagu, Jonathan Smedley et al. Samuel Richardson was appalled by *Gulliver's Travels*, especially *Book IV*. But Henry Fielding's

response was different. He applauded Swift for his wonderful work. *Gulliver's Travels* was noticed in the wake of the First World War. The violence of the war made the similarity between the humans and the Yahoos felt more than ever. Though the book had its defenders, most of them were disappointed with Swift's supposed misanthropy. But he was a man who was not just aware of the flaws of his fellow beings but also of their virtues. Whatever the critics may say, nothing can efface *Gulliver's Travels* from being one in the list of the world's most famous books.