

Satire in gulliver's travels



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Jonathan Swift was born on November 30, 1667 in Dublin, Ireland, the son of Protestant Anglo-Irish parents: his ancestors had been Royalists, and all his life he would be a High-Churchman. In 1673, at the age of six, Swift began his education at Kilkenny Grammar School, which was, at the time, the best in Ireland. Between 1682 and 1686 he attended, and graduated from, Trinity College in Dublin, though he was not, apparently, an exemplary student. In 1688 William of Orange invaded England, initiating the Glorious Revolution: with Dublin in political turmoil, Trinity College was closed, and an ambitious Swift took the opportunity to go to England, where he hoped to gain preferment in the Anglican Church. In England, in 1689, he became secretary to Sir William Temple, a diplomat and man of letters, at Moor Park in Surrey. There Swift read extensively in his patron's library, and met Esther Johnson, who would become his "Stella," and it was there, too, that he began to suffer from Meniere's Disease, a disturbance of the inner ear which produces nausea and vertigo, and which was little understood in Swift's day. In 1690, at the advice of his doctors, Swift returned to Ireland, but the following year he was back with Temple in England. He visited Oxford in 1691: in 1692, with Temple's assistance, he received an M. A. degree from that University, and published his first poem: on reading it, John Dryden, a distant relation, is said to have remarked "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet." Between 1696 and 1699 Swift composed most of his first great work, *A Tale of a Tub*, a prose satire on the religious extremes represented by Roman Catholicism and Calvinism, and in 1697 he wrote *The Battle of the Books*, a satire defending Temple's conservative but besieged position in the contemporary literary controversy as to whether the works of the "Ancients" - the great authors of classical antiquity - were to be preferred to those of the "

Moderns." In 1699 Temple died, and Swift traveled to Ireland as chaplain and secretary to the Earl of Berkeley. In 1700 he was instituted Vicar of Laracor - provided, that is, with what was known as a " Living" - and given a prebend in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. These appointments were a bitter disappointment for a man who had longed to remain in England. In 1701 Swift was awarded a D. D. from Dublin University, and published his first political pamphlet, supporting the Whigs against the Tories. 1704 saw the anonymous publication of *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books*, and *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. In 1707 Swift was sent to London as emissary of Irish clergy seeking remission of tax on Irish clerical incomes. His requests were rejected, however, by the Whig government and by Queen Anne, who suspected him of being irreligious. While in London he met Esther Vanhomrigh, who would become his " Vanessa." During the next few years he went back and forth between Ireland and England, where he was involved - largely as an observer rather than a participant - in the highest English political circles. In 1708 Swift met Addison and Steele, and published his *Bickerstaff Papers*, satirical attacks upon an astrologer, John Partridge, and a series of ironical pamphlets on church questions, including *An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity*. In 1710, which saw the publication of " *A Description of a City Shower*," Swift, disgusted with their alliance with the Dissenters, fell out with Whigs, allied himself with the Tories, and became the editor of the Tory newspaper *The Examiner*. Between 1710 and 1713 he also wrote the famous series of letters to Esther Johnson which would eventually be published as *The Journal to Stella*. In 1713 Swift was installed as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin - a promotion which was, again, a disappointment. The Scriblerus Club, whose members included Swift, Pope,

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Congreve, Gay, and Arbuthnot, was founded in 1714. In the same year, much more unhappily for Swift, Queen Anne died, and George I took the throne. With his accession the Tories fell from power, and Swift's hopes for preferment in England came to an end: he returned to Ireland "to die," as he says, "like a poisoned rat in a hole." In 1716 Swift may or may not have married Esther Johnson. A period of literary silence and personal depression ensued, but beginning in 1718, he broke the silence, and began to publish a series of powerful tracts on Irish problems. In 1720 he began work upon Gulliver's Travels, intended, as he says in a letter to Pope, "to vex the world, not to divert it." 1724-25 saw the publication of The Drapier Letters, which gained Swift enormous popularity in Ireland, and the completion of Gulliver's Travels. The progressive darkness of the latter work is an indication of the extent to which his misanthropic tendencies became more and more markedly manifest, had taken greater and greater hold upon his mind. In 1726 he visited England once again, and stayed with Pope at Twickenham: in the same year Gulliver's Travels was published. Swift's final trip to England took place in 1727. Between 1727 and 1736 publication of five volumes of Swift-Pope Miscellanies. "Stella" died in 1728. In the following year A Modest Proposal was published. 1731 saw the publication of Swift's ghastly "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed." By 1735, when a collected edition of his Works was published in Dublin, his Meniere's Disease became more acute, resulting in periods of dizziness and nausea: at the same time, prematurely, his memory was beginning to deteriorate. During 1738 he slipped gradually into senility, and finally suffered a paralytic stroke: in 1742 guardians were officially appointed to care for his affairs. Swift died on October 19, 1745. The following is Yeats's poetic version (a very free

translation) of the Latin epitaph which Swift composed for himself: Swift sailed into his rest; Savage indignation there Cannot lacerate his breast. Imitate him if you dare, World-besotted traveller; he Served human liberty.

Gulliver's Travels, a large portion of which Swift wrote at Woodbrook House in County Laois, was published in 1726. It is regarded as his masterpiece. As with his other writings, the Travels was published under a pseudonym, the fictional Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon and later a sea captain. Some of the correspondence between printer Benj. Motte and Gulliver's also-fictional cousin negotiating the book's publication has survived. Though it has often been mistakenly thought of and published in bowdlerized form as a children's book, it is a great and sophisticated satire of human nature based on Swift's experience of his times. Gulliver's Travels is an anatomy of human nature, a sardonic looking-glass, often criticized for its apparent misanthropy. It asks its readers to refute it, to deny that it has adequately characterized human nature and society. Each of the four books—recounting four voyages to mostly-fictional exotic lands—has a different theme, but all are attempts to deflate human pride. Critics hail the work as a satiric reflection on the shortcomings of Enlightenment thought. If a reader wants to understand Gulliver's Travels thoroughly and deeply, it is very necessary for him to know the writing techniques. Because of the special historical background, Swift had to employ many kinds of satire to criticize the contemporary English society indirectly. The word satire derives from the Latin *satira*, meaning "medley." A satire, either in prose or in poetic form, holds prevailing vices or follies up to ridicule: it employs humor and wit to criticize human institutions or humanity itself, in order that they might be remodeled or improved. Satire as an English literary form derives in large

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part from Greek and Roman literature. Aristophanes, Juvenal, Horace, Martial, and Petronius all wrote satires of one kind or another, and the tradition maintained a tenuous existence in England down through the Middle Ages in the form of the fabliau and the Beast-epic. The eighteenth century, however, in which poetry, drama, essays, and literary criticism were all imbued with the form, was the golden age of English satire. Dryden, Swift, Pope, Addison, Steele, and Johnson were all great satirists, and self-described heirs of the Roman poets Horace and Juvenal. Horatian satire tends to be gentler and more sympathetic than the more biting and bitter Juvenalian satire, in which the author—Swift is the great example—frequently rails savagely against the evil inherent in man and his institutions. Byron and Thackeray, in the nineteenth century, maintained and refined the satiric tradition, as did T. S. Eliot in the twentieth. Derwent Hope, the contemporary Australian poet, agrees with Pope that satire "has a social function that places it on a level with Religion, Law, and Government. Though its tone may be light, its function is wholly serious; and as for passion, it is actuated by a fierce and strenuous moral and intellectual enthusiasm, the passion for order, justice, and beauty. . . . It keeps the public conscience alert, it exposes absurdity for what it is and makes those inclined to adopt foolish or tasteless fashions aware that they are ridiculous. It shows vice its own feature and makes it odious to others. . . . Satire is an aristocratic art. It is not afraid to tell unpopular truths, but its habit is to tell them with the assurance and detachment of ridicule, and ridicule is the weapon of contempt" (pp. 62, 66-67).

1. Satire Modern scholarship has described the contemporary reception and political significance of Gulliver's Travels as an opposition work attacking the Walpolean regime, linking it with the political stance of Bolingbroke's

circle. From the time of its first publication, readers liked the book for its political allusions and allegories in the text. Swift's political satire demonstrably combines topical and general satire meanings. Swift's topical political satire in Gulliver's Travels is directed against the monarch as well as the ministry. A celebrated episode of comic satire in Part I describes the "Diversions of the court of Lilliput. "(Gulliver's Travels: 26) Gulliver is most diverted by the rope dancing which ' is only practiced by those persons, who are candidates for great Employments, and high Favor, at Court. They are trained in this Art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth, or liberal Education.'(Gulliver's Travels: 26) This rope-dancing episode is a general satire on the politics of intrigue and requirement and the incongruity between qualification or talent and office in the corrupt state. Reading topical political satire of the work is now commonplace in Swift's criticism. Significantly, in the episode of the ropedancers in Part I, satiric blame is directed against the court, not just against Flimnap and the ministers. The ministers perform their grotesque antics to recommend themselves to the monarch. Gulliver reports that the ' famous practice of acquiring great Employments by dancing on the ropes' is a corruption encouraged by the monarch. While Swift does not expose himself to danger by writing simple one-to-one allegory, the reader is enabled to see the Court of Lilliput as a diminutive parallel to England's. The Court is recognizable with a monarch, " Treasurer" and Chief ministers, and the incongruous diversion of rope dancing represents the Courts of his remote nation in the reductive familiar light of an English popular entertainment. 2. Irony apart from the using of satire¼ Swift also uses other rhetorical devices¼ which is irony. Swift employs his traveler as his narrator, as he has used other fictive narrators,

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as more or less a mask behind or through which he will speak. In Part I, the empress's apartment is on fire, Gulliver attempts to vindicate the reputation of a lady while he is unjustly accused of an adulterous relationship with her, and the surface meaning is of course Gulliver's. Swift's voice should also be heard, chuckling and saying something like, "Isn't Gulliver silly?" The same other voice is noted when Gulliver urinates on the apartment of her imperial majesty. He does flood the fire out, but he is perplexed when the empress conceived "the greatest abhorrence of what I had done." (Gulliver's Travels: 40) Why would the empress be offended by the flood of urine on her apartment? Gulliver does not understand. Swift of course does. Again, when the emperor announces his "lenient" (Gulliver's Travels: 40) decision to blind Gulliver and then starves him to death, Gulliver is distressed. He concludes that the lowness of his birth and the deficiencies of his education prevent him from regarding the sentence as lenient. Swift's voice emerges clearly, one needs neither a high birth nor an extensive education to see so obviously a fact. One needs only to see a thing and it is. The "thing" in this instance is cruel, not "lenient." (p. 40) So Swift just uses this imaginary plot to achieve the ironic effect and to criticize the contemporary English society.

3. Innuendo King George is particularly attacked throughout Gulliver's Travels. The Emperor of Lilliput is a paradigm of a despotic King, but the character also specifically reflects on George I. The Emperor has determined to use 'only Low Heels (innuendo Low Church or Whig party) in the Administration of the Government, and all Offices in the Gift of the Crown' and has proscribed the 'high Heels (innuendo High Church or Tory party)' from power, the 'High Heels' are most agreeable to our ancient Constitution and exceed the 'Low Heels' in number. The Emperor, like George I when

Swift was at work on Gulliver's Travels, had reined for about seven years. The description of the Emperor's person in Part I, Chapter II is a satiric mock-encomium of George I. Gulliver is a general satire on institutional and individual corruption with topical polemical resonance at the time of its publication. The readers of Gulliver's Travels are enabled by analogy, allusion and echo to make topical political applications of the general satire.