

Although it appears simple and straightforward on the surface, a mere travelogue intended solely for the amusement of children, Gulliver's Travels, by Jonathan Swift, proves, upon closer examination, to be a critical and insightful work satirizing the political and social systems of eighteenth-century England. Through frequent and successful employment of irony, ambiguity and symbolism, Swift makes comments addressing such specific topics as current political controversies as well as such universal concerns as the moral degeneration of man. While he incorporates them subtly early in the novel, these observations and criticisms eventually progress to a point where they may shock or offend even the most unsuspecting reader. In order to witness this evolution of presentation, one need only observe the development of the work's central character, Captain Lemuel Gulliver, as Swift has designed his novel in such a way that, as his aspersions harshen and intensify, so do Gulliver's actions and attitudes.

For instance, in book one, "A Voyage to Lilliput", when Gulliver finds himself lost in a world one-twelfth the size of his own, he proves himself to be quite naive and impressionable. Although he is simply too large to perceive them in detail, Gulliver judges the country's inhabitants he meets to be as perfect and innocent as their toylike appearances. He refers to the Lilliputian emperor, a being not even six inches high, as "His Imperial Majesty" and blindly agrees to perform any demanded service, even though he could easily overpower the tiny nation. It is only after his services have been exploited and himself banished that Gulliver realizes how cruel and deceitful the Lilliputians truly are and his personality begins to transform.

In book two, "A Voyage to Brobdingnag", Gulliver faces quite an opposite situation, for in this world everything is twelve times its expected size. Somewhat hardened by his unfavorable experiences on Lilliput, Gulliver approaches the Brobdingnagians from the outset with some degree of suspicion and contempt. Although it is apparent to the reader that this particular race is far more benevolent and trustworthy than its predecessor, Gulliver bestows upon it a great deal more criticism and disrespect. He demonstrates his hypocrisy, for instance, when he expresses his revulsion at the sight of the Brobdingnagians' physical imperfections but never attributes his ability to see their defects in such detail to his own diminutive size. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that his dissatisfaction relates directly to his inferiority among these colossal beings. Gulliver himself admits,

how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavor doing himself
honour among those who are out of all degree of equality or com-
parison with him.

In essence, he is beginning to shed his role of observer and become personally involved in the moral controversies he observes. In the same way, Swift, who devotes much of his satire in the first two books of Gulliver's Travels to social and political conditions, begins at the close of part two to discuss and criticize situations in which he is personally at fault.

By the end of book four, both Gulliver and the direction of Swift's novel have been utterly transformed. In this part, titled "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms", Gulliver becomes trapped in a world where horses represent civilization and reason, while men, indignantly referred to as Yahoos, run wild, savage and ignorant. As the horses, called Houyhnhnms, make him realize how truly corrupt his untruthful and immoral race of human beings is, Gulliver learns to love their virtuous society while gradually beginning to abhor his own. Just as Swift denounces the state of society outright, by depicting men as offensive, irrational beasts, Gulliver assumes a similar stance, declaring himself a shamed and spiteful misanthropist. When he finally returns home after his adventures, he discovers that he cannot endure the company of other humans, he cannot even bear to look at his own reflection, knowing what degeneration it represents.

Notably, however, neither Swift nor Gulliver leave the novel without

exercising that one attribute they believe man to possess, his capacity for self-understanding and change. While Swift proposes his constructive criticism throughout the story in the form of irony and satire, Gulliver himself offers a solution to his situation at the close of the novel. He realizes that there is little he can do about being human; he simply must learn to live with himself. To achieve this, he suggests looking in a mirror as often as possible, not only so that he might learn to bear the sight of his own person but also so that he may be constantly reminded of those shortcomings he seeks so desperately to overcome.