*Gulliver's Travels*

[Jonathan Swift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Swift)

Study Material by

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***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*** is a prose [satire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satire)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulliver%27s_Travels#cite_note-DeMaria_Jr-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulliver%27s_Travels#cite_note-I-Narrators-2) of 1726 by the [Irish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_people) writer and clergyman [Jonathan Swift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Swift), satirising both [human nature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_nature) and the ["travellers' tales"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travel_literature) literary subgenre. It is Swift's best known full-length work, and a classic of [English literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_literature). Swift claimed that he wrote *Gulliver's Travels* "to vex the world rather than divert it".

The book was an immediate success. The English dramatist [John Gay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gay) remarked "It is universally read, from the [cabinet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_(government)) [council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council) to the nursery."[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulliver%27s_Travels#cite_note-johngay-3) In 2015, [Robert McCrum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_McCrum) released his selection list of 100 best novels of all time in which *Gulliver's Travels* is listed as "a satirical masterpiece".[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulliver%27s_Travels#cite_note-4)

## Character List

**Lemuel Gulliver** A traveler and an adventurer. Gulliver is the protagonist of the *Travels*. He is an observer of other beings and other cultures.

**Golbasto Momaren Evlame Gurdilo Shefin Mully Ully Gue**The Emperor of Lilliput. Swift uses the Emperor as an example of rulers who must always have some type of support before making a decision.

**Flimnap** Lord High Treasurer of Lilliput.

**Reldresal** A Lilliputian councilor, Principal Secretary of Private Affairs.

**Skyresh Bolgolam** High admiral of Lilliput, a counselor of the Emperor.

**Slamecksan and Tramecksan** Lilliputian political parties. The first represents the Low Heels; the second represents the High Heels.

**Glumdalclitch**The daughter of Gulliver's master in Brobdingnag. She acts as Gulliver's nurse and protector.

**Part I: A Voyage to Lilliput**[

The travel begins with a short preamble in which [Lemuel Gulliver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemuel_Gulliver" \o "Lemuel Gulliver) gives a brief outline of his life and history before his voyages.

**4 May 1699 – 13 April 1702**

During his first voyage, Gulliver is washed ashore after a shipwreck and finds himself a prisoner of a race of tiny people, less than 6 inches (15 cm) tall, who are inhabitants of the island country of [Lilliput](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilliput_and_Blefuscu). After giving assurances of his good behaviour, he is given a residence in Lilliput and becomes a favourite of the Lilliput [Royal Court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_(royal)). He is also given permission by the King of Lilliput to go around the city on condition that he must not hurt their subjects.

At first, the Lilliputians are hospitable to Gulliver, but they are also wary of the threat that his size poses to them. The Lilliputians reveal themselves to be a people who put great emphasis on trivial matters. For example, which end of an egg a person cracks becomes the basis of a deep political rift within that nation. They are a people who revel in displays of authority and performances of power. Gulliver assists the Lilliputians to subdue their neighbours the Blefuscudians by stealing their fleet. However, he refuses to reduce the island nation of Blefuscu to a province of Lilliput, displeasing the King and the royal court.

Gulliver is charged with treason for, among other crimes, urinating in the capital though he was putting out a fire. He is convicted and sentenced to be blinded. With the assistance of a kind friend, "a considerable person at court", he escapes to Blefuscu. Here, he spots and retrieves an abandoned boat and sails out to be rescued by a passing ship, which safely takes him back home.

**Part II: A Voyage to Brobdingnag**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gulliver%27s_Travels&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: Part II: A Voyage to Brobdingnag)]

**20 June 1702 – 3 June 1706**

Gulliver soon sets out again. When the sailing ship *Adventure* is blown off course by storms and forced to sail for land in search of fresh water, Gulliver is abandoned by his companions and left on a peninsula on the western coast of the [North American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American) continent.

The grass of [Brobdingnag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brobdingnag" \o "Brobdingnag) is as tall as a tree. He is then found by a farmer who is about 72 ft (22 m) tall, judging from Gulliver estimating the man's step being 10 yards (9 m). The [giant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_(mythology)) farmer brings Gulliver home, and his daughter [Glumdalclitch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glumdalclitch" \o "Glumdalclitch) cares for Gulliver. The farmer treats him as a curiosity and exhibits him for money. After a while the constant display makes Gulliver sick, and the farmer sells him to the Queen of the realm. Glumdalclitch (who accompanied her father while exhibiting Gulliver) is taken into the Queen's service to take care of the tiny man. Since Gulliver is too small to use their huge chairs, beds, knives and forks, the Queen commissions a small house to be built for him so that he can be carried around in it; this is referred to as his "travelling box".

Between small adventures such as fighting giant [wasps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wasp) and being carried to the roof by a [monkey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monkey), he discusses the state of Europe with the King of Brobdingnag. The King is not happy with Gulliver's accounts of Europe, especially upon learning of the use of guns and cannons. On a trip to the seaside, his traveling box is seized by a giant eagle which drops Gulliver and his box into the sea where he is picked up by sailors who return him to England.

Gulliver’s Travels

Summary At its simplest level,

Gulliver's Travels is the story of Lemuel Gulliver and his voyages around the world. Prefaced by two letters attesting to the truth of the tales, the adventures are told by Gulliver after his return home from his final journey. Gulliver's Travels is divided into four Parts or Books, each about a different place. Because of this structure, the book as a whole has a very sketchy plot; it feels more like weekly episodes than one long narrative. The individual books also feel very choppy, since Gulliver has a habit of stumbling from one adventure or crisis to the next. The book seems more cohesive if readers recognize that each part reflects Gulliver's character and is related to all the other parts. For example, Part I discusses things being disproportionately small, and Part II discusses things being disproportionately large. Part I: A Voyage to Lilliput Part I, entitled "A Voyage to Lilliput," is the most famous section of Gulliver's Travels. Lured by the prospect of adventure and easy money, Lemuel Gulliver signs up as a "surgeon," or ship's doctor, for a voyage through the East Indies in Asia. Unfortunately for Gulliver, he is shipwrecked. He swims to an unfamiliar shore and, exhausted by his efforts, goes to sleep. When he awakes, he finds himself tied up by a crowd of extremely tiny and well-armed people. Gulliver is taken prisoner, shipped to the capital, and presented to the Emperor. A cross between court pet and circus attraction, Gulliver makes friends with many of the courtiers and learns about the history, society, politics, and economy of Lilliput. For many years, Lilliput has been at war with its sister island Blefuscu over whether to break soft-boiled eggs at the big or little end. This clash parodies the French-English and Catholic-Protestant conflicts of Swift's time, and many of the characters in this section correspond to actual political figures of the day. Although he aids Lilliput by stealing the Blefuscudian navy, Gulliver is resented by many of the Emperor's courtiers. He eventually hears of a plot to accuse him of treason and sentence him to be blinded and starved to death. Frightened by this prospect, he swims over to Blefuscu and presents himself as a visitor from the Lilliputian emperor. The Blefuscudian emperor treats him well, even after a message from Lilliput demands his return. An Englishman-sized rowboat washes up on shore, however, and, taking advantage of the opportunity, Gulliver departs Blefuscu and Lilliput. He is eventually rescued by a passing English ship and returns home to England and his family. Part 2: A Voyage to Brobdingnag Gulliver is only home two months when he sets out on Part II, "A Voyage to Brobdingnag." After encountering a terrible storm, Gulliver's ship puts in to another unfamiliar shore for much-needed food and water. He goes ashore with the landing party but is abandoned by the crew when they discover there are giants living there. Gulliver is captured by a farmer, who displays him as a circus wonder at local fairs. The farmer's daughter, Glumdalclitch, teaches Gulliver to speak the language and the two become good friends. Eventually, the farmer sells Gulliver to the Queen of Brobdingnag, who allows Glumdalclitch to join the court as Gulliver's keeper. Once at court, Gulliver has a series of violent, physical misadventures because of his size. Once, he is taken into the country and allowed to walk around a meadow on his own. Poor Gulliver has not yet learned the limits of his size in Brobdingnag, however. As he reports, "There was a Cowdung in the Path, and I must need try my Activity by attempting to leap over it. I took a Run, but unfortunately jumped short, and found myself just in the Middle up to my Knees." Gulliver spends most of his time discussing history, politics, philosophy, and economics with the King. The King frequently dismays Gulliver by displaying his "ignorance," that is, finding certain aspects of Gulliver's England repulsive. When Gulliver offers to teach him about gunpowder so he can rule over his subjects with force, for example, the King rejects him in horror. In the end, Gulliver is carried off by a giant bird and dropped into the sea, where he is rescued again by an English ship. Disoriented by the size of things on shipboard and then in England, Gulliver takes some time to adjust to people of his own size. Eventually he gets used to other English people again and resolves to stay at home for the rest of his life.

## Swift's Satire in *Gulliver's Travels*

*Gulliver's Travels*was unique in its day; it was not written to woo or entertain. It was an indictment, and it was most popular among those who were indicted — that is, politicians, scientists, philosophers, and Englishmen in general. Swift was roasting people, and they were eager for the banquet.

Swift himself admitted to wanting to "vex" the world with his satire, and it is certainly in his tone, more than anything else, that one most feels his intentions. Besides the coarse language and bawdy scenes, probably the most important element that Dr. Bowdler deleted from the original *Gulliver's Travels*was this satiric tone. The tone of the original varies from mild wit to outright derision, but always present is a certain strata of ridicule. Dr. Bowdler gelded it of its satire and transformed it into a children's book.

After that literary operation, the original version was largely lost to the common reader. The *Travels*that proper Victorians bought for the family library was Bowdler's version, not Swift's. What irony that Bowdler would have laundered the *Travels*in order to get a version that he believed to be best for public consumption because, originally, the book was bought so avidly by the public that booksellers were raising the price of the volume, sure of making a few extra shillings on this bestseller. And not only did the educated buy and read the book — so also did the largely uneducated.

However, lest one think that Swift's satire is merely the weapon of exaggeration, it is important to note that exaggeration is only one facet of his satiric method. Swift uses mock seriousness and understatement; he parodies and burlesques; he presents a virtue and then turns it into a vice. He takes pot-shots at all sorts of sacred cows. Besides science, Swift debunks the whole sentimental attitude surrounding children. At birth, for instance, Lilliputian children were "wisely" taken from their parents and given to the State to rear. In an earlier satire (*A Modest Proposal*),he had proposed that the very poor in Ireland sell their children to the English as gourmet food.

Swift is also a name-caller. Mankind, as he has a Brobdingnagian remark, is "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." Swift also inserted subtly hidden puns into some of his name-calling techniques. The island of Laputa, the island of pseudo-science, is literally (in Spanish) the land of "the whore." Science, which learned people of his generation were venerating as a goddess, Swift labeled a whore, and devoted a whole hook to illustrating the ridiculous behavior of her converts.

In addition, Swift mocks blind devotion. Gulliver, leaving the Houyhnhnms, says that he "took a second leave of my master, but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honor to raise it gently to my mouth." Swift was indeed so thorough a satirist that many of his early readers misread the section on the Houyhnhnms. They were so enamored of reason that they did not realize that Swift was metamorphosing a virtue into a vice. In Book IV, Gulliver has come to idealize the horses. They embody pure reason, but they are not human. Literally, of course, we know they are not, but figuratively they seem an ideal for humans — until Swift exposes them as dull, unfeeling creatures, thoroughly unhuman. They take no pleasure in sex, nor do they ever overflow with either joy or melancholy. They are bloodless.

*Gulliver's Travels*was the work of a writer who had been using satire as his medium for over a quarter of a century. His life was one of continual disappointment, and satire was his complaint and his defense — against his enemies and against humankind. People, he believed, were generally ridiculous and petty, greedy and proud; they were blind to the "ideal of the mean." This ideal of the mean was present in one of Swift's first major satires, *The Battle of the Books*(1697). There, Swift took the side of the Ancients, but he showed their views to be ultimately as distorted as those of their adversaries, the Moderns. In Gulliver's last adventure, Swift again pointed to the ideal of the mean by positioning Gulliver between symbols of sterile reason and symbols of gross sensuality. To Swift, Man is a mixture of sense and nonsense; he had accomplished much but had fallen far short of what he could have been and what he could have done.

Swift was certainly not one of the optimists typical of his century. He did not believe that the Age of Science was the triumph that a great majority of his countrymen believed it to be. Science and reason needed limits, and they needed a good measure of humanism. They did not require absolute devotion.

Swift was a highly moral man and was shocked by his contemporaries' easy conversion to reason as the be-all and end-all of philosophy. To be so gullible amounted to non-reason in Swift's thinking. He therefore offered up the impractical scientists of Laputa and the impersonal, but absolutely reasonable, Houyhnhnms as embodiments of science and reason carried to ridiculous limits. Swift, in fact, created the whole of *Gulliver's Travels*in order to give the public a new moral lens. Through this lens, Swift hoped to "vex" his readers by offering them new insights into the game of politics and into the social follies of humans.