

Gulliver's Travels

Swift is rightly enough, regarded as one of the world's greatest satirists. The age of Swift was most conducive to the spirit of satire. He was a man of piercing intellect and this intellect could not be blind to the chaos and confusion and corruption of the age. His cold, objective analysis of the socio-political conditions could not but arouse his dissatisfaction and anger.

Personally, Swift's very nature was attuned to satire. His personal experiences were disappointing and frustrating. His ambitions were suppressed and his merits were not appreciated and recognized, and he suffered from ill-health. All these factors contributed to his becoming a great satirist.

Defoe's novel about Robinson Crusoe had appeared in 1719 and in the same vein Swift makes Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon and sea captain, recounts his adventures. In part one, Gulliver is wrecked on an island where human beings are six inches all. The Lilliputians have wars and conduct clearly laughable with their self-importance and vanities- these human follies only reduced into a miniature scale. Gulliver's second voyage takes him to Brobdingnag. He meets giants who are practical but do not understand abstractions. On his third voyage, Gulliver's ship is attacked and pirated from a Chinese port and he is set adrift in a small sailboat in which he manages to reach a rocky island. Here a floating mass alights from the sky and Gulliver finds himself aboard the flying islands of Laputa, a land inhabited by intellectuals who think in terms of the abstract and ignore the practical. When the floating island arrives above the continent of Balnibarbi, Gulliver received permission to visit the land. Following the inspection of the Grand Academy, Gulliver travels on to Glubbdubdrib, the island of sorcerers. Where he interviews the apparitions of historic personalities such as Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar and Sir Thomas More, only to find the history books are unreliable sources of information. He then journeys on to Luggnagg to meet the king and to see the Luggnaggian immortals, the stuldbruggs creatures who never die. Not too impressed with what he has seen of immortality, Gulliver continues on to Japan where he takes passage for England after having been gone for more than three years.

Book III consists of visits to a number of countries which provide the occasion for extended exposure of the nastiness of totalitarian rule, the oppression of Ireland by England, the depraved folly (intellectual as well as political) of scientific research establishments, and, in the glimpse of otherworldly worthies in Glubbdubdrib, the tarnished stature of several revered figures from the past.

For the last time, in August of 1710, the restless Gulliver sets out as captain of a ship sailing from Portsmouth for the South Seas. Gulliver is kept prisoner in his cabin for four months, and then is cast adrift in a longboat to make his way to a strange shore. There he is set upon by half-human ape like creatures who flee in terror at the sight of a horse. Now Gulliver discovers that he is in the land of the Houyhnhnms, the rational horses who are the masters of the sub-human Yahoos who serve as beasts of burden. In spite of the diet of oaten cakes and milk, and the evident condescension of the superior master horses, Gulliver is intrigued by a society in which courts of law and war are unknown, for the Houyhnhnms are rational beings to whom dispute is incomprehensible. Gulliver learns to live with his hosts in complete contentment until he is informed that the Grand Assembly has decreed that he must be treated as another Yahoo or be released to return to his native land.

Heartbroken over peremptory banishment, Gulliver builds a canoe and leaves the land. He is picked up by Portuguese vessel and from Lisbon he returns to England, where, remembering the Yahoo, he lives out his life time detesting all mankind and favoring the only friend he has on earth- the horses.