



# Gulliver's Travels

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BY JONATHAN SWIFT



PRESTWICK HOUSE  
LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS

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P.O. BOX 658 • CLAYTON, DELAWARE 19938

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# Notes

## What is a literary classic, and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

Jonathan Swift was born on November 30, 1667, in Ireland. Swift's father died before Jonathan was born, and the young boy's three uncles helped to raise and influence him. At 15, Swift entered Trinity College in Dublin, considered one of Ireland's best schools. However, in 1689, civil, religious, and political unrest forced him and other Protestants to flee Ireland for England.

Swift began to work as secretary to Sir William Temple; at the former Member of Parliament's home, he was allowed to explore the influential gentleman's vast library and meet numerous important people. Swift also tutored a woman named Esther Johnson, whom he called Stella. It is unclear if they were merely friends or were secretly married, but Swift wrote his *Journal to Stella* (1710-1713) for her.

Swift changed his political support from the Whigs to the Tories, a party he felt was more supportive of the Anglican Church. He disliked the endless religious squabbling between various denominations over what he believed were insignificant differences as much as he detested political disputes and society's discrepancies. Although Swift called himself a "misanthrope," his writings constantly reflect the belief that humanity could better itself.

From 1721-1725, he composed *Gulliver's Travels*, a satire of society in general, power foolishly applied, useless thinking, and unnecessary institutions. Swift's most important work, published anonymously in 1726, was an instant success. He had become an Anglican priest in 1695, but his satire, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), offended Queen Anne, who found it blasphemous. Her opposi-

# Pointers

## READING POINTERS

### Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

Daniel Defoe's popular *Robinson Crusoe* had appeared in 1719 and set a new course for prose fiction. Swift adopted much of Defoe's technique in his 1726 story of Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon and sea captain, who recounts his adventures at sea. Because *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire, it is often difficult for the modern reader to fully appreciate Swift's wit, sarcasm, and occasional diatribe without some understanding of the major issues of the time period in which Swift lived and wrote.

#### Key Historical and Political Facts

- England's military, especially the navy, helps Britain establish itself as a world power.
- England creates an empire that will eventually span the entire world—the empire on which the sun never set.
- England remains the site of an ongoing battle between the State Church (Anglican) and the Roman Catholic Church.
- England (Anglican) and France (Roman Catholic) continue as rival nations, with each monarch claiming to be the rightful ruler of the other nation as well.
- The Royal Society of London, established in 1660, is an organization of “natural philosophers” (scientists) who meet regularly, share their scientific findings, discuss experimental techniques, etc. Many of them seem to value knowledge for its own sake, without regard to practical application.
- England, France, and much of the rest of Europe are in the midst of the “Age of Reason,” a time when groups of intellectuals believe that they can use *human reason* to free the world from centuries of irrational superstition. Opponents of this period of enlightenment believe that freedom to interpret the world through the human mind and intellectual thought will destroy faith in religion.



PART I  
A VOYAGE TO LILLIPUT

C H A P T E R I

*The Author gives some account of himself and family, his first inducements to travel. He is shipwrecked, and swims for his life, gets safe on shore in the country of Lilliput,† is made a prisoner, and carried up the country.*

**M**Y FATHER HAD a small estate in Nottinghamshire, I was the third of five sons. He sent me to Emanuel College, in Cambridge, at fourteen years old, where I resided three years and applied myself close to my studies; but the charge of maintaining me (although I had a very scanty allowance) being too great for a narrow fortune, I was bound apprentice to Mr. James Bates, an eminent surgeon in London, with whom I continued four years; and my father now and then sending me small sums of money, I laid them out in learning navigation, and other parts of the mathematics useful to those who intend to travel, as I always believed it would be some time or other my fortune to do. When I left Mr. Bates I went down to my father, where, by the assistance of him and my uncle John, and some other relations, I got forty pounds, and a promise of thirty pounds a year<sup>†</sup> to maintain me at Leyden: there I studied physic two years and seven months, knowing it would be useful in long voyages.

<sup>†</sup>Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

Soon after my return from Leyden, I was recommended by my good master Mr. Bates to be surgeon to the *Swallow*, Captain Abraham Pannell, commander; with whom I continued three years and a half, making a voyage or two into the Levant and some other parts. When I came back I resolved to settle in London, to which Mr. Bates, my master, encouraged me, and by him I was recommended to several patients. I took part of a small house in the Old Jewry; and, being advised to alter my condition, I married Miss Mary Burton, second daughter to Mr. Edmund Burton, hosier, in Newgate Street, with whom I received four hundred pounds for a portion.

But, my good master Bates dying in two years after, and I having few friends, my business began to fail; for my conscience would not suffer me to imitate the bad practice of too many among my brethren. Having therefore consulted with my wife and some of my acquaintance, I determined to go again to sea. I was surgeon successively in two ships, and made several voyages for six years to the East and West Indies, by which I got some addition to my fortune. My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books; and, when I was ashore, in observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their language, wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory.

The last of these voyages not proving very fortunate, I grew weary of the sea, and intended to stay at home with my wife and family. I removed from the Old Jewry to Fetter Lane, and from thence to Wapping, hoping to get business among the sailors; but it would not turn to account. After three years' expectation that things would mend I accepted an advantageous offer from Captain William Pritchard, master of the *Antelope*, who was making a voyage to the South Sea. We set sail from Bristol, May 4, 1699, and our voyage at first was very prosperous.

It would not be proper, for some reasons, to trouble the reader with the particulars of our adventures in those seas: let it suffice to inform him that in our passage from thence to the East Indies<sup>†</sup> we were driven by a violent storm to the north-west of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>†</sup> By an observation we found ourselves in the latitude of 30 degrees 2 minutes south.<sup>†</sup> Twelve of our crew were dead by immoderate labor and ill food; the rest were in a very weak condition. On the fifth of November, which was the beginning of summer in those parts, the weather being very hazy, the seamen spied a rock within half a cable's length of the ship; but the wind was so strong that we were driven directly upon it, and immediately split. Six of the crew, of whom I was one, having let down the boat into the sea, made a shift to get clear of the ship and the rock. We rowed, by my computation, about three leagues, till we were able to work no longer, being already spent with labor while we were in the ship. We therefore trusted ourselves to the mercy of the waves, and in about half an hour the



boat was upset by a sudden flurry from the north. What became of my companions in the boat, as well as of those who escaped on the rock, or were left in the vessel, I cannot tell, but conclude they were all lost. For my own part, I swam as fortune directed me, and was pushed forward by wind and tide. I often let my legs drop and could feel no bottom; but when I was almost gone and able to struggle no longer I found myself within my depth; and by this time the storm was much abated. The declivity was so small that I walked near a mile before I got to the shore, which I conjectured was about eight o'clock in the evening. I then advanced forward near half a mile, but could not discover any sign of houses or inhabitants; at least, I was in so weak a condition that I did not observe them. I was extremely tired, and with that and the heat of the weather, and about half a pint of brandy that I drank as I left the ship, I found myself much inclined to sleep. I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than ever I remembered to have done in my life, and, as I reckoned, about nine hours; for when I awaked it was just daylight. I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir; for, as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground, and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner. I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body, from my arm-pits to my thighs. I could only look upward; the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me, but, in the posture I lay, could see nothing except the sky. In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when, bending my eyes downward as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high, with a bow and arrow in his hand, and a quiver at his back. In the mean time I felt at least forty more of the same kind (as I conjectured) following the first. I was in the utmost astonishment, and roared so loud that they all ran back in a fright; and some of them, as I was afterward told, were hurt with the falls they got by leaping from my sides upon the ground. However, they soon returned, and one of them, who ventured so far as to get a full sight of my face, lifting up his hands and eyes by way of admiration, cried out in a shrill but distinct voice, *Hekinah degul*; the others repeated the same words several times, but I then knew not what they meant. I lay all this while, as the reader may believe, in great uneasiness; at length, struggling to get loose, I had the fortune to break the strings and wrench out the pegs that fastened my left arm to the ground; for by lifting it up to my face I discovered the methods they had taken to bind me, and at the same time, with a violent pull which gave me excessive pain, I a little loosened the strings that tied down my hair on the left side, so that I was just able to turn my head about two inches. But the creatures ran off a second time before I could seize them; whereupon there was a great shout in a very shrill accent, and after it ceased I heard one of them cry aloud, *Tolgo phonac*; when

in an instant I felt above a hundred arrows discharged on my left hand, which pricked me like so many needles; and, besides, they shot another flight into the air, as we do bombs in Europe, whereof many I suppose fell on my body, (though I felt them not), and some on my face, which I immediately covered with my left hand. When this shower of arrows was over I fell a-groaning with grief and pain; and then, Striving again to get loose, they discharged another volley larger than the first, and some of them attempted with spears to stick me in the sides; but, by good luck, I had on a buff jerkin which they could not pierce. I thought it the most prudent method to lie still, and my design was to continue so till night, when, my left hand being already loose, I could easily free myself; and as for the inhabitants, I had reason to believe I might be a match for the greatest army they could bring against me, if they were all of the same size with him that I saw. But fortune disposed otherways of me. When the people observed I was quiet they discharged no more arrows; but by the noise I heard I knew their numbers increased; and about four yards from me, over against my right ear, I heard a knocking for above an hour, like that of people at work; when, turning my head that way as well as the pegs and strings would permit me, I saw a stage erected, about a foot and a half from the ground, capable of holding four of the inhabitants, with two or three ladders to mount it; from whence one of them, who seemed to be a person of quality, made me a long speech, whereof I understood not one syllable. But I should have mentioned that before the principal person began his oration he cried out three times, *Langro dehul san* (these words and the former were afterward repeated and explained to me). Whereupon immediately about fifty of the inhabitants came and cut the strings that fastened the left side of my head, which gave me the liberty of turning it to the right and of observing the person and gesture of him that was to speak. He appeared to be of a middle age and taller than any of the other three who attended him, whereof one was a page that held up his train, and seemed to be somewhat longer than my middle finger; the other two stood one on each side to support him. He acted every part of an orator, and I could observe many periods of threatening, and others of promises, pity, and kindness. I answered in a few words, but in the most submissive manner, lifting up my left hand, and both my eyes to the sun, as calling him for a witness; and, being almost famished with hunger, having not eaten a morsel for some hours before I left the ship, I found the demands of nature so strong upon me that I could not forbear showing my impatience (perhaps against the strict rules of decency) by putting my finger frequently to my mouth to signify that I wanted food. The Hurgo (for so they call a great lord, as I afterward learned) understood me very well. He descended from the stage and commanded that several ladders should be applied to my sides, on which above a hundred of the inhabitants mounted and walked toward my mouth, laden with baskets full of meat, which had been provided and sent

## GLOSSARY

### A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson

Lilliput – a symbolic allusion to England

## Part I

### Chapter I

“My father...thirty pounds a year...” – This introduction reveals a great deal about Gulliver as a narrator. The unemotional tone he uses to narrate his travels gives the reader insight into his character. Gulliver belongs to the middle class and is governed by the desire to achieve and obtain wealth. His desires can be seen throughout his narrative. What is interesting about this introduction is that Gulliver does not speak of his father, Bates, or Uncle John with any kind of sentimentality; instead, they are mentioned and discussed only in reference to how they will benefit Gulliver in life. The lack of emotion shown in this introduction is continued until the end of the novel.

East Indies – refers specifically to India

Van Diemen’s Land – Tasmania; the island was originally named to honor the Governor-General of India, Anthony van Diemen, who arranged for explorer Abel Tasman’s journey in 1642. The island’s name was changed in 1856 to honor its European discoverer.

30 degrees 2 minutes south – When *Gulliver’s Travels* was written, sailors had no way to determine their actual position on the globe accurately. Science understood the concept of latitude, but not longitude. Therefore, this location cannot be precisely determined. Logically, based on the context and the latitude given, it can be assumed that Swift intends for Gulliver to have landed in Australia.

“This resolution, perhaps...on the like occasion...” – Swift’s sarcasm, suggests that rulers have the tendency to devise complicated and unrealistic solutions to unusual situations. This statement also reveals that Gulliver likes the Lilliputians’ solution, and his agreement shows the reader that he does not possess the common sense he thinks he does.

### Chapter II

“He is taller by almost...when I stood up.” – Swift’s description of the Emperor’s physical features may be interpreted as a derogatory remark about genetic traits that were sought out in rulers during Swift’s time. The humorous elements come from the Emperor’s shrill voice and the fact that he thinks his three-inch sword can be a defense against a giant

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## VOCABULARY

### Introduction

concourse – a gathering, assembly

esteem – respect

perused – examined

venture – to offer, put forward

veracity – truthfulness, sincerity

### A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to his Cousin Sympson

censure – disapproval; criticism

compass – extent

degenerate – corrupt, immoral

discourses – conversations

equivocating – evading

faction – conflict, infighting, disagreement

forbear – to refrain, hold back

interpolator – a person who makes additions or changes to documents

inuendo – *innuendo*, a suggestion or hint (usually negative)

levees – receptions

manifest – obvious, apparent

prevailed – successfully persuaded

reverence – worship, extreme respect

tincture – a trace, hint

vexatious – irritating, disturbing

## Part I

### Chapter I

abated – lessened

brethren – the plural of *brother*

bulk – size

civility – politeness; courtesy

computation – a calculation

countenances – appearances; faces

daubed – smeared, rubbed

declivity – a descent, slope, decline

determinate – definite; forceful

dexterity – skill

diminutive – little, small