

Gulliver's Travels



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JONATHAN SWIFT

Jonathan Swift was born to a lawyer in Dublin in 1667 and attended Trinity College. He went on to be a politician's secretary, a country parson, and a chaplain, all of which provided material for his satires about the political and religious corruption of his society. During his brief time in England, Swift, Alexander Pope, and others formed the Scriblerus Club resolving to write books satirizing modern knowledge. *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift's most famous work, arose from that resolution. Swift was also an outspoken advocate in favor of Irish liberty from England and Swift's second most famous work, [A Modest Proposal](#), satirizes tensions between the Irish and the English. In his later years, Swift is said to have become misanthropic and bitter. He died of a stroke in 1745.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the early eighteenth century, Britain's political atmosphere underwent a dramatic shift. While Queen Anne sat on the throne from 1665 to 1714, the Tory party was in favor and dominated politics with their conservative agenda of minimized parliamentary power and increased royal authority. Yet when King George I took power in 1714, the dynamics shifted and the liberal Whig party, the conservative Tory party's opponents, gained traction in English politics, pushing Tories out of prominence. One of these Tories was Jonathan Swift and parts of *Gulliver's Travels* (especially Gulliver's adventures in Lilliput) satirize the Whigs' and Tories' struggles against each other.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Gulliver's Travels satirizes the form of the travel narrative, a popular literary genre that started with Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages* in 1589 and experienced immense popularity in eighteenth-century England through best-selling diaries and first-person accounts by explorers such as Captain James Cook. At the time, people were eager to hear about cultures and people in the faraway lands where explorers were claiming colonies for England. Many accounts were largely truthful, but even those that were generally honest were not immune to elaboration. In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift satirizes embellishing travel writers as well as gullible English readers eager for outrageous tales about other countries.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Gulliver's Travels*, or, *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a*

Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships

- **When Written:** 1720-1725
- **Where Written:** Dublin, Ireland
- **When Published:** 1726
- **Literary Period:** Augustan
- **Genre:** Satire
- **Setting:** England and the imaginary nations of Lilliput, Blefuscu, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the land of the Houyhnhnms
- **Climax:** Gulliver's decision to reject humankind and try his best to become a Houyhnhnm
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

By Gulliver, About Gulliver. Although contemporary editions of *Gulliver's Travels* have Jonathan Swift's name printed as author on the cover, Swift published the first edition under the pseudonym Lemuel Gulliver.

Instant Classic. *Gulliver's Travels* was an immediate success upon its first publication in 1726. Since then, it has never been out of print.



PLOT SUMMARY

Lemuel Gulliver is a married English surgeon who wants to see the world. He takes a job on a ship and ends up shipwrecked in the land of Lilliput where he is captured by the miniscule Lilliputians and brought to the Lilliputian king. The Lilliputians are astonished by Gulliver's size but treat him gently, providing him with lots of food and clothes. Gulliver is at first chained to a big abandoned temple then, after surrendering his weapons and signing articles of allegiance to Lilliput, he is granted his liberty. He befriends the king and puts out a fire in the palace by **urinating** on it. He successfully assists Lilliput by stealing the neighboring Blefuscu's war ships and receives a high honor, but the Lilliputian king begins to cool towards Gulliver when Gulliver refuses to help enslave the Blefuscu's. Gulliver makes friends with the Blefuscu's when they come to make peace and, soon after, an unnamed man of the court informs Gulliver that the Lilliputian court plans to accuse him of treason and put out his eyes. Gulliver escapes to Blefuscu and then returns to England.

Gulliver soon sets out on his next voyage and is stranded in the land of Brobdingnag where the Brobdingnagians are immense giants and Gulliver feels like a Lilliputian. After being forced to perform exhausting freak shows by the Brobdingnagian farmer,

Gulliver is sold to the Brobdingnagian queen, the farmer's daughter and his loving caretaker Glumdalclitch in tow. In the court, Gulliver is well cared for but everyone laughs frequently at his physical mishaps. Gulliver tries to maintain his dignity with little success. He offers to help the Brobdingnagian king strengthen his power by using gunpowder and is puzzled the king's disgust, concluding that, though the Brobdingnagians are a good-hearted people, they are just not as sophisticated as humans. One day, the box Gulliver is carried around in for outings gets snatched up by a bird on the beach and, dumped in the sea, he is picked up by a human ship and carried back to England. Back among humans, Gulliver is astonished by their littleness.

Gulliver sets out yet again to sea and is again stranded, this time getting taken up by the Laputians to their floating island. He meets the Laputian king and observes life in Laputa where everyone is so obsessed with abstract mathematical, musical, and astronomical theory that they are utterly incompetent about practical matters and can barely hold a conversation. Gulliver is disgusted when he visits the city of Lagado below and sees the destructive influence the Laputians' theories have had, turning a once functioning people into a broken society. He tours the academy where the projectors contrive useless scientific projects. Afterwards, Gulliver visits Glubbdubdrib and meets ghosts of history, visits Luggnagg and meets the power-crazed Luggnaggian king and the grim immortal Struldburgs, and finally returns to England.

Gulliver sets out on his fourth voyage only to be mutinied and stranded in a land where the noble and reasonable horses, the Houyhnhnms, do their best to control the foul degenerate human Yahoos. Gulliver tries to distance himself as much as possible from the Yahoos and, indeed, the Houyhnhnms, especially Gulliver's mentor, the master horse, see Gulliver is different because he has a rational mind and wears **clothing**. The more Gulliver learns from the Houyhnhnms, the more he admires their uprightness, egalitarianism, and reason, and he eventually turns against humankind, wanting to live forever among the Houyhnhnms. As he learns about the Houyhnhnms from the master horse, the master horse also learns about humanity from Gulliver, and concludes that the Yahoos Gulliver has come from are really not very different from the filthy Yahoos among the Houyhnhnms. Much to Gulliver's chagrin, the Houyhnhnms ultimately insist that Gulliver return to his own country. Though he tries to avoid returning to human society, Don Pedro's ship picks Gulliver up and forces him to return to Europe. Back home, Gulliver remains disgusted by all the Yahoos around him, including his family members, and spends all his time with horses, reminiscing longingly about the Houyhnhnms. He concludes by assuring the reader that everything he's described is true and that he's written his travels solely for the public good so that the wretched Yahoos around him might learn from the virtuous beings of other lands.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Lemuel Gulliver – A married English surgeon, Gulliver wants nothing to do with domestic life and leaves England repeatedly to have adventures in far-off lands. He is resourceful, open-minded, adamant about his own truthfulness, and a remarkably fast learner of new languages. Though Gulliver is glad to return to England after his first three adventures in Lilliput, Brobdingnag and Laputia, his time among the Houyhnhnms permanently darkens Gulliver's perspective on humankind and he ends the novel disgusted by the society around him and longing for the company of Houyhnhnms.

The Laputian King – Lacking all common sense and utterly pre-occupied by abstractions, the Laputian King rules the land of Lagado from a floating island that never touches ground. He is by law not allowed to descend to the Earth and thus spends his life with his body hovering in space and his mind hovering amidst elaborate theories.

The Houyhnhnms – Rational, peaceful, generous, and civilized horses, the Houyhnhnms are ideal beings (at least from Gulliver's perspective). They are so honest and virtuous that they don't even have words for things like "evil" and "falsehood." They live content in their egalitarian and placid society troubled only by the question of how to constrain the Yahoos that live among them.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Gulliver's Children – Gulliver's children with his wife, whom he can't stand being around after returning to England from the island of the Houyhnhnms.

Richard Sympson – Richard Sympson is Gulliver's cousin and the editor of his travels. Gulliver strongly resents Sympson's edits.

Mary Burton – Mary Burton is Gulliver's neglected wife, left at home for years while he travels and then spurned and detested as a filthy Yahoo upon his return from the Houyhnhnms.

Betty – Gulliver's neglected daughter.

Johnny – Gulliver's neglected son.

The Lilliputians – The inhabitants of Lilliput, the Lilliputians are just a few inches tall. They are engaged in extended battles with their neighbors, the Blefuscans.

The Lilliputian King – King of Lilliput, the Lilliputian King is initially welcoming, generous, and friendly with Gulliver but he grows petulant, cold, and vengeful after Gulliver won't help him enslave the Blefuscans.

The Lilliputian Queen – Queen of Lilliput, the Lilliputian Queen never forgives Gulliver for **urinating** on the palace, despite the fact that his action saved the palace from destruction.

Flimnap – The sour-tempered treasurer of Lilliput who dislikes Gulliver and suspects Gulliver of having an affair with his wife

Skyresh Bolgolam – The admiral of Lilliput who also dislikes Gulliver.

Redresal – The principal secretary of Lilliput who suggests putting out Gulliver's eyes as a “gentler” alternative to death.

A man of the court – The Lilliputian who warns Gulliver about the court's plan to put out his eyes.

The Blefuscans – The neighbors to the Lilliputians with whom they have been engaged in extended battles. Gulliver steals their battle ships and prompts them to make peace with Lilliput, but eventually befriends the Blefuscans and refuses to enslave them against the Lilliputian King's wishes.

The Blefuscan King – The king of the Blefuscans who takes Gulliver in after he escapes from the Lilliputians and helps him prepare his voyage back to England.

The Brobdingnagians – The inhabitants of Brobdingnag, the Brobdingnagians are giants tens of feet tall. They are as big compared to humans as humans are to Lilliputians.

The Brobdingnagian King – Though he at first can't believe that Gulliver isn't just a piece of clockwork, the Brobdingnagian King comes around to Gulliver and happily discusses matters of state with him. He comes away from these discussions rather disgusted by humans, though.

The Brobdingnagian Queen – The Brobdingnagian Queen purchases Gulliver from the Brobdingnagian Farmer and grows very fond of Gulliver, proving herself a kind and generous caregiver. Nevertheless, she is highly amused by Gulliver's mishaps.

Glumdalclitch – Gulliver's primary caretaker in Brobdingnag, Glumdalclitch is a compassionate guardian, though she is not above laughing at Gulliver's mishaps.

The Brobdingnagian Queen's Dwarf – Gulliver's primary tormenter in Brobdingnag, The Brobdingnagian Queen's Dwarf is cruel and devious and always looking for a way to humiliate Gulliver.

The Brobdingnagian Farmer – The Brobdingnagian Farmer is Glumdalclitch's father and Gulliver's first care-taker in Brobdingnag. He makes money touring Gulliver through the country as a freak show.

The Brobdingnagian Farmer's Wife – The wife of the Brobdingnagian Farmer.

The Laputians – The inhabitants of the floating island, the Laputians are totally consumed by complex mathematic, astronomical, and musical theory and so disdain common sense that they lack all practical knowledge and can barely function as bodies in the world.

Lagadans – People who live in the land of Lagado, which stands beneath the floating island where the Laputians live.

Munodi – A shunned inhabitant of Lagado, Munodi believes in common sense and practical knowledge and lives on a property that resembles a well-built English estate and serves as an oasis for Gulliver amidst the widespread chaos and dysfunctionality of Lagado.

The Projectors – The members of the grand academy in Lagado, the projectors work cheerfully away on utterly useless projects and pursue vain applications of theory.

The Glubbdubdribbian Governor – A sorcerer, the Glubbdubdribbian Governor has the power to summon the ghosts of the dead and enables Gulliver to meet the dead of history.

The King of Luggnagg – A tyrannical ruler, the King of Luggnagg makes his subjects approach him by crawling on their bellies licking the floor.

The Luggnaggians – The inhabitants of Luggnagg.

The Luggnaggian Interpreter – A young boy Gulliver hires to interpret for him.

The Struldbrugs – The Struldbrug's are Luggnaggian immortals identifiable at birth by a red ring on their forehead. While they never die, they do age, and they are social outcasts due to their jealousy, pettiness, and generally obnoxious character.

The Japanese Emperor – The Japanese Emperor gives Gulliver permission to sail back to Europe on the Dutch ship.

The Master Horse – The member of the Houyhnhmns who first takes Gulliver in, teaches him Houyhnhmn ways, and discusses human society with him. Gulliver holds the master horse in the highest esteem and kisses his hoof upon parting from him.

The Yahoos – Filthy, greedy, gluttonous, selfish, and dumb, the Yahoos are the embodiment of everything gross and crude in human nature. Properly speaking, they are degenerate humans who live among the Houyhnhmns. Yet, by novel's end, Gulliver is referring to every other human being as a Yahoo.

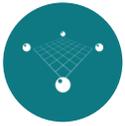
Don Pedro de Mendez – A kind and gentle Portuguese sea captain who finds Gulliver on an island after he leaves the Houyhnhmns and takes him against his will back into human society.

Gulliver's Wife – The wife of Gulliver, who barely appears.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PERSPECTIVE

Above all, *Gulliver's Travels* is a novel about perspective. While the story is abundant with potential morals, the strongest and most consistent message is a lesson in relativism: one's point of view is contingent upon one's own physical and social circumstances and looking at people's circumstances explains a lot about their respective viewpoints. Gulliver explicitly lectures the reader on relativism, explaining how England's ideas of beauty, goodness, and fairness are radically different from notions of those qualities possessed by the beings he visits in other lands. Until novel's end, Gulliver is able to see merit in his own country's perspective as well as in the perspectives of other nations, a fair-mindedness which he acquires from immersing himself in different cultures and adopting their opposite points of view. Indeed, his travels possess a perfect symmetry: he goes from being a giant among the Lilliputians to being a tiny person among the Brobdingnagians; he exploits the world of tiny people for his own profit (by showing off Lilliputian animals for profit in England) and is in turn exploited in the world of the giants (by the Brobdingnagian Farmer who charges people to gawk at Gulliver); he goes from Laputa, where the Laputians ignore their bodies to concentrate on abstract knowledge and science, to the land of the Yahoos, who are exclusively absorbed by their bodies and the pursuit of crude physical pleasures. Though Gulliver continually marvels at the otherness and strangeness of the foreign people he's landed among, he is also constantly comparing them to people back home in England, finding analogues or points of comparison for even the least familiar customs.

The novel ultimately suggests that one's perspective on reality is even more powerful than reality itself. When Gulliver returns to England from Brobdingnag, he encounters "normal" human-sized life but sees everyone and everything as miniature. He thus misgauges size, misjudges people's health, and generally misunderstands his situation until enough time passes for his perspective to adjust. Likewise, Gulliver's time spent among the Houyhnhnms enables him to see his own society in a new way. Though he has been eager to go home after all his prior adventures, he no longer wants to return to England after living amongst the Houyhnhnms, for he has so internalized their perspective that he sees all human beings as Yahoos. He is disgusted even by his own reflection and starts affecting the manner of a horse. Though he is, from a biological standpoint, still fully human, his new perspective has transformed him into a Houyhnhmn and he can no longer function in human society.



MORAL VS. PHYSICAL POWER

By placing Gulliver amongst people of extremely different physical circumstances than his own, Gulliver's adventures dramatize the distinction between moral and physical power. In Lilliput, Gulliver's huge

size advantage over the Lilliputians would make it easy for him to treat them like inhuman vermin and to assert himself against them by physical force (he even imagines squashing them by the handfuls during their initial encounter on the beach). But Gulliver's willingness to empathize, reason with, and respect the Lilliputians despite their diminutive size yields a much more meaningful, rewarding experience (at least until the prince turns against him). Conversely, in Brobdingnag, the Brobdingnagians could easily dehumanize and squash Gulliver, but Gulliver is impressed by their kindness and willingness to listen and empathize with him (though they do treat Gulliver a little more like a cute clown than he would like). Through the example of the Lilliputians' ridiculous, futile battles over how best to crack an egg, the novel suggests the absurdity of all warfare as a means to settle matters of the mind and faith. Through the example of the Laputian king and the Luggnaggian king, the novel presents a parody of tyrannical excess and shows the dangers of rulers who assert themselves through physical power. In Laputa, the king is totally out of touch with his people and maintains his hold over the people simply by making himself "taller" than they are by floating above them on his island. In Luggnagg, the king demands grotesque demonstrations of physical supplication, making subjects crawl on their stomachs licking the dirty floor before him.

As the novel considers the dangers of physical power in society, it also considers the physical character of the individual and reflects on how best to handle one's body. The Laputians' and Lagadans' obsession with reason and knowledge has rendered them utterly out of touch with their bodies. Their inability to function in the practical, physical world has in turn destroyed their society, and their example indicates that ignoring physical reality inevitably leads to suffering. Among the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver learns that the possession of a human body does not automatically elevate a person over the animals. The Yahoos, it turns out, are much more bestial than the animal Houyhnhnms. This directly contradicts the common European assertion of the time that human bodies were automatically superior to animal bodies because the human form necessarily contained moral and rational power. Indeed, the Houyhnhnms possess a stronger moral compass and sense of reason than the Yahoos and the Europeans alike. At each instance, the novel thus shows that true superiority and worthy power come from a moral, rational mind in harmony with the body it inhabits.



SOCIETY AND THE STATE

As Gulliver travels from society to society, he observes each one's organization in detail and compares and contrasts it with the English state.

Though all of the societies visited are flawed, several possess some admirable qualities and almost all of them play out the consequences of a particular utopian ideal. Their admirable qualities include the peaceful Brobdingnagian king's disgust at

the thought of gunpowder and rule by violent force; the Lilliputian king's initial generosity and warmth towards the foreign Gulliver; the Houyhnhnms' reason-driven peace and order. But the societies also demonstrate the unfortunate outcome of certain utopian ideals. Lilliput separates its children from their birth parents (as Plato himself advised in), but the practice does not end up yielding very mature or reasonable adults. The Lilliputian king and his court are petty grudge-holders, no better than the monarchs of Europe. Laputa dedicates itself to reason and scientific progress but its devotion produces only trivialities and useless inventions, leaving the useful parts of society to decay. The Houyhnhnms practice strict family planning, but the plans leave no room for the passionate and beautiful parts of love and marriage. The Houyhnhnms' also transcend humanity's ills and evils, but this, too, ends up stripping them of personal identity so that their society lacks humanity's rich vividness and seems to the reader a bit too robotic, even as Gulliver professes to love it. Gulliver himself attempts to live the ideal of uniting with nature by living among the Houyhnhnms, but this commitment only dooms him to dissatisfaction and insanity in the human life he must inevitably return to.

Swift never draws up a formula for an ideal state and society because he does not believe that one exists. However, by showing the goods and ills of the vastly different societies Gulliver visits, Swift implicitly points out the errors of human society while also cautioning against the embrace of certain "utopian" solutions.



KNOWLEDGE

Gulliver's Travels also considers the value of knowledge and its best applications in life. The novel surveys many different kinds of knowledge and examines the effect they have on the people possessing them. Gulliver's worldly knowledge about other societies and lifestyles makes him tolerant and open-minded person, able to see both sides of most stories while many of the minds around him are more rigid. Still, it's unclear if this knowledge actually serves Gulliver well—it ends up, after all, leaving him dissatisfied and lonely, estranged from his family and his society and wishing futilely that he was one of the Houyhnhnms. In Brobdingnag and the land of the Houyhnhnms, the novel considers the kind of political knowledge that both the Brobdingnagian king and the Houyhnhnms lack. Yet, while both are ignorant of gunpowder, Machiavellian strategies, and the use of fear and violence to keep people in line, both organize successful, happy societies that seem much more functional than those governed by the more "sophisticated" political knowledge of Europe. The novel also compares practical scientific knowledge, as practiced to valuable effect by the Lilliputians and the Houyhnhnms, to abstract scientific knowledge, as practiced to useless effect by the the Laputians.

The Laputians' knowledge, Swift shows, may as well be ignorance, for they don't put their theories to any useful purpose and only waste their lives on fruitless experimentation. Finally, the novel considers self-knowledge as it is gradually acquired by Gulliver over the course of the novel, most so in Book 4. One could see Gulliver's end as an awakening to his true self (and the true self of all human beings), which leaves him disgusted with human nature. However, one could also see Gulliver's end as a tragic exaggeration of self knowledge such that he amplifies human evil beyond its actual proportions and thereby bars himself from integrating productively into the human society he should be a part of.

In most of these instances, knowledge becomes harmful when it approaches an extreme: problems arise if one *only* understands scientific and mathematic abstraction, as the Laputians do, or if one *only* pursues knowledge of foreign lands without spending time at home among one's own people, as in the case of Gulliver himself. Thus, the novel seems implicitly to advocate a moderate balance between practical and abstract knowledge, between knowledge of the outside world and knowledge of one's own position in it.



TRUTH AND DECEPTION

Much of the novel's plot action is driven by deceptions, and Gulliver takes note of the inhabitants' feelings about truth and lying in every country he visits. Deceptions that drive plot action include the Lilliputians' secret plot to starve Gulliver to death and Gulliver's subsequent deceptions to escape Lilliput. Then, in Brobdingnag, Gulliver deliberately conceals as many of his mishaps he can from Glumdalclitch in order to try to maintain his dignity and freedom. Later, Gulliver lies to the Japanese emperor about being Dutch in order to be granted passage to England. Finally, in the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver deliberately avoids correcting the Houyhnhnms' misimpression that his **clothes** are a part of his body, which helps distinguish him enough from the Yahoos to convince the Houyhnhnms he isn't really one of them.

From society to society, Gulliver also tracks the inhabitants' different attitudes towards truth and falsehood. The Lilliputians' treat fraud as the highest crime and profess a rigorous devotion to honesty (which is, of course, somewhat undercut by the court's deceptive plot against Gulliver). In Glubbudubdrib, Gulliver explores his own culture's attitude towards truth by summoning ghosts of the past and having later thinkers show ancient thinkers like Aristotle the falsehood in their theories while also exposing rampant deception among the English royalty. In the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver encounters a purely honest society, so committed to truth that its members don't even have a word for 'lying' and only refer to a falsehood as "the thing which is not."

Yet even as the novel raises earnest questions about the value

of honesty, it also toys with the reader, suggesting that truth may be more subjective than absolute. As certain as the novel's human readers are that the societies described are pure fantasy, so too do the characters that inhabit those societies refuse to believe Gulliver's descriptions of human society and insist that Europe is make-believe. Further, Swift makes a concerted effort at verisimilitude by including the preface from Richard Sympson, which repeatedly alludes to geographical facts omitted, supposedly to prevent boredom. (Earlier editions of the novel took this verisimilitude even further by keeping Swift's name off the book and publishing it under the pseudonym Lemuel Gulliver.) Swift also has Gulliver attest again and again to his own honesty and to the true nature of his account. Beyond insisting that it is the factual count it emphatically isn't, *Gulliver's Travels* also criticizes the novelistic form it is when Gulliver encounters the erosive influence of novels on readers' brains. As with knowledge, then, Swift presents a mixed message on truth: while his work advocates for honesty among individuals and human governments, it also suggests that life will always contain some degree of unknowability and confusion.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



EXCREMENT

In *Gulliver's Travels*, **excrement** symbolizes the crude reality of human flesh, a fact Gulliver faces most prominently in the filthy, feces-flinging bodies of the Yahoos. Yet excrement occurs in every other one of his other adventures too: in Lilliput, Gulliver defecates on the floor of his Lilliputian home and urinates on **the Lilliputians'** burning palace; in Brobdingnag, flies defecate on Gulliver's food and maids urinate in front of him; in Laputia, the projectors attempt to transform human feces back into food. The recurring appearance of excrement anchors the novel in the body's demands, limits, and inelegances, refusing to let its characters float off into the heady realm of purely elegant abstractions.



CLOTHING

Clothing in *Gulliver's Travels* symbolizes perspective and thus each population that Gulliver visits sports different garments. The tiny clothes of the Lilliputians differ from the immense clothing of the Brobdingnaggians as their small size endows them with a different view of the world from that of the giant Brobdingnaggians; the Laputians' elaborate robes decorated with astronomical and mathematical symbols are the opposite of the Houyhnhmns' nakedness, as their

preoccupations with theory and abstraction are utterly distinct from the Houyhnhmns down-to-earth wisdom. Though Gulliver comes to each country wearing his own clothes, those clothes gradually fall apart and he is outfitted in native garments. Likewise, Gulliver enters each country carrying his own ideas and opinions but, as he immerses himself in the new society, his mindset is shaped by the people around him until his perspective starts to match theirs.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Gulliver's Travels* published in 2003.

Preface 1 Quotes

☞ This volume would have been at least twice as large if I had not made bold to strike out innumerable passages relating to the winds and tide, as well as to the variations and bearings in the several voyages...likewise the account of longitudes and latitudes...I was resolved to fit the work as much as possible to the general capacity of readers.

Related Characters: Richard Sympson (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Right away, Swift makes it clear that the tale we're about to hear isn't, strictly speaking, true; which is to say, it's been edited and shortened to fit the tastes of the general public. Although Richard Sympson—the editor-figure who's supposedly assembled the book we're about to read—claims that he's omitted parts of the text that deal with dull matters of navigation, we can't help but wonder what else he's omitted or changed, and therefore, whether or not we can really trust what we're about to read. (This question of trustworthiness soon becomes absurd and humorous as Gulliver's tales really begin.)

One other important thing to notice about this passage is that Sympson has taken out all descriptions of location—we have no idea where any of the places Gulliver visits are located. By omitting all geographic specificity, Swift makes his descriptions of imaginary countries more pertinent to Western readers. If Swift were to describe Lilliput, for example, as being on the other side of the planet, then a European reader might assume that the country had no relevance to his own culture. But by refusing to specify where Lilliput is, Swift encourages the reader to see

surprising similarities between his own country and the fictional ones in the novel.

Book 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ I confess, I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground. But the remembrance of what I had felt, which probably might not be the worst they could do, and the promise of honor I made them—for so I interpreted my submissive behavior—soon drove out those imaginations. Besides, I now considered myself as bound, by the laws of hospitality, to a people who had treated me with so much expense and magnificence.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Lilliputians

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gulliver has arrived on the island of Lilliput. He's been captured (tied down) by the Lilliputians, a race of tiny, mouse-sized people. Although the Lilliputians eventually free Gulliver from his restraints, Gulliver doesn't immediately attack the Lilliputians--and it's important to understand why.

As Gulliver puts it, he refrains from attacking the Lilliputians because he has made a promise to them. While the "promise" is ambiguous (Gulliver himself doesn't entirely understand it, and merely interprets his *own* behavior), it seems to force Gulliver to be peaceful. Perhaps Gulliver refuses to attack the Lilliputians because he follows the laws of hospitality--laws which hold a great deal of sway in his European homeland. As Gulliver travels across the world, he's introduced to a great number of strange cultures. Although the cultures have strange customs and rules, they all treat Gulliver with some measure of respect, offering him food and shelter. In short, Gulliver and his hosts cooperate according to the unwritten rules of hospitality: Gulliver is the visitor, meaning that he deserves some respect.

Book 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ ...taking them one by one out of my pocket...I observed both the soldiers and people were highly delighted at this mark of my clemency, which was represented very much to my advantage at court.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Lilliputians

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gulliver, now friendly with the emperor of Lilliput, is presented with the "traitors" who fired arrows at him. Instead of hurting the traitors, Gulliver scares them and then releases them. He notices that his behavior has endeared him to the emperor--everyone seems delighted with his mercy.

Gulliver is something of a showman--he knows that he has to make a good impression on the emperor, and he also knows how to go about intimidating the Lilliputians, who are rightly terrified of his enormous size. And yet Gulliver also seems genuinely merciful--he's given an opportunity to hurt the Lilliputians, but doesn't. For all his faults, Gulliver is still, essentially, a gentle person.

☞ In the right coat-pocket of the great man-mountain...after the strictest search, we found only one great piece of coarse cloth, large enough to be a foot-cloth for your majesty's chief room of state.

Related Characters: The Lilliputians (speaker), Lemuel Gulliver

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In this famous passage, the Lilliputians—tiny people, for whom Gulliver is a “man mountain”—examine Gulliver’s possessions. Although they don’t really understand what Gulliver’s possessions are (here, for example, they have no idea that they’ve found his handkerchief), the Lilliputians offer their own unique perspective on the objects. The passage is an excellent example of defamiliarization. By

showing a common object from the perspective of the Lilliputians, who've never seen such a thing before, Swift makes readers question aspects of their life that they'd otherwise take for granted. In other words, Swift's strategy is two-fold. Here, he defamiliarizes readers with their own culture (a culture of handkerchiefs, watches, guns, etc.); later, he'll encourage readers to see the eerie similarities between their own culture and that of the Lilliputians (and others).

Book 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ It is computed, that eleven thousand persons have, at several times, suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy...

Related Characters: Redresal (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Here Swift describes an ongoing feud between Lilliput and Blefuscu, the two imaginary countries Gulliver visits on his first adventure. The people of Lilliput and Blefuscu have been at war for many years, because they can't agree on the right way to break an egg. Some think it's best to break it at the small end; some prefer the larger end. Because of the tremendous controversy over this incredibly trivial difference, Blefuscu and Lilliput fight with one another, and many people die.

Swift may have intended this quote to symbolize the feud between Catholics and Protestants in Europe. (See Background Info for more.) Beginning with the Protestant Reformation, Europe fell into civil war: the two main sects of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, fought over the correct way to worship Jesus Christ. Swift seems to be suggesting that by fighting over relatively minor religious differences, Christians in Europe were ignoring all the similarities between them: a classic example of the "narcissism of petty differences." Swift might also be alluding more generally to the relatively small cultural differences or arguments over borders that have sometimes led neighboring countries to go to war.

Book 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ And so immeasurable is the ambition of princes, that he seemed to think of nothing less than reducing the whole empire of Blefuscu into a province, and governing it as a viceroy...by which he would remain the sole monarch of the whole world...And I plainly protested that I would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery.

Related Characters: Redresal (speaker), The Blefuscans, The Lilliputian King

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Gulliver has helped the Lilliputians win a great war against the people of Blefuscu: he's surprised the navy of Blefuscu, tying together all the ships and pulling them to Lilliput, where the people of Blefuscu surrender right away. Although the emperor of Lilliput is pleased with Gulliver's actions, he's angry when Gulliver refuses to go further and enslave the people of Blefuscu.

Gulliver's refusal to enslave the people of Blefuscu is a mark of his virtue--in spite of his many faults, he's not the type to actively cause pain to other people, whether they're human beings or Lilliputians. The irony, however, is that Gulliver, as a European man, lives in a society that *does* enslave the people of other countries (Irish, Africans, etc.)--Gulliver seems too naive to realize the truth about his own homeland.

Book 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ They look upon fraud as a greater crime than theft, and therefore seldom fail to punish it with death.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Lilliputians

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Swift makes an interesting point about Lilliput--a point that could easily be applied to Swift's own European homeland. The Lilliputians consider fraud worse than theft. As we've seen, Lilliputians seem perfectly content to commit theft on a massive scale: conquering the people of Blefuscu and taking away their property, freedom,

etc. And yet the Lilliputians simultaneously believe that honesty--understood in the sense of legal cooperation and trustworthiness--is of the utmost important.

In short, Lilliput is meant to be a caricature of early modern European society: a society in which legalism and bureaucracy were becoming extremely important (i.e., fraud was an extremely serious crime) and yet where the most basic forms of crime (violence, theft, genocide, practiced under the guise of imperialism) were accepted and even glorified. In the same way, we could interpret this as a satire of modern American society, in which fraud--considered a more upper-class crime--is often drastically less punished than petty theft, though one crime may ruin lives and the other be relatively victimless.

Book 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ It was a custom, introduced by this prince and his ministry...that after the court had decreed any cruel execution either to gratify the monarch's resentment or the malice of a favorite, the emperor always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world...nor did anything terrify the people so much as those encomiums on his majesty's mercy; because it was observed that, the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Lilliputian King

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 68-69

Explanation and Analysis

In this fascinating quotation, Gulliver describes how the emperor of Lilliput maintains power over his people. Whenever he executes someone, he makes a great show of claiming to be "merciful"--to the point where the Lilliputians come to associate mercy itself with deadly executions.

Swift is satirizing the systems of absolute monarchy of the early modern era--in which a single, volatile, all-powerful ruler aimed to be (like God) both loved and feared. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli argued that a great ruler had to intimidate his people into submission, to the point where even the ruler's gentleness held the possibility of more cruelty behind it--Machiavelli set the tone for centuries of absolute kings and emperors, whom Swift satirizes here. It may seem strange to say that mercy can be intimidating, but

in fact we already have evidence for such an idea: Gulliver's decision to spare his Lilliputian attackers (see quote above) intimidated the people of Lilliput *more*, not less.

Book 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ I reflected what a mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this nation as one single Lilliputian would be among us.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Brobdingnagians

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation from the beginning of Gulliver's second voyage, Gulliver is discovered by a group of Brobdingnagians--giants, to whom Gulliver is as tiny as a Lilliputian is to Gulliver. Gulliver's role is reversed--he's now a tiny victim to his giant hosts, instead of a colossus, looming over them. The symmetrical relationship between the Lilliput voyage and the Brobdingnag voyage suggests a number of things. Life, we can see, is totally relative: Gulliver is a giant to some and a dwarf to others. Swift seems to suggest that "strangeness" is universal: Gulliver is bizarre to the Brobdingnagians in exactly the same way that the Lilliputians are bizarre to him. Since all beings are equally strange, then, the only question is: how do we treat those who are different from us--with hostility or graciousness?

☝☝ This made me reflect upon the fair skins of our English ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own size...

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Brobdingnagians

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gulliver examines the women of Brobdingnag--because they're enormous, they're not particularly beautiful to him. Indeed, Gulliver is able to see

the tiny cracks and wrinkles in their skin, which frequently disgust him. (It's been suggested that Swift was responding to the recent discovery of the microscope--an invention that allowed scientists to study the tiny hairs and pores on the human body, effectively seeing the body in a new, less appealing light).

What conclusion should Gulliver draw from his observations? While Gulliver made few connections between the society of Lilliput and that of his own country, because of his experience with the Lilliputians he now seems to grasp the connection between the Brobdingnagian women and those of his home. Gulliver's women are no more or less pretty than those of Brobdingnag; if he pointed a microscope at his wife, he'd probably be just as revolted--in short, it's all a matter of perspective.

Book 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

...he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Blefuscan King

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the King of Brobdingnag listens to Gulliver's descriptions of human society—a society in which some humans (kings, emperors, popes, etc.) pretend to be greater and more important than others. From the perspective of an enormous Brobdingnagian, however, humans' delusions of grandeur are pathetic—the “greatest” human is of no more importance to the King than the “greatest” termite.

In a way, the King's insights in this quotation show what Gulliver failed to fully grasp in his first voyage with regard to the Lilliputians. All thinking beings (humans, Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Blefuscans) claim some kind of superiority over their peers. In the grand scheme of things, however, such claims of superiority are nonsensical--it takes a radical shift in perspective (Gulliver staring down at the Lilliputians, for example) to see how nonsensical they are. (Interestingly, the King of Brobdingnag seems not to see the connection between humans' delusions of grandeur and those of his own way of life—i.e., he seems to be making the same mistake as Gulliver with the Lilliputians.)

Book 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

However, my speech produced nothing else besides a loud laughter, which all the respect due to his majesty from those about him could not make them contain. This made me reflect how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavor to do himself honor among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Brobdingnagian King

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

In this important quotation, Gulliver tries to make a grand address to his Brobdingnagian hosts—who tower over him—but finds himself unable to do so. Gulliver is too small and feeble to impress his new friends, and nothing he says can be taken seriously. The quotation is interesting, because it could be considered a metaphor for Swift's own philosophy of comedy and satire. Swift lived at a time when the institutions of society, such as family, the monarchy, and the church, were considered to be above all criticism--to criticize the Pope, for example, was practically a capital offense (in fact, it was a capital offense on many occasions).

It's hard to imagine Swift's world, since in our own era, there are very few things that are considered to be above criticism (everybody makes fun of the President, the Pope, etc.). Swift was a man ahead of his time--as he suggests here, nothing is immune from ridicule, as long as the perspective is right. The most honorable and impressive man would still seem silly and amusing if seen from the perspective of a giant. Swift the satirist is putting himself in the position of the Brobdingnagians, staring down at human folly with amusement.

Book 2, Chapter 6 Quotes

...you have made a most admirable panegyric upon your country; you have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator; that laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them. I observe among you some lines of an institution, which in its original might have been tolerable, but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by corruptions.

Related Characters: The Brobdingnagian King (speaker),

The Brobdingnagian King

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 122-123

Explanation and Analysis

The King of Brobdingnag comments on the speech Gulliver has just delivered, in which Gulliver describes his own European society. From Gulliver's perspective, his home is a perfectly ordinary place—Gulliver accepts the corruption and hypocrisy of his world, simply because he's used to it. The King of Brobdingnag, by contrast, questions everything about Gulliver's world—because he's defamiliarized with Europe, he has no problem seeing what's absurd, contradictory, or otherwise immoral about it. The King's comments reinforce Swift's reason for writing *Gulliver's Travels* in the first place. By offering a novel perspective on a familiar topic (such as the Brobdingnagian King's perspective on Europe), Swift satirizes the institutions of his own society, encouraging readers to see them in a new light, as if for the first time.

Book 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

●● He was amazed, how so impotent and groveling an insect as I...could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner, as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation, which I had painted, as the common effects of those destructive machines, whereof, he said, some evil genius, enemy to mankind, must have been the first contriver.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Brobdingnagian King

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

The King of Brobdingnag studies Gulliver's pistols, and Gulliver explains—very calmly—that people use these weapons to murder their enemies. The King is appalled that anyone, big or small, could speak so calmly of killing other people. Gulliver, for his part, seems puzzled that the King is so puzzled: he's so used to owning pistols and using them to "defend" himself that he can't understand why anybody would question his behavior.

It's ironic that the King supposes that some "enemy of mankind" invented the pistol. Logically, the King supposes, human beings themselves would never invent something

that would cause them so much pain. But, as we know very well, humans *did* invent guns. The message is clear: people don't know what's good for them—they have an unlimited imagination for machines of pain, misery, and self-destruction.

Book 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

●● Their houses are very ill built, the walls bevel, without one right angle in any apartment; and this defect arises from the contempt they bear to practical geometry, which they despise as vulgar and mechanic; those instructions they give being too refined fro the intellects of their workers, which occasions perpetual mistakes.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Laputians

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

In Gulliver's third voyage, he discovers the land of Laputa, where a race of cerebral, "book smart" people live. The Laputians have no "street smarts"—they know how to do math and make music, but they can't build houses or plan a proper city. Indeed, the Laputians seem to despise practicality of any kind—the purest and most noble exercises of the mind, they believe, are those that have no practical application whatsoever.

The Laputa section is often interpreted as Swift's satire of the Age of Enlightenment: an era in which the "wisest" members of society engaged in brilliant philosophy and metaphysics while often avoiding more concrete applications of knowledge. Note that Gulliver believes the Laputians' intelligence to be too "refined" for workers to understand. While Gulliver doesn't get the irony here, readers should: the Laputians blame the working class for any mistakes in their society, even though the Laputians themselves are to blame for being so cerebral and impractical in the first place.

Book 3, Chapter 4 Quotes

●● They were indeed excellent in two sciences for which I have great esteem, and wherein I am not unversed; but, at the same time, so abstracted and involved in speculation, that I never met with such disagreeable companions.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Laputians

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gulliver sums up his time with the Laputians. The Laputians could be considered pure Platonists: they're obsessed with music and mathematics (the two sciences Gulliver mentions here), but think too abstractly for any other disciplines. In spite of their supposed intelligence, they're unable to hold a simple conversation with Gulliver. (Coming from a great talker like Swift, not being able to have a conversation is a sure sign of being intellectually lacking!) They are, in short, stereotypical "ivory tower" figures—sheltered from the realities of the world. Swift suggests that for all their knowledge, the Laputians don't have any real wisdom about the world: they're so concerned with speculating about abstractions and the future that they can't manage their own lives in the present.

Book 3, Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ I was chiefly disgusted with modern history. For having strictly examined all the persons of greatest name in the courts of princes, for a hundred years past, I found how the world had been misled by prostitute writers, to ascribe the greatest exploits in war, to cowards; the wisest counsel, to fools; sincerity, to flatterers; Roman virtue, to betrayers of their country...

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, the Laputians take Gulliver to visit with the great leaders and thinkers of human history: Homer, Aristotle, etc. Here, Gulliver segues from the Greek and Roman leaders to the modern European kings and emperors. Surprisingly, Gulliver finds the European "greats" sorely lacking in dignity or grandeur of any kind. The reputation of a king for greatness, Gulliver realizes, is the result of "prostitute writers" who lie about kings' abilities and fool millions of people into worshipping kings as gods.

The passage is an excellent example of what Swift finds

lacking in European literature. Swift sees his literary colleagues and predecessors as toadies--groveling before the kings and queens in Europe instead of "calling it like they see it." Swift also implies that reason itself is too easily manipulated to make mediocrity seem great--kings and traitors have gained a reputation for brilliance because smart people were too willing to sell their literary and legal services to the highest bidder. (The word "prostitute," it's been noted, translates to "puta" in Spanish--in other words, the very name "Laputa" is supposed to remind us of the cheapness and hypocrisy of supposed intelligence.)

Book 3, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ ...he observed long life to be the universal desire and wish of mankind. That whoever had one foot in the grave was sure to hold back the other as strongly as he could. That the oldest had still hopes of living one day longer, and looked on death as the greatest evil, form which nature always prompted him to retreat. Only in this island of Luggnagg the appetite for living was not so eager, from the continual example of the struldbrugs before their eyes.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Luggnaggians

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

In the land of Luggnagg, there are a certain number of immortal beings, known as struldbrugs. The struldbrugs live forever, but contrary to Gulliver's ideals, they're not perfect creatures. On the contrary, the struldbrugs are old, feeble, foolish, and generally contemptible--everyone in Luggnagg hates them. The Luggnaggians tell Gulliver that Gulliver is wrong to think that immortality is the greatest good--actually, immortality gets pretty ugly.

The struldbrugs seem to refute the widespread belief in our society that life is the greatest good. As the Luggnaggians point out, Gulliver believes that life is an absolute good--the more life, the better. Yet the opposite is sometimes the case: when it's made a reality, an unlimited, long life can be a nightmare and a burden on the rest of society.

Book 4, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ The beast and I were brought close together, and by our countenances diligently compared both by master and servant, who thereupon repeated several times the word *Yahoo*. My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed in this abominable animal, a perfect human figure.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Yahoos, The Master Horse

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

Gulliver, washed up on an island after his fourth voyage, crosses paths with a Yahoo. The Yahoo at first appears to be a wild, unfamiliar creature. But on close inspection, Gulliver realizes that it's a human being—in form and countenance no different from Gulliver himself. What's the difference between Gulliver and the Yahoo? Although the two beings have the same body, Gulliver has culture, education, religion, and language, whereas the Yahoo has none. The Yahoo is the “raw material” of mankind—humanity with all the good parts stripped away. By juxtaposing the two creatures, the passage reminds us that deep down, human beings are savage, disgusting creatures, no different from animals—and Swift makes sure we don't forget it.

Book 4, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ He replied, “that I must needs be mistaken, or that I said the thing which was not;” for they have no word in their language to express lying or falsehood. “He knew it was impossible that there could be a country beyond the sea, or that a parcel of brutes could move a wooden vessel whither they pleased upon water. He was sure no Houyhnhnm alive could make such a vessel, nor would trust Yahoos to manage it.”

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver, The Master Horse (speaker), The Yahoos

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Gulliver explains to the Master Horse of the Houyhnhnms that in his homeland, Yahoos are strong and powerful, capable of building boats and sailing around the world. The Master Horse, still convinced that Yahoos must be

subservient to horses in other parts of the world, continues to assume that Gulliver's people are subservient to their own horses, and further refuses to accept that humans are capable of building anything worthwhile.

The Master Horse's comments remind us that culture and civilization are all relative: the Master Horse, in spite of his wisdom, is just as clueless about Gulliver's society as Gulliver is about the Master Horse's. And while the Houyhnhnms are mostly portrayed as virtuous and morally upright beings, Swift makes it clear that human beings are technologically cleverer—they're capable of building great boats that can travel around the world. So perhaps it's fair to say that Houyhnhnms are more virtuous than people, but people are more technologically cunning.

Book 4, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ Power, government, war, law, punishment, and a thousand other things, had no terms wherein that language could express them...

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Houyhnhnms

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gulliver describes the nature of Houyhnhnm society—a place in which dishonesty or hypocrisy of any kind are rendered impossible by the qualities of language. There's no violence or crime among the Houyhnhnms, and therefore no need for words like war, law, punishment, etc.

In short, the Houyhnhnms' society is so perfect that language itself can't tolerate even a hint of immorality. After traveling the world, Gulliver finally seems to have encountered a totally moral society. And yet, as it's often observed, the Houyhnhnms are also the most *boring* characters in the entire novel. They're so vanilla that they don't hold our interest in the same way as the Laputians or the Lilliputians—just because they're good doesn't mean they're interesting. The blandness of the Houyhnhnm language suggests Swift's subtle attack on his own characters—if a writer like Swift had no way to communicate war or punishment, he'd have to find a new profession!

Book 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞☞ But when a creature pretending to reason could be capable of such enormities, he dreaded lest the corruption of that faculty might be worse than brutality itself. He seemed therefore confident, that, instead of reason we were only possessed of some quality fitted to increase our natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill shapen body, not only larger but more distorted.

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver, The Master Horse (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, the Master Horse asks Gulliver about his own society. Gulliver explains that in Europe, people have used their intelligence to build instruments of war, causing death and destruction to their fellow men. The Master Horse is astounded that it's possible to use intelligence for such nefarious purposes. He concludes that humans aren't actually intelligent at all—they've just found a way to increase the amount of evil in the world.

The Master Horse's comments bring up an interesting idea: do morality and reason necessarily work together? As Gulliver's own society proves, the smart thing and the right thing aren't necessarily one and the same. The Master Horse, used to a society in which his fellow horses use their intelligence for the betterment of one another, is naturally reluctant to believe that humans are really intelligent at all—he can't stand the idea that morality and reason need not agree. (We've already seen other examples of how reason and morality can oppose one another; for example, in *Laputa* Gulliver realizes that the supposedly great men of the past have been just painted in a positive light by the artists and writers of the past, and weren't morally "great" at all.)

Book 4, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞☞ For now I could no longer deny that I was a real Yahoo in every limb and feature, since the females had a natural propensity to me, as one of their own species

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Yahoos

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

Gulliver comes to realize that he is a Yahoo: a savage beast living in the land of the Houyhnhnms. The Yahoos are violent, stupid, and barbaric, and yet they look exactly like people—therefore, for a long time Gulliver tries to distance himself from the Yahoos, but here at last he acknowledges that he really is a Yahoo, just one with more clothing, culture, and language.

Should we take Gulliver seriously? On one hand, Swift seems to be implying that the Yahoos are the "true" versions of human beings: humans with all their pomposity, duplicity, and pretentiousness stripped away. And yet perhaps Gulliver is too quick to assume that he is a Yahoo: the reason he gives for believing so (female Yahoos think he's attractive) doesn't make much sense at all, and in fact reduces all of human identity to sexual desire. So maybe Gulliver is once again jumping to conclusions, just because of what his peers do and say—he's as gullible as his name suggests.

Book 4, Chapter 12 Quotes

☞☞ I could, perhaps, like others, have astonished thee with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact, in the simplest manner and style...

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

In this ironic quotation, Gulliver insists that his story—i.e., the novel we've just finished reading—had been plain, simple, and straightforward. Right away, we recognize that we can't take Gulliver seriously: contrary to what he insists, his adventures have been extremely "strange and improbable!" And yet there's a grain of truth in Gulliver's claim. Even if the content of his novel has been bizarre and fantastical, Gulliver's tone has been calm and plain: instead of offering his own commentary on the events he witnesses, he explains them, leaving readers to judge for themselves. Moreover, as fantastical and bizarre as *Laputa* and *Lilliput* might be, they're designed to reflect and parody aspects of European society. In other words, the worlds Gulliver describes aren't that strange after all—they're just exaggerated versions of Swift's own society (and maybe the society we continue to live in).

●● I here take a final leave of all my courteous readers...to apply those excellent lessons of virtue which I learned among the Houyhnhnms; to instruct the Yahoos of my own family, is far as I shall find them docible animals; to behold my figure often in a glass, and thus, if possible, habituate myself by time to tolerate the sight of a human creatures...

Related Characters: Lemuel Gulliver (speaker), The Houyhnhnms, The Yahoos

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, Gulliver makes a strange series of claims. Touched by his time among the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver finds that he can't stand human beings anymore—he finally realizes that, deep down, humans (even

own wife and children, and even himself) are just filthy animals. Seeing that he has no choice but to live among humans, he resolves to “habituate” himself to humans.

The big question at the end of the novel is—should we take Gulliver seriously? Has Gulliver finally realized the truth (that the human race is barbaric and hopeless?), or is Swift making fun of Gulliver once again for his simple-mindedness? On one hand, it's easy to imagine Swift agreeing with Gulliver: human beings are foolish, savage, violent, etc.—the entirety of the novel impresses such a point of view on us. And yet Gulliver, in reducing all human beings to Yahoos, seems to neglect the most important part of humanity, our ability to think, create, and (crucially for Swift) write. In the end, Swift seems to have his cake and eat it, too: the only thing dumber than believing that all humans are good, kind, and civilized is believing that all humans are barbarians.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE 1: "THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER"

Richard Sympson introduces the book as papers left with him by his friend Lemuel Gulliver, whom Sympson thinks was originally from Oxfordshire and had later lived in Redriff, though he's currently retired in Nottinghamshire to escape the crowds of visitors he'd gotten at Redriff. Sympson vouches for "an air of truth" about the text and attests to Gulliver's honesty, noting that his fellow townsmen would often emphasize something's truth by saying "it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoken it." Sympson explains he is publishing an edited version for people's entertainment. His edits have consisted of cutting out passages about sea travel and geographical information, which he thinks would go above the head of the common reader, as they go above his.

Sympson's prefatory letter is one of Swift's many tactics to make the book seem like a "true" travel account rather than a piece of fiction. The letter not only refers to Gulliver as a real person, it also vouches for his honesty (and, by extension, for the truthfulness of the subsequent account). The letter also defends the book's vagueness about geographical facts. The reader would most likely assume there aren't any facts because the travels are just fantasies. Yet this letter claims the facts do exist and were only omitted to save the reader the boredom of reading them.



PREFACE 2: "A LETTER FROM CAPTAIN GULLIVER TO HIS COUSIN SYMPSON"

This letter is dated 1727, written from Gulliver to Sympson. Gulliver is furious with Sympson's edits of his book, protesting Sympson's adjustments to his story, especially the addition of a passage praising the English Queen (though Gulliver says he respects the Queen, he insists he never would have praised her to the Houyhnhnms). He complains, too, that Sympson has muddled the details of his sea travel. He calls the book libelous. He has received a great deal of abuse for the book and everyone doubts the veracity of the account.

This letter introduces the theme of perspective. Though Sympson has just expressed his edition of the text, Gulliver is furious with his edits. By accusing Sympson of falsification and libel, this letter not only calls the truth of Sympson's letter into question, it also implies that the text to come (as edited by Sympson) is itself somehow untrue, while also therefore implying that at least some part of the narrative is true—because why would Gulliver be angry about Sympson's "falsifications" if Gulliver's own story wasn't true?



Throughout the letter, Gulliver refers to human beings as Yahoos and laments the perverse world in which degenerate Houyhnhnms are enslaved by Yahoos. Though Gulliver acknowledges that he, too, is a Yahoo, he notes that he was elevated by his education among the Houyhnhnms, though some of that refinement has begun to erode during his time spent back among "your species...particularly those of my own family."

At the same time, Gulliver's crazy names for things and his insistent distancing of himself from human beings ("your species") suggest that he may not be fully sane as he writes the letter. Is his claim to truth undercut by a potentially insane perspective?



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1

Gulliver recounts his birth into modest circumstances and his background as a surgeon and then a ship's surgeon. However, he never made a lot of money because he didn't feel comfortable cheating people, as other surgeons did. One of the ships he was working on was wrecked and he was the only survivor, swimming to safety on a beach where he passed out with exhaustion.

When Gulliver awakens, he finds himself tied down to the ground and surrounded by a crowd of six-inch-high people (the Lilliputians) speaking a language he doesn't understand. At first he struggles and the people shoot arrows at him. Then when Gulliver stops struggling, the people loosen some of his bindings and feed him well. Though tempted to grab and crush handfuls of them, Gulliver restrains himself reminding himself that he has made them "a promise of honor" by his "submissive behavior." The little people dress the wounds Gulliver suffered from their arrows.

While Gulliver's sleeping, the Lilliputians convey him onto a large carriage, which they had built specially in the few hours since Gulliver appeared (Gulliver praises their ingenious mathematics and engineering), and begin a journey to the Lilliputian emperor. Upon arrival, he is chained to an out of use temple (the biggest structure in the kingdom) where he will lodge. The emperor and thousands of people view him. His strings are cut so that he may stand and move while still being constrained by his chains. Everyone is dumbfounded by his size.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 2

Gulliver is desperate to relieve himself so the first thing he does in his new house is **defecate** on the floor. He assures the reader that he only did this that one time out of desperation and, in the future, he defecated at the far length of his chain in the open air and it was cleaned up by Lilliputian servants.

Gulliver is fed and visited by the Lilliputian emperor, who is a human-nail's-width taller than his subjects and very handsome. The two of them converse without understanding each other, each in their own language. Onlookers who shoot an arrow at Gulliver are seized and handed over to Gulliver who picks them up, scares them with a mean face and a glimpse of his penknife, and then releases them. The Lilliputians are delighted by Gulliver's gentleness.

Gulliver's description of his past distances himself from the corrupt, deceitful society of England and gives him the moral high ground. He may not have been a financially successful member of society, but he was far richer in virtue than his lying peers.



This scene introduces the theme of moral vs. physical power. The Lilliputians have exerted physical power against Gulliver by tying him to the ground and shooting at him. However, when Gulliver resists the urge to fight back with physical power and instead chooses to negotiate reasonably, the Lilliputians respond in kind. They begin to heal the physical wounds they themselves inflicted.



The Lilliputians are obviously talented and practical engineers as Gulliver says since they have been able to invent and construct an enormous carriage in just a few hours. The image of Gulliver standing upright emphasizes the difference between his perspective and the Lilliputians' perspective. For him, he is normal and they are tiny. For them, they are normal and he is a giant.



This anecdote introduces the symbol of excrement and is the first of many examples of Gulliver's dedication to honesty: he doesn't edit out details, even for the sake of politeness or propriety.



These interactions confirm Gulliver's choice to exert moral rather than physical power. He converses peacefully with the Lilliputian emperor (even though they can't understand one another) and lets the arrow-shooters free without any bodily punishment.



Gulliver is well provided for with custom-made furniture and food. He begins to learn the Lilliputians' language and frequently visits with the emperor, whom he begs for his liberty. The emperor agrees after his men search Gulliver and Gulliver surrenders his weapons. These men submit a report to the Lilliputian emperor inventorying Gulliver's possessions, all of which are foreign to them and which they describe in great detail without calling anything by its name in human society. They refer to Gulliver as the "man-mountain." They call his handkerchief a "great piece of coarse-cloth, large enough to be a foot-cloth" in the palace; they call his pipe a pillar "the length of a man" with a "piece of timber" at the end; they call his pocket watch "a wonderful kind of engine" at the end of "a great silver chain."

Though the Lilliputian state exerts its physical power to hold Gulliver prisoner, it otherwise treats him very humanely. Through persistent rational discussion and a willingness to give up his own weapons of physical power, Gulliver is able to convince Lilliput to consider relaxing its own physical power over him. The Lilliputians' account of Gulliver's possessions highlights their difference in perspective: to Lilliputians' a human is mountain-sized, a human handkerchief is carpet-sized, etc.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 3

The court performs its rope-dancing (tightrope-walking) and secret thread-jumping/thread-limboing for Gulliver, who explains that these games are very dangerous and are used to determine which members of court should fill vacant offices. Those skilled at the games are conferred great status and respect.

Curiously, the Lilliputian state uses tests of physical power and agility (rather than tests of moral power and reason) to determine who will hold its governmental offices.



Later Gulliver builds a platform with his handkerchief and has the Lilliputians joust on it to everyone's delight, though he stops when someone falls through the cloth.

The fact that his handkerchief can be used as a stage emphasizes Gulliver's very different size (and perspective). He is a gentle, moral friend, stopping the game to protect physical safety.



Gulliver realizes that the "great black substance" Lilliputians report having found on the beach is his hat. He's still chained and not allowed to get it himself. The Lilliputians retrieve and return it to him, though, by dragging it the whole way, they've damaged it.

The Lilliputian perspective doesn't recognize a human hat as a hat and therefore doesn't know how to treat it as a human would.



For amusement, the Lilliputian emperor has Gulliver stand upright and has his whole army march through Gulliver's legs, ordering the soldiers to treat Gulliver decently "upon pain of death."

A juxtaposition of perspective: the king protects Gulliver's physical safety and announces his physical power over soldier's bodies (he can kill them). However, Gulliver is so much larger than everyone that he faces little risk and could easily stamp everyone to death, which is perhaps why he can afford to resort to moral power rather than physical power—because he is in fact so physically powerful that he is essentially invulnerable.



Gulliver has all along been begging the Lilliputian emperor for liberty and the emperor and his council (all except for Skyresh Bolgolam, a sour minister who dislikes Gulliver) agree on the condition that Gulliver sign an agreement. The articles of the agreement state that: Gulliver will not leave the kingdom or enter the metropolis without permission, that he will not trample the fields or the Lilliputians, that he will carry Lilliputian messengers on urgent errands, that he will be an ally against the Blefuscians in warfare, that he will help maintain the kingdom and will survey its circumference, and that he will for his compliance be provided with a specific amount of food and drink. Gulliver notes that the specific amount was ingeniously calculated according to his body measurements. He signs and is freed.

The treaty functions to restrain Gulliver's physical power (by restricting his movements, making him promise to put his large size to Lilliput's use, and denying him sustenance if he should choose to disobey these conditions). Only after Gulliver has submitted to these restraints on his own physical power will the Lilliputian state agree to withdraw its own physical hold on him (the chain imprisoning him in the temple).



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 4

Now free, Gulliver wants to see Mildendo, the metropolis, and, by building a two-stool contraption, manages to wedge himself into the inner court to get a view into the grand rooms of the Lilliputian emperor's palace.

This image emphasizes the immense size (and perspective) difference between Gulliver and the Lilliputians.



Gulliver gets a visit from Reldresal, the principal secretary of private affairs, who explains that Lilliput struggles with "two mighty evils." The first is the animosity between the Tramecksan (high-heeled shoe-wearers) and Slamecksan (low-heeled shoe-wearers) and, while the Lilliputian emperor will allow only low heels in court, the Tramecksan threateningly outnumber the Slamecksan.

This first struggle of the Lilliputian state seems utterly absurd since it is based on purely superficial, physical differences (rather than on any substantial moral conundrum). Indeed, Swift will use the absurdity of Lilliput's wars to comment on the absurdity of warfare in general.



The second is the danger of an impending invasion from Belfuscu, "the other great empire of the universe" (Reldresal notes to Gulliver that nobody can really believe Gulliver's accounts of other lands beyond Lilliput and Belfuscu.) The animosity with Belfuscu is rooted in a disagreement over whether to break eggs on the bigger or smaller end. "Big-Endians" have left Lilliput (which is on the side of smaller end) and have joined forces with the Blefuscians. There have been many bloody battles over the years and Reldresal has been sent to acquaint Gulliver with the situation so he can help defend Lilliput against another impending attack.

This second struggle is just as absurd as the first and further supports the subtext pointing out the ridiculousness of warfare. Though the Lilliputians have been careful to restrict Gulliver's physical power over them, they are eager to harness his power against their enemies.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5

Gulliver conceives of and carries out a plan to swim across the channel separating Lilliput from Blefuscu, sew together the Blefuscians' military fleet with a cable, and drag the lot of them back to the Lilliputians. To the Blefuscians' astonishment and the Lilliputians' delight, he manages this, though not without being pelted by Blefuscan arrows. As soon as Gulliver returns to the Lilliputian shore, the Lilliputian emperor declares him a *nardac*, "the highest title of honour."

The Lilliputian emperor now wants Gulliver to help enslave the Blefuscians, but Gulliver refuses on the grounds that this would be inhumane. He notes that, from that point on, the emperor treated him much more coldly.

Three weeks later, the Blefuscians send a group of peace-offering ambassadors to Lilliput, all of whom are very warm towards Gulliver and invite him to visit Blefuscu, permission for which the Lilliputian emperor reluctantly gives. Gulliver attributes this reluctance to a rumor he's heard that the court ministers Flimnap and Bolgolam are spreading word that Gulliver's friendliness with the Blefuscan ambassadors was a sign of his disloyalty to Lilliput. Gulliver notes that, from this point on, he began to develop a darker view of "courts and ministers."

Though his title of *nardac* has relieved Gulliver of many of the kingdom-maintenance chores he'd signed up to do in exchange for liberty, he recounts one "most signal service" he was able to perform for the Lilliputian emperor. One night, there is a fire in the palace and the Lilliputians entreat Gulliver to go help stop it. The fire was due to a careless maid who fell asleep reading a novel by candlelight. Gulliver, having no instrument to put out the fire, extinguishes it by **urinating** on it. Though he has saved the palace, Gulliver knows that he has also broken law by urinating in the palace. Still, he feels better when he receives word that the emperor is ordering Gulliver be pardoned (though the empress, disgusted, has refused ever to live in the building again).

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 6

Gulliver describes life in Lilliput. He explains that, though the Lilliputians are small, their animals, surroundings, and physical capacities (such as sight) are scaled to size.

From Gulliver's perspective, the Lilliputians' deep channel is just a little stream and an intimidating battle is just a matter of pulling a few toy boats across the water. Still, the Lilliputians are overjoyed by Gulliver's performance. The nardac award honors Gulliver as societal hero and affirms his physical power is an asset to the Lilliputian state.



Gulliver privileges moral power (humaneness) over physical power (Lilliputian dominance). Yet the emperor's reaction to Gulliver shows he does not share Gulliver's perspective.



From the Blefuscians' perspective, Gulliver is not an enemy—he was simply carrying out the will of the Lilliputian emperor. Gulliver likewise sees the Blefuscians as potential new friends. Yet the Lilliputian state sees these two perspectives as a problem. It might be a sign, their rumor suggests, that Gulliver's allegiance to Lilliput is not "true."



The symbol of excrement recurs, and again challenges propriety. Gulliver's action is either heroic or treacherous, depending on the perspective from which it's viewed. On the one hand, his urine saved the palace from burning to the ground. On the other hand, his urine befouled the palace and represented a tremendous disrespect.



Because everything in Lilliput is small (from Gulliver's perspective), nothing looks small to a Lilliputian.



Gulliver describes aspects of the Lilliputians' legal system. If a person is found innocent by trial, the accuser is sentenced to death and the innocent person is paid generously for the inconveniences suffered. Fraud and ingratitude are likewise capital crimes punished by death. Citizens who follow the law throughout their lives have the title *snilpall* (which means 'legal') added to their name and are accorded privileges. (And Lilliputians are appalled to hear from Gulliver that his society maintains order only by punishment, without rewards.) When hiring people to positions, the hirers consider that person's moral more than they do his abilities.

Gulliver goes on to describe other aspects of life in the Lilliputians' society. Children are raised by professors and servants in public nurseries away from their parents. The nurseries are organized based on gender and social class. However, girls are raised to be just as brave and smart as boys are (and any maid at the girls' nurseries who entertains the girls by telling stories is whipped, imprisoned, or permanently exiled). Parents rich and poor all pay pensions and monthly sums to the nurseries, as the Lilliputians' think it is unfair to place the cost of raising children on the general public. Still, the payments are scaled to the parents' income levels.

Gulliver goes on to describe the prodigious efforts made by hundreds of the Lilliputian servants to **clothe** and feed him. He notes that once he had the Lilliputian emperor and the whole court over for an enjoyable dinner, though he thinks that Flimnap, the lord high treasurer, may have used the event as evidence to show the emperor how much money Gulliver was costing the kingdom. Gulliver describes also losing favor with the emperor when Flimnap accused him of having an illicit affair with Flimnap's wife, though Gulliver assures the reader that he and the lady were only ever friends. Gulliver says he found out about this accusation "by an accident not proper to mention" but notes that the treasurer was eventually "undeceived" and warmed to his wife again, though he never stopped resenting Gulliver.

The Lilliputian state obviously takes honesty extremely seriously—it punishes both false accusation and fraud with death. The state's justice system is also organized to promote obedience to the law by rewarding good behavior as well as punishing bad behavior. (Swift's England, by contrast, promoted obedience only by punishing bad behavior.) Note how, while to Gulliver (and us) the Lilliputian's laws seem ridiculous, to them England's laws seem silly.



This description of Lilliputian child rearing evokes the philosopher Plato's notion that an ideal society would raise children apart from their parents. It also evokes ideals of egalitarianism (by treating both genders equally) and fairness (by sparing non-parents from the costs of other people's children and by taxing people progressively).



This passage introduces the symbol of clothing, which represents perspective. Gulliver's clothes will change in each society as his perspective also changes. Flimnap's secret agenda behind the dinner party and the rumor about Gulliver's affair with Flimnap's wife intertwine the theme of the state with the theme of deception, as government officials appear to be driven by concealed or untruthful motives. At the same time, Gulliver's withholding (neglecting to explain how he heard about the rumor) could imply his own deceptiveness.



BOOK 1, CHAPTER 7

While planning his trip to Blefuscu, Gulliver receives a secret visit one night from a man of the court whom Gulliver had helped out in the past. This man explains that the Lilliputian emperor and Lilliputians in court have been secretly preparing to punish Gulliver for treason and other crimes including: urinating on the palace, refusing to enslave the Blefuscans as the emperor ordered, traitorously communing with the Blefuscan ambassadors, and planning a traitorous visit to Blefuscu. The man informs Gulliver that, though some members of court wanted Gulliver to be executed, they all worried what they would do with such a huge mass of rotting flesh. They have thus officially agreed to put out his eyes and then subsequently slowly starve him to death (so the resultant corpse will be less cumbersome).

The Lilliputians emperor and court plan to carry out their plot in three days, the man of the court tells Gulliver, and leaves him to decide what to do on his own. Gulliver reflects on the speeches the man has told him about the emperor making, attesting to his own leniency as a ruler and generosity in sparing Gulliver's life by merely putting out his eyes. Gulliver knows that it's a tradition in Lilliput for the emperor to publish a speech about his mercy after the court decrees a cruel sentence and that, the crueler the sentence, the more emphatic the emperor's claims about his mercy. The Lilliputians feel that "the more these praises were enlarged and insisted on, the more inhuman was the punishment, and the sufferer more innocent." Gulliver confesses that he has no expertise in courtly matters since he is just a common man but suspects that his sentence is more on the "rigorous" than the "gentle" side.

Gulliver resolves to escape to Blefuscu, though he notes that, if he'd known back then "the nature of princes and ministers, which I have since observed in many other courts...I should, with great alacrity...have submitted to so easy a punishment." He takes off at once, leaving a note saying he's left early for his trip to Blefuscu. He is warmly welcomed at Blefuscu.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 8

From Blefuscu, Gulliver spies an abandoned human boat in the sea and retrieves it, planning to restore it and return to England, a plan the Blefuscan emperor endorses. Meanwhile, the Lilliputian emperor sends a secret convoy to Blefuscu to explain Gulliver's treason and request his return. However, the Blefuscan emperor replies that, with all due respect, he can't obey this order because Gulliver has been a friend of Blefuscu. He tells Gulliver about the exchange and supplies Gulliver with lots of help to hasten his departure for England.

The concealed man's honesty saves Gulliver from the Lilliputian state's deceptions. The Lilliputian state has, according to the man's account, distorted its previous perspective: where it once accepted Gulliver's urination as necessary to save the palace, it now views it as disrespectful; where it once accepted Gulliver's friendliness to the Blefuscans as a mere nuisance, it now considers that friendliness a capital crime. The state's deceitful plot to blind and starve Gulliver proposes a particularly gruesome abuse of physical power.



Gulliver professes ignorance about proceedings of state and thus does not strongly assert his own perspective on the emperor's cruelty. Still, by unveiling the emperor's plot to blind and then starve Gulliver and by including this account of the state's extreme hypocrisy, Swift ensures that the reader's perspective will not be as conflicted as Gulliver's seems to be. Indeed, the Lilliputian state is revealed to be brutal and abusive towards its subjects.



Gulliver's reflection functions ironically. Through it, Swift darkly ridicules the brutality of European states by suggesting that the Lilliputian emperor's horrific plot against Gulliver was "easy...punishment" in comparison to other government's tactics.



The Blefuscan state seems to be much more moral than the Lilliputian one. It refuses to entertain the Lilliputians' deceitful schemes and honors Gulliver's life. On the other hand, the Lilliputians are the Blefuscans' enemies so Blefuscan reluctance to obey Lilliput may have more to do with asserting Blefuscu's independence than it does with honoring moral virtues.



Gulliver departs with a well-stocked boat and is eventually picked up by an English merchant ship which kindly takes him aboard. Though everyone initially doubts Gulliver's tales of Lilliput, they believe him once he shows them the tiny Lilliputian animals he has with him. Back in England, Gulliver spends two months with his wife and young children, Johnny and Betty, during which he makes "a considerable profit" by selling views of the Lilliputian cows, then selling the cows themselves. Gulliver sets his wife up in a house in Redriff, leaves her some money, and then, following his "insatiable desire of seeing foreign countries," sails off on a merchant ship called the Adventure.

Gulliver's return to England intertwines the themes of perspective and truth. What seems "true," the text suggests, is a matter of perspective, not an absolute. In Lilliput, humans like Gulliver seemed strange and unbelievable but back in England, it's Lilliput that seems like a fantasy and Gulliver is at pains to prove the Lilliputians exist.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 1

The start of the Adventure's voyage goes well but a storm somewhere north of Madagascar damages the ship and sets them off course into unknown waters. When they finally spot an island, they disembark and separate to look for water. Gulliver is then left behind when a huge "monster" scares his companions into rowing back to the ship without him. Gulliver runs deeper into the island and realizes he is surrounded by giant grass and corn.

Gulliver's perspective on this second voyage will be extremely different. Where Lilliput shocked him with its tininess, he is now amazed by this new land's immensity. Note that Swift's prose keeps pace with Gulliver's own perspective: he does not yet know the name of the creature and so he just refers to it as a "monster."



In the cornfield, Gulliver is terrified when he runs into a group of the "monsters" carrying giant scythes. As he tries to escape them, he compares himself to a Lilliputian in a human world. He thinks, "undoubtedly philosophers are in the right, when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison."

Swift's prose continues to match up with Gulliver's perspective. Gulliver's reflection emphasizes an absence of absolute truth: everything is dependent on comparison, that is, perspective.



When one of the reapers almost steps on him, Gulliver cries out to save himself and is plucked up by a reaper who then observes him cautiously as if he were a curious animal. Gulliver compares the giant's gaze to his own gaze examining a weasel in England. The reaper does not crush Gulliver as Gulliver expects him to but instead responds to Gulliver's attempts to communicate that the man's pinch is hurting him by depositing Gulliver "gently" in his pocket and running off to show Gulliver to his master, the farmer. The farmer and others gather in awe around Gulliver, who tries to supplicate them with gold, which they don't recognize as valuable and return to him. They try to converse but speak different languages.

From the giant's perspective, Gulliver is simply a tiny animal and his riches are worthless. The worldly knowledge Gulliver acquired from his adventures in Lilliput enables him to recognize and empathize with the giants' perspective. Still, Gulliver falsely assumes that the giants will choose to exert their physical power. In fact, they seem eager to privilege moral power and treat Gulliver humanely, just as the "giant" Gulliver treated the Lilliputians.



The farmer wraps Gulliver in his handkerchief and brings him home. Gulliver has lunch with the family, who delights in watching him eat his tiny piece of their huge meal. When the farmer's son grabs Gulliver, the farmer boxes his son's ears until Gulliver pantomimes a request for the son's forgiveness which the farmer grants. Gulliver kisses the son's hand. From here on, Gulliver refers to the farmer as his "master."

A meal's worth of food from Gulliver's perspective is a mere crumb from the giant's viewpoint. Gulliver affirms his own desire to privilege moral power (and forgiveness) over physical power by kissing the son. At the same time, he supplicates himself to the farmer's power by referring to him as "master."



Gulliver is terrified by the cat and nearly squeezed to death by the baby. He observes the disgusting complexion of the farmer's wife, then remembers that this is because her face is so much enlarged compared to his own. He recalls the beautiful skin of the Lilliputians and their horror at his. After lunch, the farmer's wife puts him to bed under her handkerchief. While there, Gulliver is attacked by two rats the size of "mastiffs" and manages to save himself by killing one with his sword (the other is scared away).

The farmer's wife returns and is relieved to find Gulliver alive. She cleans up the mess of the dead rat. After much desperate miming, Gulliver manages to convey to her that he needs to **go to the bathroom**, which she takes him to the garden to do in privacy behind a leaf. Gulliver asks the reader's forgiveness for "dwelling on these...particulars" but that, while they seem insignificant, they "will certainly help a philosopher to enlarge his thoughts and imagination, and apply them to the benefit of public as well as private life," which is Gulliver's purpose for writing his travels in the first place.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 2

Gulliver is cared for by the Brobdingnagan farmer's nine-year-old daughter Glumdalclitch. Glumdalclitch tends him diligently, making him new **clothes**, washing those clothes regularly, and teaching him the Brobdingnagian language. Gulliver says that he owes his survival in Brobdingnag to Glumdalclitch.

News about Gulliver spreads around town and the Brobdingnagan farmer's miserly neighbor advises the farmer to make money by showing Gulliver "as a sight" at the local market. Glumdalclitch is horrified by the idea, worrying that Gulliver will be hurt by prodding strangers, but the farmer enthusiastically drives Glumdalclitch and Gulliver to the market the next day.

At the market the Brobdingnagan farmer sets Gulliver on a table and has him answer Glumdalclitch's questions, bow to the spectators, toast them with a thimble of wine, and flourish his sword, a performance the farmer has Gulliver perform twelve times. A boy in the audience throws a hazelnut at Gulliver's head and narrowly misses. The boy is, to Gulliver's "satisfaction," beaten. The shows prove to be such a financial success for the farmer that he resolves to bring Gulliver back the next market day and afterwards to take the show on a country-wide tour. At each stop, the farmer schedules ten shows a day.

Again, Gulliver's worldly knowledge (of the Lilliputians) helps him make sense of his new experience. Gulliver's perspective is as different from the giants' as the Lilliputians' perspective was from his in Lilliput: things that are harmless or small nuisances to the giants (pets, babies, vermin) are huge dangers for Gulliver.



Gulliver once again includes details about his excrement. For him, this inclusion is proof of moral power, a testament to the honesty and usefulness of his account. The uncensored truthfulness will make his adventures more imaginable to readers, which will thereby make its lessons more applicable to English lives.



The symbol of clothing recurs. Gulliver acquires this new set of clothes as he enters this new society and begins to acquire a new perspective.



From Glumdalclitch's perspective, Gulliver is a beloved being deserving humane treatment but, for her father and his neighbor, Gulliver is simply a business opportunity.



The farmer capitalizes on how strange Gulliver appears in his countrymen's perspective. Gulliver recently privileged moral power over physical power when he requested the farmer's son be spared a beating, but now that he is being physically abused himself (by being manipulated and overworked) he supports abuse for his abusers. Note how Gulliver is shown off for money just as Gulliver showed off the Lilliputian animals for money in England.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 3

Gulliver thins and weakens as the Brobdingnagan farmer grows richer and richer off the shows. Thinking that Gulliver will soon die, the farmer sells him to the Brobdingnagan queen, and agrees, at Gulliver's request, to throw Glumdalclitch into the bargain too. Left with the queen, Gulliver recounts his grueling treatment under his prior master and expresses confidence that she will treat him better. The queen is impressed by Gulliver's intelligence and rationality and shows him to the Brobdingnagian king, who at first thinks Gulliver is a piece of clockwork.

The Brobdingnagian king orders philosophers to examine Gulliver to try to determine where he is from, dismissing Gulliver's own claims about his origins as a story made up by Glumdalclitch and the farmer. The philosophers are thoroughly puzzled and, after much study, can only determine that Gulliver is a freak of nature. After interrogating the farmer, the king finally starts to think Gulliver might be telling the truth.

The king orders Glumdalclitch and Gulliver housed in a special chamber and Gulliver is fixed up with a custom-made bed and **clothes** of highest quality. The king and queen are fond of dining with Gulliver, who entertains the royal family with his descriptions of life in England. Once, the prince (ordinarily very earnestly interested in Gulliver's accounts of Europe) observes to a table-mate "how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as [Gulliver]." But Gulliver calls the prince's view understandable and says that he himself had gotten so used to those around him that he would have laughed at the sight of ordinary human beings too.

Gulliver describes the biggest pests in his daily life. The Brobdingnagan queen's dwarf enjoys torturing him. He once stuck Gulliver in the hollow of a marrow bone and once nearly drowned him in a pitcher of cream. Gulliver is also plagued by flies, which are huge compared to him and **excrete** on his food or lay eggs all over it (which no one else can see, though they are visible to Gulliver). Gulliver was also dangerously attacked by wasps "as large as partridges" whose huge stingers he managed to remove and later showed as "curiosities" in England.

The farmer continues to consider Gulliver nothing but a money making tool. Disturbingly, he seems to see his own daughter the same way. The queen does not expect Gulliver to possess human reason and is thus surprised to see he does. The king is just as unprepared to perceive Gulliver's humanity and assumes he must be mechanical.



At first, the king's perspective will only accept truth in the words of people who look like him. He assumes that Gulliver's words must be lies. Indeed, this rigid perspective shows that the king is not as worldly as Gulliver, whose knowledge has equipped him to sympathize with and listen to people of different appearances.



Again, as Gulliver's context and perspective shifts, his clothes shift too. The royal family members seem to be broadening their perspectives on Gulliver, though the prince's sudden dehumanizing disdain towards him shows the limits of their view. At the same time, Gulliver's reflection indicates how much his own perspective is being altered by his environment: human beings no longer seem "normal" to him.



The dwarf cruelly abuses his physical advantage over Gulliver to humiliate him. There is a bit of a suggestion here that the dwarf, who has always been small compared to the other Brobdingnagans, is asserting the power he never could before over Gulliver. Gulliver's struggles emphasize the difference between his perspective and the Brobdingnagans perspectives: in the case of the fly excrement, they can't even see the thing that causes Gulliver so much discomfort.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 4

Gulliver describes the kingdom of Brobdingnag, which is on a rocky peninsula which Gulliver surmises must be in between Japan and northwest America. Gulliver frequently leaves the palace on expeditions with Glumdalclitch, who carries him in a specially made and furnished box. On one trip, Gulliver is fascinated to see beggars crawling with visible lice and gauged with immense wounds. Gulliver is eager to see the “chief temple,” but is unimpressed by the sight of it, thinking that, in proportion to the size of the inhabitants, it is nowhere near as impressive as Salisbury steeple in England.

The geographical orientation between “real” countries makes the tale seem more “true.” Though it can be a nuisance, Gulliver’s different perspective can also work in his favor. He can see things—like the lice—invisible to those around him. His worldly knowledge also enables him to make comparisons and judgments that the Brobdingnagans, who have never been to England, can’t.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 5

Gulliver recounts various accidents that befall him because of his “littleness”: he is nearly struck to death by apples that the queen’s dwarf shakes off the tree at him, is nearly crushed by hail, nearly eaten by a dog, and is pecked at by birds, who steal his food. He is also treated with curiosity by maids, who undress Gulliver, cradle him like a baby, dress and **urinate** in front of him, and play with him on their naked bodies. He is disgusted by the magnified odors and flaws of their huge bodies. He nearly drowns in the trough the queen has had built for him to row in. His most dangerous run-in was with a pet monkey, who, thinking Gulliver was a baby monkey, stole him from the castle and climbed onto the roof to force-feed him. The monkey was soon captured and killed and Gulliver recovered from his injuries.

Though Gulliver’s different perspective may give him certain insights, it mostly causes him grief. Even situations that would be pleasurable in the human world—such as getting to be the only man present among a group of naked women—are grotesquely distorted in Brobdingnag. Gulliver’s physical powerlessness dehumanizes him. The naked women in fact don’t consider him a man at all—they think of Gulliver as a baby. The monkey doesn’t recognize Gulliver as a human either.



Still, the Brobdingnagian king, the Brobdingnagian queen, the court, and even Glumdalclitch cannot help laughing at Gulliver’s accidents, even as they genuinely feel sorry for him. Gulliver tries to preserve his dignity but reflects “how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavor to do himself honor among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him.”

Even though the Brobdingnagans are fond of Gulliver, they can’t help seeing his crises as jokes. Gulliver’s reflection suggests that identity itself is completely dependent on perspective. A person’s dignity isn’t inherent but depends on its being recognized by the people around him.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 6

Gulliver weaves the Brobdingnagian queen a purse out of her own hair and builds a human-sized instrument to play music to entertain the court. He offers to teach the Brobdingnagian king about the governance of state in Europe, which the king agrees to. Over the course of several multi-hour lessons, Gulliver proudly describes England’s land holdings and divisions of government, hoping his words can do his country justice.

Growing more and more accustomed to his new perspective, Gulliver is able to contribute to the society around him by making crafts and sharing his knowledge of England.



After having heard five of these lessons, the Brobdingnagian king is unsatisfied and pummels Gulliver with questions and protests of disbelief. After the next such lesson, he takes Gulliver gently in hand and caresses him as he says, “you have made a most admirable panegyric upon your country; you have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice...qualify...a legislator; that laws are best...applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them.” The king goes on to note that he has also learned that England’s priests, soldiers, judges, and senators are without merit. He concludes by saying that his observations of Gulliver and Gulliver’s reluctance to answer his questions has instructed him that Englishmen are “the most pernicious race of little odious vermin.”

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 7

Gulliver says he has only included the Brobdingnagian king’s reaction to England because of his “extreme love of truth” and apologizes to the reader on the king’s behalf. He explains that he did his best to evade many of the king’s questions and to cast “a more favorable turn” to his answers “than truth would allow.” Still, he advises the reader to cut the king slack because his seclusion and ignorance of the rest of the world has left him narrow-minded and prejudiced in ways that Europeans “are wholly exempt” from.

Gulliver goes on to give a few examples illustrating the Brobdingnagan king’s ignorance. When Gulliver told the king about gunpowder and its immense powers of destruction and offered to help the king make it, the king was appalled by “such inhuman ideas” and wanted nothing to do with it. When Gulliver referred to the “science” of politics and political secret keeping in Europe, the king professed that he did not understand why secrets should be kept from anyone but a country’s enemies and “confined the knowledge of governing...to common sense and reason, to justice and lenity.”

Gulliver continues, explaining the “defective” education of the Brobdingnagans, who learn only “morality, history, poetry, and mathematics,” and though they excel in these fields, they only apply mathematics to “what may be useful in life...so that among us, it would be little esteemed.” They have no concept of abstractions. Their laws are brief, blunt, and interpreted by everyone in the same way. Their literature is “clear, masculine, and smooth, but not florid.”

The king’s reaction gives further evidence that “truth” is not objective but subjective: it’s created by perspective. Whereas Gulliver thinks that he’s praising England and painting a grand portrait of his nation for the Brobdingnagan king, the king hears only a pitiable account of England’s evils and weaknesses.



As Gulliver apologizes for including excrement in his narrative, so he apologizes for including criticism against England. Though Gulliver appears to be apologizing for and dismissing the king’s criticism, in reality Swift has managed to voice a solid attack against the English state and society through the Brobdingnagan king’s mouth.



Gulliver’s dismissal of the king’s ignorance is ironic. In fact, Swift constructs the prose so that the reader can clearly see that the Brobdingnagan king’s ruling principles are humane and virtuous and European politics are cruel and “inhuman,” just as the king says.



Gulliver’s perspective is again at odds with Swift’s. Gulliver’s professed pity for Brobdingnagan ignorance only ends up highlighting all the ways in which their society is superior to Europe. Where Europe is obsessed by impractical abstractions and over-analysis, Brobdingnag uses its knowledge practically and efficiently.



As to their military, Gulliver explains it is not professional but instead comprised of ordinary tradesmen and farmers and led by noblemen. Still, Gulliver notes that they function perfectly, as the soldiers are very obedient since their officers are their landlords. Though Gulliver is surprised that such a geographically isolated kingdom even needs a military, he has learned that there have historically been civil wars and the military was formed to keep peace.

Brobdingnag's successful military suggests that a state needn't have specially appointed soldiers. Instead, people with ordinary professions could also function just as successfully as a standing militia.



BOOK 2, CHAPTER 8

Having spent two years in Brobdingnag, Gulliver leaves by accident. On a trip to the ocean, a page supposed to be guarding Gulliver's box gets distracted and a great bird swoops down and carries Gulliver's box away by the ring in its roof. Gulliver is carried for some time and then eventually dropped into the water while the bird has a tussle with some other birds. Gulliver hopes to be found and waves his handkerchief out the window. Eventually, he feels his box hoisted up and he comes face to face with a crew of astonished Englishmen. Gulliver is "confounded at the sight of so many pygmies."

As with his return to human society from Lilliput, Gulliver's reentry after Brobdingnag connects the themes of perspective and truth and shows how malleable a person's sense of "truth" is. Having spent two years among Brobdingnagans, humans are no longer the norm to Gulliver's mind—they are freaks, "pygmies."



The ship's captain helps nurse the starved and panicked Gulliver back to health. When Gulliver asks if he'd seen a giant bird, he says he's seen no birds bigger than usual, Gulliver assumes the captain must have gauged their sized incorrectly, being at a distance from them. Gulliver's box is accidentally destroyed by careless crewman trying to extract the furniture, but Gulliver's cabinet of mementoes is preserved and he uses them to help convince the crew that his account of Brobdingnag is true. He shows them his mouse-skin **trousers**. The captain believes him and encourages him to write up his adventures for all to read.

The process of Gulliver's reentry continues to highlight the inseparability of the themes of perspective and truth. Gulliver's worldly knowledge enables him to make assumptions about other people's limited perspectives (as he assumes the captain simply misgauged the birds' sizes). Gulliver uses physical evidence, including the symbol of his clothing, to convince the humans around him that his story is true.



The captain points out that Gulliver is shouting and Gulliver realizes he's gotten so used to his Brobdingnag habits that he's acting very strangely in the human world. He is amazed by the size of everyone, confessing never to have looked in the mirror in Brobdingnag out of shame for his littleness. He finds the human world tiny. The ship deposits Gulliver on shore in England and, returning home, Gulliver bends much too low to embrace his wife and can't even see his daughter. Looking at them, he feels they are "pigmies and I a giant." His wife begs him never to leave home again, but Gulliver soon sets out once more.

Even though Gulliver knows that he is simply startled by the change in perspective and that in fact the human world is just as he left it, the power of perspective is so strong that he remains unable to adjust his behavior to line up with the world around him. Instead, he acts completely out of proportion to his situation.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 1

Much to his wife's chagrin, Gulliver accepts an invitation to be a surgeon and co-captain aboard the *Hopewell*. Though the voyage starts out well, they are soon hijacked by pirates, most of whom are Japanese. Gulliver pleads in Dutch with one Dutch pirate, begging him as a Christian and a fellow European. The Dutchmen, furious and determined to kill them all, recounts Gulliver's plea to his Japanese companions. The Japanese captain then approaches Gulliver and tells him they wouldn't die. As he bows in gratitude, Gulliver quips to the Dutchman that he has found "more mercy in a heathen." This sparks the man's fury again, such that he persuades the Japanese captains to abandon Gulliver in a small canoe with only four days' provisions. (The rest of Gulliver's crewmates are taken aboard the pirate ships.)

Thus abandoned, Gulliver rows to an island where he finds eggs to eat and begins to consider his impending miserable death before sleeping in a cave. Still feeling grim the next morning, he suddenly sees "a vast opaque body" cross the sun and move towards the island. Through his binoculars he can distinguish it is a floating island with men moving about on it. It moves closer and he bows in supplication and begs their help. They don't understand English and speak their own language but understand Gulliver needs help and lower a chair on a chain for Gulliver to be drawn up among them.

Though Gulliver's worldly knowledge usually assists him by helping him empathize with and understand other people around him, here it does him no favors: instead of winning the Dutchman over, Gulliver's ability to speak Dutch only winds up irritating the Dutchman further and landing Gulliver in an abandoned canoe.



Swift's prose is again attuned to Gulliver's perspective when it refers to the island in the sky as a vague, unknown thing. Gulliver assumes a pose of physical powerlessness to express his deference to the floating islanders. The posture wins them over and inspires their moral power: they altruistically rescue Gulliver from his abandonment.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 2

Gulliver is immediately surrounded by a crowd of peculiar-looking individuals. Many of them don't hold their heads up straight. Some are cross-eyed. All wear **clothes** elaborately decorated with celestial bodies and musical instruments. Amongst these people walk servants carrying a blown bladder filled with little pebbles or peas to flap at the mouths and ears of those around them. Gulliver explains that he later learned that these servants are called "flappers" and they are responsible for striking the mouths of those who should speak and the ears of those they should speak into, for the speakers and listeners are so distracted they would often forget if left to carry on the conversation themselves. The flapper is also responsible for preventing his absent-minded master from tripping over things, bumping into walls, etc.

The designs on the floating islanders' clothes suggest that their perspective values astronomy and music. Though the floating islanders' elevation above the Earth suggests physical power, their individual appearances only indicate physical powerlessness. Their drooping heads, crossed eyes, and pathetic reliance on flappers show that they cannot even control their own bodies.



Gulliver is led to the Laputian king, who is too absorbed with solving a math problem to notice Gulliver for the first hour. (And even then he only notices Gulliver because a flapper bids him to.) The king gives orders for Gulliver to be sent away and fed. The food is cut into geometrical figures. After dinner, a tutor arrives, sent by the king to teach Gulliver the native language and, in the days that follow, Gulliver studies hard to learn to speak it.

Gulliver learns that the floating island is called Laputa, a word whose etymology means “high governor.” Gulliver privately doesn’t “approve of this derivation,” thinking it “strained.” He thinks the etymology should actually be traced to two words meaning ‘sun dancing on the sea’ and ‘wing.’

At the Laputian king’s orders, Gulliver is measured for **clothes** using a quadrant, a ruler, and compasses, and the resultant clothes are very misshapen due to a failure in the calculation. Gulliver says such mistakes were frequently made and largely ignored.

The Laputian king orders Laputa to be steered towards Lagado, the capital of the kingdom below. Along the way, Laputa stops over certain towns and villages to hoist up “petitions” from the king’s people.

Gulliver describes life among the Laputians. Their speech relies very heavily on mathematical terms and they insist that their houses be built without any right angles because they hate practical geometry and can’t bear to live in rectangles (many of their houses are thus misshapen, as the workmen can’t manage the complex mathematics of building them). They have no grasp of common sense or practical knowledge and don’t know even have words for ‘imagination’ and ‘invention.’ However, they confidently pontificate on politics (as, Gulliver notes, do mathematicians in England). Everyone is perpetually obsessed with the health of the sun and they all worry ceaselessly about its impending death.

The Laputian women “have abundance of vivacity,” loathe their husbands, and take Lagadans (from the kingdom below) to be their lovers on Laputa. Many women try to escape to Lagado, but it is difficult to get the Laputian king’s permission to leave Laputa because “the [Laputian] people of quality have found, by frequent experience, how hard it is to persuade their women to return from below.”

Gulliver’s interaction with the king implies that the islanders’ lack of control over their bodies was not due to stupidity but rather to over-absorption in matters of the mind.



Gulliver has his own perspective on the truth about Laputa’s etymology, though it seems a bit presumptuous to assume he knows more about the native language than the native speakers do.



As usual, Gulliver’s entry into a new society’s perspective comes with a new set of clothes. The tailor’s measurements exemplify an inability to apply knowledge practically.



The Laputian state manages its subjects by exerting its physical power. It positions itself physically above them.



Laputian society suffers the inability to use knowledge to practical effect. The Laputians’ refined geometrical and astronomical theories are too complex to serve the simple tasks of daily life (like building houses). Because the Laputians’ refuse to embrace more practical forms of geometry and astronomy, their knowledge is basically useless and just causes societal dysfunction. They live in defective houses and can only discuss the day’s weather in terms of the sun’s eventual demise. All of this contributes to Swift’s satire of those in English and European culture who hold the theoretical and philosophical to be higher than everything else.



The Laputian women clearly don’t have the same problem relating to their bodies that the Laputian men do, which makes sense as women must be more in touch with their bodies given the fact of having to bear children. Their knowledge of life is visceral and practical. Still, the men that control the state use government law to restrain the women within Laputa.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 3

Gulliver gets permission from the Laputian king to explore the island and proceeds to describe it: it is a four-and-a-half mile diameter circle with a layer of adamant as its base and an immense magnetic loadstone in a chasm at the island's center. Laputa's movements are controlled by highly skilled Laputians who are astronomers (and know about many more celestial bodies, Gulliver notes, than European astronomers do). The astronomers turn the magnet so that either the attractive or the repellent end of the magnet faces the kingdom below (which either pulls Laputa towards or pushes it away).

The Laputian king manages the kingdom below by manipulating the motions of the island. If a particular population is misbehaving, he hovers the island over them, depriving their land of sun and rain. If they continue misbehaving, he pelts them from above with stones. If they still misbehave, he begins to lower the island towards them, threatening to flatten them completely. However (as the kingdom's subjects well know) the king is usually too worried about damaging the base of Laputa to really want to crush any part of his kingdom. Even as the king announces that he spares his subjects because of his leniency, they know the real reason. The king and Laputian princes are not allowed to leave Laputa ever. The Laputian queen is not allowed to leave till she is finished bearing children.

Though the Laputians generally seem unable to apply their knowledge to practical effect, the astronomers' use of their skills to navigate the island stands out as an exception. Still, the practical effect—that is, controlling the kingdom below through the elevated physical motion of the island—is perhaps not so laudable.



The king's method of ruling his kingdom is a clear abuse of physical power and the mark of a dysfunctional state. Indeed, the kingdom's subjects don't respect the king and see him as the selfish, pathetic tyrant that he is. Though the king thinks his lies about his leniency convince the listeners of his nobility, his subjects see straight through his deception. The Laputian king's abuse of power also comments on the way that those who pursue high-minded theory or philosophy are often just as, or more, corrupt and power-hungry than the less theoretically minded.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 4

Gulliver does not enjoy his time on Laputa. Because he doesn't know much about mathematics or music, most people ignore him and he converses only with "women, tradesmen, flappers, and court-pages," and a lord who feels out of place in Laputa too and is the only noble interested in hearing Gulliver talk about Europe. Gulliver soon gets the Laputian king's permission to leave.

Gulliver sets off for Lagado where he visits the Laputian king's friend, Munodi. Walking about Lagado, Gulliver is astonished to find the city and surrounding countryside in utter destitution and disarray, and asks the king's friend about it. Munodi takes Gulliver to his private estate to discuss the matter. Munodi's estate is unlike all of Lagado—it is orderly and productive, with a mill, cropfields, symmetrical landscaping, and rectangular house as one would find in England. When Gulliver praises it, Munodi tells him his estate is reviled by all of Lagado.

Because Gulliver doesn't share the Laputians' obsession with abstract knowledge and theory, he is excluded from their inner circle and can connect only with society's outcasts who lack the same knowledge he lacks.



This exchange sets up an interesting play of perspectives, triangulating the Lagadans' perspective against Gulliver's and Munodi's along with the reader's perspective itself. In this kingdom, the English reader's own views and values are spurned and considered worthless by most of the kingdom's population.



Munodi explains that forty years prior, a group of Lagadans went up to Laputa and returned with mathematic theories which they used to revamp their entire society. Lagado and its surrounding towns all opened academies and filled them with professors who invented “new rules and methods of agriculture and building.” Munodi’s estate is one of the last few hold-outs of the old ways. However, all those highly new scientific and mathematic schemes failed and have left the country impoverished, infertile, and horrifically disorganized. Still, the people stand by the new ways and spurn Munodi’s allegiance to tradition. Munodi says that he will secure permission for Gulliver to visit the academy in Lagado after a few days’ stay at his estate.

Munodi’s account speaks to the power of perspective, showing how the value system contained within a certain perspective can stay strong even in the face of evidence that seems to contradict it. Thus, the people around Munodi remain convinced that their abstract theories are superior to Munodi’s ways, even though their theories are crippling their society and wreaking havoc while his traditional practices are yielding good results.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 5

Gulliver visits the academy in Lagado which is housed in several decrepit buildings along a street. He encounters men, called projectors, engaged in many bizarre projects: one is working on extracting sunbeams from cucumbers; one on turning human **excrement** back into food; one on turning calcine ice into gunpowder; one on building houses from the roof down; one on learning to identify paint colors by smell and texture; one on training hogs to plow fields; one on training spiders to spin colored webs; one on treating colic by pumping air into people’s anuses. Gulliver observes that while all of the projectors are working cheerfully, none of them seem to be making any progress.

The projectors, who value theory above all else, aren’t assessing the practicality of their experiments and are thus blissfully blind to their projects’ blatant futility, though this futility is plainly apparent to Gulliver. Swift’s description of the academy is also a not-so-subtle attack on the newly founded Royal Academy in contemporary London, an institution Swift felt was uselessly devoted to abstract knowledge.



Gulliver goes on to visit the educational wing of the academy where projector professors are giving lessons on how to write books using a mechanic word randomizer and how to learn mathematics by eating wafers with equations written on them. They are also discussing a new strategy to enable people to stop speaking (since speech stresses the lungs and shortens the lifespan) and communicate only by showing each other the actual objects they wanted to refer to. This plan has been strongly contested by “women, in conjunction with the vulgar and illiterate” who object to the huge bulk of objects it forces people to carry around.

The projectors continue to devote themselves to projects that are, as Gulliver and the reader can see, a waste of time. The projects are worse than useless. The implementation of these projectors’ theories would only hinder society, not help it. Women, who lack the men’s abstract knowledge, are the only citizens with the common sense perspective to resist the projectors’ plans.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 6

Gulliver goes on to visit the academy’s political projectors, whom he judges to be totally insane. Gulliver does admire one doctor among them, who proposes to manage politics by managing the physical ailments and corporeal bodies of politicians (since “there is a strict universal resemblance between the natural and the political body”). When politicians disagree, he proposes performing surgery on their brains and giving each half the brain of the other. Thus political arguments can be resolved within one head.

The doctor’s plan is based solely on abstract theory and has no grounding in practical knowledge. Its brain transplant proposal clearly ignores the most basic facts of medicine and human health.



Gulliver also hears projector professors debating the standards by which people should be taxed, proposing that men be taxed on their vices, follies, talents, sexual prowess, “wit, valour, and politeness,” but never on “honour, justice, wisdom, and learning,” since those four are valueless. Women could be taxed on “beauty” and style, but not on “constancy, chastity, good sense, and good nature,” because the latter four were too scarce to yield any tax profit.

The projector professors also discuss choosing senators by a raffle, detecting conspiracies by examining statesmen’s diets and excretions.

Gulliver shares with the projector professors a few political strategies he has observed in the kingdom of Tribnia where the Langdon (the natives) falsely accuse people of conspirators to elevate their own standing, and prove their false accusations by having skilled “artists” find hidden codes, meanings, acrostics, or anagrams, in the supposed conspirators words or letters. The professors thank Gulliver heartily. Generally unimpressed by Lagado, Gulliver starts thinking about returning to England.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 7

Gulliver leaves Lagado and sets out planning to go to Luggnagg, an island in between western American and Japan. However, when there are no ships for Luggnagg he goes to the island of Glubbudrib instead, which is governed by magicians who practice necromancy. The Glubbudribbian governor’s servants are all ghosts, which startles Gulliver at first, though he soon gets used to it. The governor offers to summon up any dead person Gulliver wants to meet and so Gulliver sees Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Caesar, Pompey, the Roman senate, Caesar and Brutus. Gulliver is very impressed by Brutus’ intelligent benevolent appearance, and Caesar’s ghost affirms this impression by telling Gulliver none of his own life’s actions were as great as Brutus’ murder.

Gulliver summarizes the innumerable other ghosts he had summoned by saying they were “chiefly...destroyers of tyrants and usurpers, and the restorers of liberty to oppressed and injured nations.”

The projectors continue to demonstrate their own perverse values—here they consider “honor, justice, wisdom, and learning” worthless. Still, unbeknownst to them, their tax system would encourage just such “worthless” values (by leaving them untaxed) and would therefore promote a more virtuous society.



The plan to select powerful state leaders by chance or by irrelevant physical characteristics is obviously flawed.



The reader’s perspective clashes with Gulliver’s and the projectors’. Gulliver seems to have no qualms about sharing his worldly knowledge of other society’s manipulative and dishonest political strategies, and the projectors welcome the information.



As a magician able to summon ghosts of the dead, the governor possesses extraordinary physical power. By encountering the historical European dead, Gulliver gets a chance to learn about his own society’s past. In doing so, he discovers the flaws in his own knowledge and sees that his perspective on European history does not match up with the perspectives of the historical figures themselves. Indeed, history lessons teach that Brutus is a villain and Caesar a hero, but the ghosts themselves reverse this dynamic.



Gulliver is interested in meeting heroes of the people: individuals who fight power’s abusers and virtuously defend the rights of a country’s people.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 8

Gulliver sets aside a day to see the ghosts of men renowned for their knowledge. He sees Homer and Aristotle and their huge crowd of commentators, none of whom Homer and Aristotle have met since the commentators are so ashamed by the gross lies they've made up in their commentaries that they've avoided Homer and Aristotle in the afterlife.

Gulliver calls up Descartes and Gassendi to school Aristotle in their systems. Aristotle freely admits his own errors. Still, he says that new theories of nature go in and out of fashion and even those that purport to be grounded in timeless mathematic principles will vary age to age. Gulliver also calls up the Roman emperors.

Gulliver then calls up the modern deceased and meets the royalty and aristocracy of Europe, in all of whom he can detect tainted and degenerate blood brought into the bloodline by men of low standing. By conversing with these royals and aristocrats, Gulliver discovers how dishonest the accounts of history are that portray these people as grand and virtuous when really they are weaklings, commoners, villains, hypocrites, liars, and corrupt people. He calls historians "prostitute writers." The kings insist that virtue is just "a perpetual clog to public business" and that the throne relies on "corruption."

Continuing in this conversation, Gulliver learns that all of history's good statesmen and virtuous leaders are remembered as traitorous villains. Gulliver reflects that, just like it happened in Rome, Europe's acquisition of wealth has led its people to be less healthy and more corrupt, and the past century has reduced England to a state of disgusting degeneracy.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 9

Gulliver leaves Glubbudrib for Luggnagg. On the ship to Luggnagg, Gulliver lies and says he is Dutch because he aims eventually to go to Japan and knows that only Dutch Europeans are allowed entrance. On the ship, Gulliver hires a young Luggnaggian to be his Luggnaggian interpreter.

This anecdote intertwines the themes of knowledge and deception—some of history's most "knowledgeable" scholars (the commentators) are exposed as shameful liars.



Gulliver arranges the meeting between these philosophers to establish absolute truth by showing Aristotle his own theories were lies. However, Aristotle wisely recognizes that absolute truth does not exist—truth is just a matter of people's perspectives at a particular time.



Gulliver's encounter with the past rulers of European states makes him realize that all the historical knowledge he possesses has come from deceptive sources—the "prostitute" historians who represented the rulers as morally and physically powerful men. Yet these rulers, Gulliver finds, were in fact weak on both counts: they are corrupt and their bodies are physically debased by polluted bloodlines. Gulliver's perspective on history shifts.



Gulliver's reflection links societal wealth with societal corruption. The text is thus implicitly advocating a simpler lifestyle as a path to virtue.



Though it's a fairly harmless deception, Gulliver's lie is nevertheless hypocritical—he's so often insisted on his utter truthfulness that the sight of him lying so unapologetically diminishes some of his moral power.



Gulliver applies for and receives permission to visit Trildrogdrib, where the Luggnaggian king and court reside. Upon arrival, he is forced to approach the king in the manner of the country: that is, crawling on his belly licking the floor. Though the floor has been cleaned for him, a stranger, he notes that the king has the floor strewn with dust or even with poison before his enemies approach, causing them great discomfort and/or death. Gulliver praises the king as he's been instructed to.

The Luggnaggian king is pleased with Gulliver and provides him and his Luggnaggian interpreter with food and lodging for the three months Gulliver stays there.

The ritual illustrates this king's grotesque abuse of physical power. He controls his state by physical domination and the threat of physical punishment.



Still, despite his kingdom's horrific rituals, the king is as kind and welcoming towards Gulliver as all the other states have been. Though it's worth noting that the king is only kind after Gulliver has completely supplicated himself to the king.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 10

One day, a Luggnaggian asks Gulliver if he has seen any struldbrugs (immortals). He explains that in Luggnagg, children are occasionally born with a red spot on their forehead above the left eyebrow which indicates that that child is immortal. The spot changes colors as the struldbrug ages and immortality is not necessarily passed down to the struldbrug's children.

Gulliver is overjoyed to hear of the struldbrugs and exclaims what a great "happy nation, where every child hath at least a chance for being immortal!" He says he wants to ask permission to live in Luggnagg forever, talking with the struldbrugs. The Luggnaggians are amused by Gulliver's reaction and ask him what he would do if he were granted immortality. Gulliver waxes poetic, saying he would gain great wealth, learning, and knowledge of history as it passed; he would teach young men; commune with other immortals as a group of wise men, setting a virtuous, grand example for the rest of mankind. He would watch with joy as new discoveries were made and obscure lands found over time.

This mark of immortality, positioned as it is next to the eyebrow, strongly resembles an eye. Indeed, immortality would make one "see" things differently, would greatly alter one's perspective.



Gulliver's rhapsody demonstrates the European perspective that considers death to be the greatest evil and longs for immortality above all things. The fact that Luggnagg possesses immortal individuals makes it seem like an ideal society to Gulliver and he is eager to become a part of it.



The Luggnaggians laugh at Gulliver's response and one explains to him that humans, like many races that lack immortals, misunderstand immortality entirely by thinking that it is the greatest good and death the greatest evil. They imagine that immortality entails perpetual youthfulness, health, wisdom, and wealth. In fact, by the struldbrugs' example, the Luggnaggians know that as they age, immortals grow cantankerous, "peevish, covetous, morose, vain...incapable of friendship, and dead to all natural affection." They are jealous of youth and of the ability to die. In Luggnagg, struldbrugs over age eighty are considered legally dead and their heirs can claim inheritances while they themselves are excluded from participation in society. All mortal Luggnaggians despise the struldbrugs and, indeed, once Gulliver sees them, he finds them horrible. He tells the reader he never pined after immortality again.

Because the Luggnaggians have the knowledge of first-hand experience with immortals, they possess an entirely different perspective on immortality than Gulliver does. Indeed, they recognize that the very thing European society longs for (immortality) is in actuality a tremendous hindrance and burden to society. Thus the immortal struldbrugs have to be legally excluded from society (considered dead) at a certain point to limit the social damage they might cause.



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 11

Though the Luggnaggian king wishes Gulliver to stay in Luggnagg, Gulliver insists on leaving and so the king sends him off with riches and a letter of introduction to the Japanese emperor. Upon arriving in Japan, Gulliver pretends to be Dutch and asks the emperor to help him find a Dutch ship leaving from Nangasac. He also asks the emperor's permission to excuse him (out of respect for the Luggnaggian king) from the Dutch maritime custom of trampling a crucifix. The emperor is suspicious of this request, wondering aloud if Gulliver might not actually be a Catholic. Nevertheless, he complies.

By orienting the (imaginary) country of Luggnagg in relation to the (real) country of Japan, Swift lends Gulliver's adventures verisimilitude, making it seem like Luggnagg is actually a place any reader could potentially visit, just as they could potentially visit Japan. Gulliver adds lies upon lies by pretending not only that he is Dutch, but that he has made a specific promise to the Luggnaggian king.



Gulliver sails back to England on a Dutch ship, successfully convincing the sailors that he, too, is Dutch. When pressed about whether he's trampled his crucifix, Gulliver answers that he's "satisfied the emperor and court in all particulars." The voyage passes smoothly and Gulliver returns to Redriff in England to see his family after being gone five years.

Since Gulliver has been so comfortable about lying to the Japanese emperor, it's curious that he doesn't seem to feel that same comfort now and uses evasive language to avoid the outright lie of saying he's trampled the crucifix.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 1

After five months in England (just long enough to impregnate his wife), Gulliver sets out to sea again, this time as captain of the Adventure, an offer made to him by a merchantman. Several men die early on in the voyage and the replacements Gulliver hires, he realizes too late, had been pirates in the past. The crew mutinies, imprisoning Gulliver below deck and eventually abandoning him on an unknown shore.

Gulliver suffers because he is unable to see the true character of the men he hires. Although Gulliver, as captain, possesses moral power over the ship, his authority is no match for the sailors' physical power.



Gulliver begins to walk inland and runs into “ugly” “animals” with thick hair on their heads, breasts, anuses, and genitals, but bare skin elsewhere. They have no tails, can walk upright, and climb trees. One approaches Gulliver and raises its “fore-paw.” When Gulliver bats it away with his sword, a whole “herd” of the animals comes running, but, afraid of Gulliver’s sword, simply climb up a tree and throw their **feces** at him.

Suddenly, all the animals run away and Gulliver sees they have been scared away by a horse. When he tries to pet the horse, the horse seems repulsed by Gulliver’s hand and won’t allow it to touch him. Another horse approaches. Gulliver observes that they are “formal” with each other and seem to converse reasonably in a mysterious language. They approach Gulliver and delicately examine and admire each item of **his clothing**. Gulliver concludes that the horses must be magicians who have turned themselves into horses. Listening to them speak, he hears them using the word Yahoo, which he repeats. The horses are impressed and try to teach him the word Houyhnhnm. The horses depart, one beckoning Gulliver to follow him.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 2

This horse leads Gulliver to a house and Gulliver readies the toys and jewelry he always carries to give to native peoples. As he’s lead in, Gulliver keeps expecting to see a human voice and wonders what kind of man has all horses for servants. Still, he sees no people, only a number of horses sitting neatly in clean rooms.

Gulliver observes the power dynamics between the horses and sees the gray horse is the master horse. He seems to speak with the others about Gulliver, frequently repeating the word Yahoo. He leads Gulliver out behind the house where some of the filthy ugly animals Gulliver first encountered are tied up eating raw meat. The gray horse has Gulliver stand beside one for comparison and Gulliver realizes to his horror that the animal is actually a human being (albeit a very degenerate, wild, and rude one). The horses refer to the animal as Yahoos and Gulliver sees they think he is a Yahoo too, except for the presence of **his clothes**, which the horses seem to think are a part of his body.

Swift’s prose stays true to Gulliver’s perspective—not knowing the creatures’ identity or names, he refers to them only as “animals.” He likewise uses other vocabulary associated with animals—such as “paw” and “herd”—to describe them.



Swift’s prose continues to stay true to Gulliver’s perspective. He describes the scene based on his current knowledge (though his subsequent discoveries will soon reveal how mistaken these initial impressions are). Even from a position of ignorance, Gulliver’s perspective registers that these are no ordinary horses—their humanoid qualities leads him to assume they must be humans in an elaborate disguise.



Gulliver, as a human Englishman, is operating from the perspective that every civil society must be organized by human beings. He enters prepared to greet human inhabitants with human gifts.



This scene juxtaposes the perspectives of Gulliver, the reader, and the horses. Gulliver and the reader, who has seen everything through Gulliver’s eyes, consider the grotesque animals he met on the beach to be beasts. Yet the horses have all along seen no essential difference between Gulliver and the Yahoos. As they present their perspective, Gulliver suddenly realizes the errors of his own view—though the Yahoos are disgusting and crude, they are in fact humans.



The master horse tries to feed Gulliver the meat the Yahoos eat but Gulliver is disgusted and gestures for milk. The horse gives Gulliver milk and allows him to stand beside him while he and the other horses eat together in a civilized fashion indoors. They eat cold oats, except for a very old visiting horse, who has them warm. Gulliver shows them that **his gloves** are removable, which pleases the horses. They teach him more words. Later, Gulliver accepts some oats to eat and beats them into a cake. He expresses to the reader that, during his time in this land, he sometimes missed meat and salt, but that he got used to eating oat cakes.

Come evening, the master horse lodges Gulliver in a place behind “the house” but separate from “the stable of the Yahoos.”

This exchange is a perspective-widening one for both Gulliver and the horses. Whereas Gulliver previously considered civility to be a human characteristic, he is now witnessing dignity and civilized behavior among horses. Whereas the horses previously considered humans to be carnivorous beasts, they are now witnessing a human being refusing meat and acting politely.



The position is significant—in this society, Gulliver is situated in between the beastly humans and the genteel horses.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 3

Gulliver proceeds to study the Houyhnhnm’s language under the tutelage of the master horse, a kind and patient teacher who marvels at Gulliver’s un-Yahoo-like capacity for learning and reason. He asks about Gulliver’s origin but does not believe Gulliver’s account, since he can’t imagine Yahoos being in charge of any country. He suggests Gulliver’s story is “the thing which was not,” since the Houyhnhnm language has no word for “lie.”

The Houyhnhnms continue to think that Gulliver’s **clothes** are a part of his body and Gulliver takes care to undress only in their absence so as to keep up the illusion and thereby distinguish himself from the Yahoos as much as possible. But one day, a servant disturbs Gulliver in his sleep and sees his naked body. The master horse asks Gulliver to explain himself and Gulliver undresses for his gentle admiring examination. He calls Gulliver a perfect Yahoo, though Gulliver says it bothers him to be called a Yahoo of any sort. He also asks the master horse to keep the truth about his clothes a secret, which the master horse consents to.

Once Gulliver gains enough fluency, he begins to tell the master horse about Europe, asking the master horse please not to be offended by the tale of his past. The master horse is still puzzled by the possibility that Yahoos would be capable of building ships or that any Houyhnhnms would allow them to be in charge of such a project. Gulliver explains that, where he comes from, Houyhnhnms are irrational beasts and Yahoos are the rational rulers. He tries to make the master horse understand by saying that he was just as astonished to find civilized Houyhnhnms here as the master horse would be to find civilized Yahoos in Europe.

From the Houyhnhnms’ perspective, it is remarkable that humans could learn and reason since they attribute those abilities only to horses. Because he lacks the worldly knowledge Gulliver possesses, the master horse has trouble conceiving of other societies. The fact that their language lacks even the word for ‘lie’ proves just how honest Houyhnhnm society must be.



Again, Gulliver contradicts his professed devotion to complete truthfulness. The care Gulliver takes to keep up the Houyhnhnms’ illusions about his clothes isn’t strictly a lie but it is certainly an evasion of truth. By agreeing to keep the truth about Gulliver’s clothes a secret, the master horse sympathizes with his perspective, understanding Gulliver’s desire to distance himself from the Yahoos.



The European and Houyhnhmn societies possess exactly opposite perspectives on the superiority of humans vs. animals. Gulliver uses his worldly knowledge (his experience of both European and Houyhnhmn society) to try and help the master horse understand the European perspective.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 4

The master horse is astounded by Gulliver's account and has a hard time believing the conditions of Houyhnhnms in European society or that they would ever submit to Yahoos. In an apologetic tone, Gulliver explains that the Houyhnhnms in Europe lack reason and that they are subjected by brutal physical training. The master horse is disgusted, but does grant that "reason in time will always prevail against brutal strength," and thus, if European Yahoos were indeed endowed with reason, it would make sense that they'd be the rulers. Still, he doubts that beings so puny as Gulliver would be capable of "employing that reason in the common offices of life."

The master horse asks Gulliver if all European Yahoos look like him and Gulliver begins proudly to recount his and the other European Yahoos distinctions from the Yahoos the Houyhnhnms know. But the master horse observes that all of these distinctions are in fact "for the worse," since Gulliver's body type lacks the Yahoos' strong nails, tough hands, ability to walk on all fours. He criticizes the unattractiveness and awkwardness of Gulliver's features and the weakness of his body that needed **clothes**. The master horse also wonders how the creatures of Europe are able to overcome the natural abhorrence of Yahoos that is born into every living thing. But he lets these matters lie in favor of hearing Gulliver recount his own past.

Gulliver describes his past up till the present but has to spend many hours clarifying the criminal backgrounds of the pirate crew who mutinied against him on his last voyage. The master horse has no concept of crime or vice and the Houyhnhnms' language has no terms for "power, government, war, law, punishment" and many other such things. Thus, it takes a lot of explaining before he understands.

From the master horse's Houyhnhmn perspective, it is difficult to imagine a society ruled by Yahoos. This conversation also illustrates the Houyhnhmn's belief in the superiority of moral power over physical power. But in the land of the Houyhnhnms, moral power and physical power are both found in the same bodies (the Houyhnhnms). It is hard for him to conceptualize human society where moral power is concentrated in physically powerless bodies (human bodies).



Although, from Gulliver's perspective, the European human body's differences from the Yahoo body indicate its dignity, moral superiority, and civility, the master horse takes a more practical perspective. From this angle, he sees that Gulliver's body is weaker and less capable than a Yahoo's body. The master horse's understanding that every living creature abhors Yahoos shows how dependent "truth" is on perspective: his understanding is not the absolute fact the master horse thinks it is but is instead a byproduct of his cultural perspective.



Again, the master horse's complete ignorance about deception and crime indicates the virtuous state of Houyhnhmn society, in contrast to human society.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 5

Gulliver summarizes the various discussions he had with the master horse over the course of two years, begging allowance for the "barbarous" English language's inability "to do justice" to the master horse's views.

Gulliver's apology indicates his shifted perspective—he considers Houyhnhmn refinement superior to English language and culture.



When Gulliver recounts the endless petty wars and unjustified violence among European states, the master horse reflects that, though such constant fighting is certainly not reasonable, at least they can't be very bloody as Yahoos like Gulliver have such short claws and flat mouths that they wouldn't be able to hurt each other very gravely. When Gulliver tells the master horse about weapons and explains the typical European artillery and its uses, the master horse is disgusted. He concludes that no reasonable being could commit such atrocities and thus that the reason Gulliver insists the European Yahoos possess can only be "some quality fitted to increase...natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill-shapen body, not only larger but more distorted."

Like the Brobdingnagan king, the master horse sees Europe's violent political tactics as a grotesque, unreasonable abuse of physical power. Whereas Europeans might point to their technological advances in weaponry and cunning war strategies as signs that their society is more sophisticated than Houyhnhmn society (which is ignorant of guns and war), the text suggests otherwise. Put in the words of the master horse's perspective, European "advances" indeed look debased and repulsive, and seem a lot more like ignorance than knowledge.



When Gulliver describes the "science" of European law, he describes lawyers as liars trained to manipulate language into claiming that the truth is whatever they are paid to claim; he describes courts being ruled by legal precedent with no regard for reason or common sense; he describes trials as long, tedious, aggressive accounts of endless details that are always besides the point of the actual case in question; he describes the impenetrability of legal jargon to common people. The master horse reflects that it's a pity that people with such great mental abilities as lawyers must have aren't teachers of "wisdom and knowledge." Gulliver assures him that it's no pity for in fact lawyers are "the most ignorant and stupid generation among us" in all matters apart from the law.

Gulliver presents an extremely grim view of European society's justice system. His description of law's "science" harkens back to Laputia and implicitly compares the members of Europe's justice system to the useless, misguided projectors of the Lagadan academy. Indeed, lawyers and judges are, from Gulliver's perspective, just a bunch of liars unable to apply their knowledge to any good effect in society.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 6

When the master horse expresses bafflement as to why lawyers would engage in such loathsome work, Gulliver tries to explain the concept of money and the human thirst for it. This leads to a description of what kinds of things money can acquire, which leads Gulliver to explain England's huge trade in foreign food and drink, despite the fact that England's own soil is capable of producing enough food to feed its entire population.

Again, the master horse's ignorance of greed—both for money and for food/goods—indicates the virtuous character of Houyhnhmn society in comparison to European society.



Gulliver goes on to describe statesmen, explaining that the chief minister of state is a person completely consumed by his hunger for power and thoroughly dishonest. Thus, the people around him always believe exactly the opposite of what the chief of state says. The chief of state rises to his position either by murdering female relatives, betraying his predecessor, or by lambasting "the corruptions of the court." The chiefs of state control their councils through bribery and every member of court learns "insolence, lying, and bribery."

Gulliver continues to portray the European state as a corrupt, immoral institution whose members grasp power by immoral means and retain that power through lies and deception. He has adopted the Houyhnhmn perspective.



When the master horse remarks that Gulliver's superior appearance to the Yahoos of the Houyhnhnms must bespeak his nobility. Gulliver corrects this impression, explaining that, in Europe, all nobles look sick, sallow, and weak because they are raised "in idleness and luxury" and debauchery. Thus, in Europe, "a healthy robust appearance" always signifies a low birth like Gulliver's.

The master horse, accustomed to his honest society, assumes that noble appearances indicate noble essences. Yet Gulliver, well versed in his own society's lies and deceit, knows that appearances can perversely contradict essences.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 7

Gulliver justifies his grim portrait of humankind to the reader, explaining that his time among the Houyhnhnms had opened his eyes to the evils of human nature and human society and that he had in fact been hoping to live permanently among the Houyhnhnms and never return to England.

Gulliver acknowledges outright the shift in his perspective that has only been implied earlier: he feels the Houyhnhnms have helped him see the dark "truth" about human society and made him realize he wants nothing to do with humans.



The master horse, having reflected on Gulliver's portrait of humankind, concludes that the European Yahoos are "animals, to whose share...some small pittance of reason had fallen" of which they made no use than "to aggravate...natural corruptions and...acquire new ones." Thus, they were in many ways worse off than the reason-less Yahoos, for they also lacked those Yahoos' physical strength, swiftness, agility, and strong claws. As to the European state, the master horse points out that they are "plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature."

From Gulliver's accounts, the master horse deduces the "truth" about human society that so alters Gulliver's perspective. According to this view, humans are completely lacking in moral power, are pathetically disabled physically, and have managed to organize a society that is simply the grotesque reflection of their unreasonable minds.



The master horse continues, saying that, apart from their physical inferiority, the European Yahoos Gulliver has described resemble the Yahoos of the Houyhnhnms in countless other respects. The Yahoos of the Houyhnhnms also loathe the sight of one another's bodies (which the master horse assumes is the real reason for Europeans' **clothes**); greedily hoard food; overeat; purge; suffer sickness from immoderation (which is cured by eating their own **excrement**); seek intoxication; live in filth; suck up to their leaders, then throw their excrement at that leader as soon as he is replaced; lust after and hoard jewels; suffer malaise when indolent (which can only be cured by physical exertion); and indulge the grotesque lust of their females.

Though, from the Europe's perspective, European clothes, access to fancy foods/luxury goods, wealth, political savvy, and complex emotions indicate their society's refinement and civility, the master horse's Houyhnhnm perspective sees the same qualities as evidence of the opposite. He recognizes those qualities as evidence of savagery and brutality, linking the possessors of those qualities to the Yahoos and indicating their society's degradation.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 8

Gulliver often goes out to study the Yahoos in order to learn more about human nature. The master horse consents to this and sends along one of his servants for Gulliver's protection. Gulliver recounts that the Yahoos often approach him during his observations and imitate his movements like "monkeys." He once tries to capture a toddler Yahoo for closer examination but his efforts to subdue it don't work and the baby squirms, bites, and **defecates** all over Gulliver before escaping.

Gulliver explains that, among the Houyhnhmns, the Yahoos are kept in kennels, sent to dig up roots and catch small game in fields, and fish. Once while Gulliver is swimming in a river he is assaulted by a young female Yahoo who can't contain her lust for him. Gulliver is mortified by the incident, feeling he can no longer deny that he is "a real Yahoo" since the female Yahoos recognize him as a potential mate.

Gulliver goes on to describe the ways of the Houyhnhmns. Their reason is so perfect and absolute that they never have disagreements or differences of opinion—in fact, they don't even have a word for "opinion." They love all of their species equally and treat their relations as well as they treat neighbors and strangers. They don't show their children affection but instead educate them in reason.

The Houyhnhmns practice family planning so that each marriage is arranged by family and friends of a couple to balance the partners' respective strength and beauty without giving thought to "courtship, love, presents, jointures, settlements." Each couple has two offspring, one colt and one foal, before stopping (servant couples have three in order to keep the households well-stocked with servants).

The Houyhnhmns' children are educated in "temperance, industry, exercise...cleanliness," "strength, speed, and hardiness," and both genders receive the same kind and degree of education. The master horse is disgusted by human Yahoos' propensity to discriminate between male and female education.

Every four years, a representative council of all the land meets to discuss "the state and condition of the several districts" and then immediately supplies undersupplied districts with hay, oats, cows, Yahoos, or extra children.

Even though Gulliver knows, intellectually, that the Yahoos are humans, his own perspective on what it means to be a human prevents him from being able to reconcile himself to the truth of this knowledge. Thus he examines the Yahoos as a foreign species and refers to them as "monkeys."



Houyhnhmn society treats human Yahoos much the way European human society treats its animals. Gulliver is mortified because, though he considers himself different from the Yahoos, the young woman proves that, from the Yahoo perspective, he is a Yahoo.



Houyhnhmn society is governed by absolute reason—their dedication to rational thinking and behavior produces a perfectly moral, egalitarian society, albeit one lacking in individual personality and affection.



Houyhnhmn society embodies the utopian ideals of equality and balance. Still, embracing those ideals seems to require them to abandon any chance of individual love and choice.



Another example of Houyhnhmn society's embodiment of a utopian, egalitarian ideal. This equality of the sexes is in marked contrast to European society's sexism.



Another example of Houyhnhmn society's embodiment of utopian ideals: their state is perfectly democratic and treats all subjects equally.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 9

Gulliver recounts the proceedings of one of the Houyhnhnms' councils as relayed to him by the master horse. The council debated the question "whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth?" Those in favor point out that the Yahoos are not only a nuisance and a drain on Houyhnhmn resources, they are not even native to the land but instead appeared from somewhere else many years ago. The master horse steps in, sharing the knowledge of humankind he's learned from Gulliver, to surmise that the Yahoos were originally from Gulliver's own society and are his degenerated relatives. He suggests controlling the Yahoos as Gulliver has described his own people controlling the reason-less horses: castration. The council agrees to implement this plan.

Gulliver proceeds to detail more of the Houyhnhnms cultural features. They make excellent wound dressings; they make good practical use of astronomy; they write excellent poetry; they make simple, sturdy buildings; they use their front hooves as humans do hands; and they make pottery. They only ever die of old age and never lament death. In fact, Gulliver recalls one female Houyhnhmn coming to a social lunch gathering a few hours after her husband had died that morning.

Gulliver explains that the Houyhnhnms have no words for evil and thus, to express anything bad, they "borrow from the deformities or ill qualities of the Yahoos" and simply append the word "Yahoo" to the word of the thing.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 10

Gulliver describes his happy contentment living with the master horse. A room has been built for him away from the house and he makes a mattress stuffed with feathers and Yahoos' hair. He makes new clothes out of rabbit skin and makes shoe soles from dried Yahoo skin. He enjoys perfect physical and mental health and is never tempted to do any evil, freed from the corruptive context of humanity.

Gulliver explains that, although he didn't feel so fond of the Houyhnhnms when he first arrived among them, the more he learned from and about them, the more he admired them and the more he cultivated the views about humans that Houyhnhnms held about Yahoos. When he sees his own reflection in water, he is disgusted and he aspires as much as possible to imitate the physical characteristics of a horse.

From the Houyhnhmn perspective, humans are an invasive species that needs to be restrained. (This is more or less the European perspective on horses—an invasive species humans restrain by castration, harnesses, and stables.) Having acquired knowledge of the human practice of castration from Gulliver, the master horse can now apply that knowledge to the uses of his own Houyhnhmn society, though now it will be humans, not horses, who get castrated.



Unlike the Laputans, Houyhnhnms put their knowledge to practical use and enhance the good of society. Their easy attitude towards death could be considered superior to the human tendency to grieve and lament death, but the Houyhnhmn attitude could just as easily be considered a disturbing emotional numbness.



This linguistic tactic emphasizes that evils and weaknesses are aspects of human, not Houyhnhmn, culture.



Gulliver's contentment reflects his new perspective on Houyhnhmn superiority, as does his disturbing comfort with treating human beings' bodies like dispensable animal pelts to make clothes from. He has ceased to see the Yahoos as human beings, as sentient entities. He sees them as animals.



Although there are clearly virtuous advantages to Houyhnhmn over human society, Gulliver's extreme pro-Houyhnhmn perspective seems problematic as it results in self-loathing and an inability to accept his own body.



One day, the master horse sends for Gulliver and explains that, at the council, the Houyhnhnms had confirmed that it wasn't right for him to live with Gulliver, a Yahoo, and that Gulliver should be sent back whence he came. The master horse is reluctant to send Gulliver away but knows he must. Gulliver is so upset by this news that he faints. But, after recuperating, he and the master horse begin planning Gulliver's departure. Gulliver builds a canoe out of Yahoo skins and prepares to set off.

In parting, Gulliver kisses the hoof of the master horse. He acknowledges that "detractors are pleased to think it improbable that so illustrious a person should descend to give so great a mark of distinction to a creature so inferior." But Gulliver explains that, "if these censurers" only knew "the noble and courteous disposition of the Houyhnhnms, they would soon change their opinion."

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 11

Gulliver resolves that he would rather live out the rest of his life on an uninhabited island than return to live amongst Yahoos. He lands on one he thinks is uninhabited but is soon chased off by savages who shoot arrows at him, scarring his knee. When he next pulls up on shore, he is discovered by the crew of a Portuguese ship captained by Don Pedro de Mendez. They are all baffled by Gulliver's resolution not to return to live with Yahoos and laugh at his horsey voice and strange **clothes**. When they insist he board their ship to return to Europe, he is extremely reluctant to and tries to kill himself by jumping into the sea. A crew member captures him before he falls and Gulliver is chained to his cabin. Gulliver is repulsed by the sight of the humans around him.

During the rest of the voyage, Don Pedro acts tenderly towards Gulliver, listening to him and gradually beginning to believe his stories (even though he first seems to suspect Gulliver is lying). He makes Gulliver promise not to kill himself and, when they reach Portugal, takes Gulliver into his own bachelor's home and gives him a new set of **clothes**. He helps Gulliver ease slowly back into familiarity with human society. He eventually convinces Gulliver that he should return to his family in England.

Gulliver may imitate a horse and aspire to forget his own humanity in favor of becoming Houyhnhmn but, from the Houyhnhnms' perspective, Gulliver is clearly a human being who will never truly fit in Houyhnhmn society.



Though it would be considered grotesque and self-debasing to kiss a horse's hoof in human society, Gulliver insists that, from his perspective, kissing a Houyhnhmn hoof was an honor. Any reader who thinks otherwise, he warns, just doesn't know the truth about Houyhnhmn superiority.



Adopting the Houyhnhmn perspective has stranded Gulliver between societies—he won't be accepted by the Houyhnhnms and he can't himself accept the human society of England. From Don Pedro and his crew's perspective, Gulliver's "elevated" Houyhnhmn habits are absurd and laughable.



Despite Gulliver's conviction that human beings are immoral and repulsive, Don Pedro acts as tenderly as the master horse did, listening to Gulliver describe what seems at first an unbelievable account of Houyhnhmn culture just as the master horse listened to Gulliver describe the European society he initially thought was a lie.



Gulliver sails back to England where his family, it turns out, has presumed him dead. He refers to his wife as “that odious animal” and faints at her embrace. He tells the reader that, at the time of writing, it has been five years since he’s been back in England and he still can’t stand the sight, smell, or presence of his wife and his children. Upon his return, he immediately buys two horses and dotes on them, never saddling or bridling them and spending as much time with them in the stable as he can. The only human he likes is the groom, because he smells like a horse.

Indeed, Gulliver’s new perspective and worldly knowledge have crippled him in human society. He is alienated from all people, even his own family members, and can no longer see humans as loved ones or fellow companions. His effort to recreate Houyhnhmn society by buying two irrational European horses proves equally futile.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 12

Gulliver addresses the reader, explaining that he has written his travels only worrying about the plain truth and never indulging in entertainment or elaboration, as other travel writers do. Gulliver wishes all travel writers were sworn to the level of truth that he holds himself to because he thinks travel writers have a moral obligation to write for “the public good.” Others’ travel books have in the past delighted him, but he’s realized through his own travels that they were writing lies.

Through Gulliver’s vehement insistence on his own truthfulness, Swift plays with the novel’s verisimilitude. Gulliver equates truthfulness in writing with moral power (goodness), and doesn’t seem to recognize or leave room for the pleasures of fiction and fantasy.



Gulliver confesses that he knows that travel writers “like dictionary-makers” are quickly outshone by new editions and he admits that those who visit the lands he’s visited in the future will surely write their own travels and “jostle me out of vogue.” Still, since he is only writing for the public good and not for personal fame. He is sure people will grow more virtuous after reading about the societies he describes.

Gulliver’s confession cleverly sidelines the question of whether his account is true. If there are untruths in his book, he assures the reader, those are only trivial cultural details that will naturally shift and evolve over time. He doesn’t even acknowledge that anyone might doubt the more basic truth of those cultures’ existence.



Gulliver is pleased that his book will “meet with no censurers,” because surely no one will object to a plainly factual account of distant lands where Europe has no economic or political interest. He points out that he also wrote without any emotion or prejudice, wrote purely for the betterment of mankind, and ventures to pronounce himself “an author perfectly blameless.”

Gulliver’s assurance that he wrote without any kind of bias denies the undeniable fact of his own perspective—his claim is plainly false. There is no way to write, see, or speak except through one’s necessarily limited and prejudiced perspective.



In response to those who have suggested Gulliver should have laid claim to the lands he discovered for England, he points out that the Lilliputians are not worth conquering and that humans would be no match for the Brobdingnagans, the Laputians’ floating island, or the Houyhnhmns’ hooves and strength. Then he adds that he actually had another reason for not conquering these people for England: it troubles him that shipwrecked pirates so often lay violent claim to the kind, gentle peoples that take them in and initiate a huge bloody effort “to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people.” Gulliver adds that this description of course does not apply to England, “who may be an example to the whole world for their wisdom, care, and justice in planting colonies.”

Swift positions the reader’s perspective at angles to Gulliver’s. Even though Gulliver claims not to be talking about English society, it is clear to the reader that Gulliver’s criticisms apply very aptly to England. In Swift’s day, England was a fierce imperial nation, conquering and subduing foreign peoples with brutal physical power in order to colonize them for the English throne.



Gulliver announces that “having thus answered the only objection that can ever be raised against me as a traveller,” he will retire to his private contemplation of the Houyhnhmns and continue to try to improve “the Yahoos of my own family” and to habituate himself to his own image in the mirror. Gulliver adds that, regarding Yahoos, he would have an easier time getting used to them if they were all the open villains that lawyers, thieves, fools, politicians, physicians are—it’s some Yahoos’ pride that he really can’t stand. He points out that pride is a foreign concept to the Houyhnhmns and they “are no more proud of the good qualities they possess” than Gulliver is of possessing arms and legs, “which no man in his wits would boast of, although he must be miserable without them.” He warns any readers who are proud to stay away from him.

Gulliver closes the text by announcing plans to retreat into his Houyhnhmn perspective, loathing human society and trying to make his human family more like Houyhnhmns. His final thought makes a complex point about moral virtue and truthfulness. If humans were truly moral, Gulliver explains, they would not flaunt their pride of it but would instead treat their morality like a natural part of their selves, equivalent to an arms and legs. The Houyhnhmns, who are truly moral, take morality for granted because it is such an essential, natural part of their society.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Ross, Margaret. "Gulliver's Travels." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 3 Mar 2014. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Ross, Margaret. "Gulliver's Travels." LitCharts LLC, March 3, 2014. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/gulliver-s-travels>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Gulliver's Travels* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. Penguin Classics. 2003.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. New York: Penguin Classics. 2003.