

GULLIVER’S TRAVELS - Synopsis:

A public square in London in 1730. The Showmaster has captured Gulliver who has gone mad after his adventures (as in the book). Gulliver is being displayed at fairgrounds and is forced to perform his own story, with the help of some actors (who are bullied by the Showmaster):

Part one – the voyage to strange new lands. Pirates attack the ship, and showing no mercy or humanity they force Gulliver overboard. He swims to safety in the strange land of Lilliput. Here he discovers he is a giant, but as he is exhausted on the beach the little Lilliputians tie him up and call for the King and Queen and prime minister to decide what to do. This is satire on the emerging parliamentary democracy of the day in Britain, and is relevant to now. We see small people with bigoted ideas in power, in particular they wish to declare war on the neighbouring country of Brobdingnag because they open their eggs from the bottom not the top. They admire Gulliver and want him to help them in their war, when he refuses to do any violence they try to persuade him that hating other people is the correct attitude. The satire analyses intolerance and violence. In the end Gulliver saves Lilliput from a fire created by their own army and is rewarded with expulsion.

He swims away to the land of Brobdingnag. In Brobdingnag he is small and giants tower over him. But these giants are obsessed with money and material wealth at the expense of finer feelings and human values. They treat little Gulliver like a pet and try to raise money from his performances. Eventually he rejects their offers of money for his services and escapes as he is too small to catch.

Gulliver flies away on borrowed wings and bumps into a flying saucer in space. The saucer is guided by scientists who are obsessed with possibilities of science without any human responsibility (an echo of A.I in our own time). Swift was mocking the new Royal Society and Isaac Newton but his parody works very well for today. At last he wrecks their selfish experiments, and escapes when the flying saucer crashes to earth.

Finally Gulliver finds himself in the kingdom of the talking horses. The wise and noble horses have taken over from the appalling humans, known as Yahoos. These Yahoos are disgusting apes and embody all that is worst in humanity. They terrify Gulliver who is happily accepted by the Horses as the one noble human (after the wisdom gained in his adventures and his strangeness as a “civilised” human). But gradually Gulliver realises that the Horse rulers are not so fine, they are brutal and cruel and cause the Yahoos to be so terrible because they are terrorised. Eventually Gulliver is tried and released from the land of the horses and given as a departing gift the skin of a Yahoo.

Now Gulliver is going insane under the pressure of these adventures that seem to prove that wisdom, decency and kindness have no place on this planet. But as the play returns to the frame of the Showman’s public display of the mad Gulliver, humanity does reappear: the actors rebel and free Gulliver because they appreciate him and have a kinder view of us all. The actors and Gulliver run free from the theatre to leave the bitter Showman alone with his collapsed performance and inhumane values that Swift despises and mocks with his fabulous tale: Gulliver’s Travels.

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