

Gulliver's travels



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

February Fantastical Comparisons: Gulliver in Laputa Some believe comparisons are odious (old English saying), but fictional contrasts and comparisons can be very entertaining. Jonathan Swift takes his protagonist on some fantastic journeys in Gulliver's Travels, and imaginatively gives locations and people many invented characteristics. Here, an attempt is made to contrast and compare some of them, mainly Laputa, Lagado and Balnibarbi, discussing striking differences between them, while showing how Swift could not depart from his own ingrained conventions and customs. London, then, is part of the comparison.

Laputa is a fictional island made out of a kind of marble, 'adamantine' - adamant means stubborn, an indication of the king (Your Dictionary 2009) - that hovers above a bigger island called Balnibarbi. Gulliver spends some time there, but is dismayed by the blinkered views of the inhabitants, who are good with technology, astronomy, mathematics and music, but have not developed practical skills and are not sociable. His time there is spent chatting with servants and women, who he considers less important. He lumps women of all times and places together as being 'not limited by any climate or nation, and ... are much more uniform, and can be easily imagined.' (Swift 2003) But they are 'less valid' than the ones who matter: the scientists and thinking men, who have no time for him. Thinking them rude, he decides to leave. He is allowed to go with a gift of 'about two hundred pounds English' a sum which indicates not only the time Swift writes in, but also his inability to break out of the English mold: perhaps because he thinks of his audience, or perhaps because he is caught within that scope. All the fancy imaginings he uses are a conscious departure from the customs, politics, costumes and language he knew.

Descending to the lower static island, Gulliver is appalled by the lack of development he witnesses during a tour of the capital, Lagado. Compared to the place he has just come from, it is backward, unkempt, disorganized and in disrepair: a real Dystopia, even though the Laputians had strange ways of doing things. In a place about 'half the bigness of London', the people below appear so strange, and the soil so uncultivated, that he asks questions of his guide, lord Munodi. It turns out the reasons behind the sorry state of Lagado is that laws were put in place to ensure everything was done the wrong way around, by the divergent government.

Munodi takes Gulliver to his own estate, which in comparison, is extremely well run. '... in three hours travelling, the scene was wholly altered; we came into a most beautiful country; farmers' houses, at small distances, neatly built; the fields enclosed, containing vineyards, corn-grounds, and meadows.' (Swift 2003). It is Utopian, that is: an ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects (Your Dictionary 2009). One must note how closely this resembles Swift's impression of England. Munodi's realm, however, is not liked by the government, and criticized by the rest of the population of Lagado: it is ridiculed with contempt, and considered barbarous. Lagado is a place of back-to-front reasoning, where nice and neat is despised, and backward and disorganized is seen as wonderful. This is a satirical observation of Swift's: some politicians in England at the time this book was written were seen to have back-to-front reasoning. He is taking a strike at them: this would have been obvious in its time: now, it needs explanation.

In contrast with the king of Laputa, who never seemed interested in Gulliver's origins, language or land, lord Munodi seemed very curious about

his guest's country, and asked a lot of questions. This pleased Gulliver, but Swift seems to make the point that an Englishman would naturally seem so very interesting to the populations of these strange lands, just like the people of Mildendo in Lilliput had crowded to their windows to see Gulliver pass; not only because of his size, but of his civilization, bearing and language (Swift 2003).

What strikes me as most interesting in this book is the attitude of the author: he invents concepts that must have seemed wildly imaginative in his time, but he seems very self-conscious and a bit condescending to the modern reader. In addition, his attitude towards women, servants, and the uneducated is noticeably negative. So it gives any student the impression that social attitudes have changed a great deal since 1735, when the book was written.

Sources Cited

Swift, Jonathan (2003) *Gulliver's Travels* Penguin Classics

Your Dictionary (2009) Accessed February 28, 2010