

# Political comparisons between gulliver's travels and herland



Change is inevitable; it grows with the next generation and time and time again sneaks up on those that are not looking for it. This is true for music, fashion, literature, religion, and even politics. The tide of any of these subjects may change dramatically in a short period, however, the basic principles of each are never truly lost. The reoccurrence of once obsolete ideals can be proven simply by looking at the past and comparing to our current situation. This is also seen in literary plots spanning from the 1800s to today. The novels I am focusing on, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift and *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, are two prime examples of retrograde literature and the ability of essential doctrines to move from the past into novels of the future. Though authors may unknowingly do so, they are responsible for this continuation and the production of novels with identical or similar concepts. Although *Gulliver's Travels* was written before *Herland*, they both mention politics and religion as overarching themes throughout the stories.

*Gulliver's Travels* covers the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver as he discovers a number of unknown colonies with peculiar residents. Though his initial reaction, when arriving at Lilliput, is one of shock at the tiny citizens that attempt to restrain him, he also is presented with the political system that is Lilliput's kingdom. The emperor, a hospitable man once Gulliver provides him with decent entertainment and protection, rules over a noble system and kingdom. This usually successful model is corrupted by the emperor's willingness to place his friends and loved ones in positions of power, an act of blatant nepotism. Comparably, the king of the Brobdingnagians often contemplates the necessary actions for his government to be acceptable at

least, exceptional at most. Other kings, like the one that rules over Luggnaggia, refused to consider the political ramifications of his actions; instead, he chose to force his subjects to flatter him and obey his every order and command. Finally, the Laputian king chose monetary gain over the success of his own kingdom, by selling off the lands that surrounded them he gained power through money, not respect. Swift may not be inherently misogynistic, but his continued placement of a male as the head of all fictitious governments in his novel perpetuates the stereotype that women are incapable of leading. This is most likely due to the time period Gulliver's Travels was produced within, it is just an unfortunate view to have, especially when compared with the equality-driven society of Herland.

The patriarchal model seen throughout Gulliver's Travels is not easily overlapped with the socialist society seen within Herland. Rather than uplifting a singular person or a small class of well off individuals, the women within Herland's society shift their focus to communal peace. The action of treating the entire community as if it is one large family produces individual members who care more about their sisters than they do themselves.

Though some may see this as self-destructive, to this particular society, the concept of socialism provides a simple and trustworthy community in which they can raise their children. Common education and communal farming insure no inequality will take place, thus also insuring there will not be quarrels over "special treatment". Furthermore, the lack of laws showcases the advancement these women have already made; there is not violence or a need for disagreement because they have reached their prime potential, only moving forward to further scientific and research based operations.

There is a large difference with Gulliver's Travels as we see a different political system in Herland than any mentioned in the former novel. Where Swift seems so focused on the necessity of a formal, rigid political structure, Gilman prefers a more simplistic approach. The change of ideals is stark, a night and day comparison of sorts; it is near impossible to find even a slight continuation from the early 1800s publication of Gulliver to the early 1900s publication of Herland and the Amazonian-like women. Gilman does not produce a singular leader within her colony of self-reproducing females; they all view each other as equals to not only those within their society, but also those who stumble upon them. However curious they may be, the women are not afraid of the men, nor do they feel the need to elect one their king and serve under him.

Though it is true in certain aspects that history does repeat itself, it is difficult to find such close comparisons when location, author age and gender, and a span of about a century create the differences spotted. Gulliver's Travels enforces an age old idea that a patriarchy is the best option for a civilized land while Herland accepts the notion that perhaps there is no need for a ruling body. Given the fact that these two novels present quite separate ideas of a utopia it is not entirely fair to claim one as correct and the other as misinformed; however, it is not impossible to tell which literary piece and author expanded their frame of thinking to include larger possibilities for politics and leadership.