

## **Gulliver's Voyage to Lilliput**

Jonathan Swift's greatest satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, is considered one of the most important works in the history of world literature. Published as *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts; by Lemuel Gulliver in 1726*, *Gulliver's Travels* depicts one man's journeys to several strange and unusual lands. The general theme of *Gulliver's Travels* is a satirical examination of human nature, man's potential for depravity, and the dangers of the misuse of reason.

Each of the four books has a different theme, but all are attempts to deflate human pride. Book I, written between 1721 and 1725, may reflect the concerns of Swift's own day, and of his own life — it may be a politico-sociological treatise in the form of a satire; a protest against Imperialism and Colonialism; an attack on the corrupt Whig oligarchy which had displaced the Swift's Tories in London — a defence of Tory policies, an attack on the Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, and on the expensive and bloody trade wars which had accompanied the twelve years of Whig government — but it is also, on a deeper level, a satire on the universal human tendency to abuse political power and authority, to manipulate others and deceive ourselves. It is at once a folk-myth, a children's story, and a misanthrope's gift to mankind: in Lilliput, which is, quite literally, a microcosm, the vices and follies not merely of England but of all mankind are epitomized. Swift points out that when men are six inches tall, their squabbles seem petty, and their pomp and ceremony ridiculous: he leaves it to us to take his point.

When the ship Gulliver is traveling on is destroyed in a storm, Gulliver ends up on the island of Lilliput, where he awakes to find that he has been captured by Lilliputians, very small people — approximately six inches in height. Gulliver is treated with compassion and concern. In turn, he helps them solve some of their problems, especially their conflict with their enemy, Blefuscu, an island across the bay from them. Gulliver falls from favor, however, because he refuses to support the Emperor's desire to enslave the Blefuscudians and because he "makes water" to put out a palace fire. Gulliver flees to Blefuscu, where he converts a large war ship to his own use and sets sail from Blefuscu eventually to be rescued at sea by an English merchant ship and returned to his home in England.

The Lilliputians are men six inches in height but possessing all the pretension and self-importance of full-sized men. They are mean and nasty, vicious, morally corrupt, hypocritical and deceitful, jealous and envious, filled with greed and ingratitude — they are, in fact, completely human.

Swift uses the Lilliputians to satirize specific events and people in his life. For example, Swift's model for Flimnap was Robert Walpole, the leader of the Whigs and England's first prime minister in the modern sense. Walpole was an extremely wily politician, as Swift shows, by making Flimnap the most dexterous of the rope dancers. Reldresal, the second most dexterous of the rope dancers, probably represents either Viscount Townshend or Lord Carteret. Both were political allies of Walpole.

The articles that Gulliver signs to obtain his freedom relate the political life of Lilliput to the political life of England. The articles themselves parallel particular English codes and laws. Similarly, the absurd and complicated method by which Gulliver must swear to the articles (he must hold his right foot in his left hand and place the middle finger of his right hand on top of his head with the right thumb on the tip of his ear) exemplifies an aspect of Whig politics: petty, red-tape harassing.

Swift also uses the Lilliputians to show that English politicians were bloody-minded and treacherous. In detail, he records the bloody and cruel methods that the Lilliputians plan to use to kill Gulliver; then he comments ironically on the mercy, decency, generosity, and justice of kings. The Lilliputian emperor, out of mercy, plans to blind and starve Gulliver — a direct reference to George's treatment of captured Jacobites, whom he executed — after parliament had called him most merciful and lenient.

Gulliver's Travels had appealed to everyone; it was an interesting simple story for children and a challenging satire for adults, complicated enough to confuse them. Jonathan Swift, through Gulliver's Travels, showed the need for reason in the political interactions of England and Ireland during the reign of King George II. The ideas included the unjust ways and actions the royalty and the privileged class took against the working and lower class. Swift's work became prophetic and implied for 18th century England.