

Gulliver's travels: an altered perspective



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Gulliver's Travels: An Altered Perspective Jonathan Swift's ultimate satirical masterpiece, Gulliver's Travels, scrutinizes human nature through a misanthropic eye. More directly, it examines the bastardization English society underwent. The brilliant tale depicts the journey of Lemuel Gulliver, an Englishman, and his distorted encounters. Examining the prominent political and social conflicts of England in the eighteenth century, Swift's critical work causes much controversy. Gulliver's Travels leads him to places of opposite environments and presents him with different opportunities. Through Gulliver's journey, Swift ridicules Gulliver as an individual character, and also as a product of England's social practices. First, Gulliver travels to Lilliput, a land of miniature humans. The culture and society of the Lilliputians is very similar to that of Gulliver's home, England. However, in this undersized environment, Gulliver's outlook is altered. The Lilliputians actions seem trivial and insignificant. Because Gulliver is so incredibly large to this race, the emperor utilizes him as a monument. Gulliver explains, " He desired I would stand like a colossus with my legs as far asunder as I conveniently could. He then commanded... the troops in close order and march them under me." (p. 377) This grand celebration of thousands of horses, an army of toy troops, and flamboyant reverberations of color and sound all underneath Gulliver is a frivolous interpretation of the Lilliputians asserting their pride and buoying their national egos. Gulliver, in size, is superior to the Lilliputians; however, they still have complete control of him. The society of Gulliver, portrayed by Swift, becomes underdeveloped, stunted, and feeble. Swift also criticizes many of political England's institutions through the actions of the Lilliputians. Several of the characters and their actions are reflections of those transpiring in England at the time.

In one scene, Gulliver is invited to watch some royal entertainment. The competitions are to win places of office in the Lilliputian government. He describes that, " This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employment and high favor at court...candidates petition...to entertain his Majesty and the court with dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office." (p. 374)

The government is run by people of the most dexterity and straining persistence. Satirizing the corrupt appointment of English offices, Swift indicates the unfairness of favoritism at the court, of despotism, and of physical ability and power over moral stature and just righteousness. This scene demonstrates the dedication office holders have to their personal valor rather than their vocational determination. Although observed on a smaller scale, Swift's condemnation of inequitable and illogical doctrines of his culture is magnified through this satire. In his next adventure, Gulliver's entire view is magnified as he encounters the giant Brobdingnagians. Gulliver's distorted proportion alters his perception once again. As a miniature character, he is permitted to observe each human Brobdingnagian up close, personally, and with great attention. He is confronted with amplified human vices and sordid practices. In spite of his altered view of others, Gulliver also sees himself very differently. He is not only diminished in size, but in character. While the Brobdingnagian's human instincts are denigrated, this episode also suggests the possibility for their values to transcend to a virtuous and moral eminence. After Gulliver describes the methods by which England functions, he invokes this response from the king of Brobdingnag: " I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to

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crawl upon the surface of the earth." (p. 379) To the Brobdingnagian king, England's management of laws, government, religion, and conquests were absolutely appalling. While Gulliver boasts of his country's achievements, the king is horrified. Swift implies that humans have the potential to overcome corruption while simultaneously disparaging English practices of such evil intent. Gulliver's Travels is one of the most successful satires against man's corrupt nature. This open political and social ridicule by Jonathan Swift employs the journey of Gulliver to portray the faults of England. Gulliver's travels to places where his perspective is altered thus allowing faults to be revealed on many different levels. By alluding to the misconceived political and social life of eighteenth century England, Swift effectively expresses his disapproval. Gulliver, as an Englishman, cannot help but to descend to idiocy no matter his size.