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RAPE OF THE LOCK

Alexander Pope

R.M. Kala

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rape of the lock is a poem written by Alexander Pope and published in 1712 and reworked to its final form in 1714. The subject matter of the poem is, what would be considered extremely ridiculous now, the cutting of a few locks of hair of a fair lady by an unusually adventurous Baron. Both these characters were, perhaps, acquaintances of Pope. The poem is based on an actual incident where the act of cutting off a lock resulted in estrangement of two families that had, otherwise, been very close to each other. Pope wrote the poem to criticise this frivolity of the upper classes. The idea was to make them see the folly of their actions make them laugh at it. To achieve this end Pope used the novel form of the Mock-epic. Pope used a heightened elevated epic style, in short, a highly dignified style, to a frivolous subject to mock at it.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify and describe the features of a mock-epic.
- Develop a broad awareness of the Augustan age and neo-classicism.
- Discuss the epic conventions used by Pope in *The Rape of The Lock*.
- Write a critical analysis of the poem and discuss the major themes.

3. POPE AND HIS TIMES

Literary critics tend to name an age either after literary trends, or a handful of writers sufficiently central to that age. Thus, we can speak of an Age of Wordsworth but not an Age of Keats, a Pound Era but not a Williams Era or an Age of Frost. Pope is the major poet of his century, and the period of his lifetime (1688-1744) might justly be called the Age of Pope. Pope's importance, however, extends far beyond his own times. Few major poets remain so



unfailingly controversial, for Pope has deeply divided readers in almost every subsequent generation. He continues to engage us especially because his work requires us to clarify and to articulate our differences about literature itself. Pope is more than a gifted writer from a distant age whose writings still commands attention.

Pope's period has also been called the Augustan Age, Age of Satire and Age of Reason. This period sees the author facing a radical change in his reading public and prospects. In the best Augustan works social fact is being not only described but felt with a particular reality. Its substance, variety and interest are perpetually being recorded. And social behaviour is both recorded and corrected in the interest of good sense. That accounts for the sharp realistic descriptions and satirical tone and temper in the literature of the period. As a matter of fact, the most significant value of Augustan literature is that it is deeply rooted in society.

English society had crossed a watershed in the middle of the seventeenth century. Dynamic and explosive conceptions of religion and politics, and complex but unstable literary fashions in poetry and prose, had to be rejected in favour of modes which would unite rather than divide men. The post-Civil War period generated a wish for harmony rather than for discord. The period could also be called the Age of Commerce, for important elements of business organizations surfaced - the Bank of England (1694), insurance and trading companies and the "Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce." Encyclopaedias of the Arts and Sciences began to appear. The Age, thus, had a definite tendency towards planned organization in all spheres of life, including that of literature.

London was the economic and cultural heart of England. The city's growth during the eighteenth century was phenomenal. Defoe called it 'a great and monstrous thing'. It was during this period that London was transformed from a late medieval town into an early modern city. Yet despite its speed of change and growth it remained a healthy centre for literature. The special place of London in Augustan literature signifies the fact that London had become the symbol of national life.

It was a period of expansion in terms of trade and commerce. The horizons of age were wider and more exotic than we sometimes remember. In *Rape of the Lock*, Belinda's dressing table displays "the various off rings of the world." Throughout the eighteenth-century interest in the East was keen not only in the sphere of commerce but also in the arena of literature. The imaginative effect of the Orient's luxuries and of its reported wisdom and virtue was far more influential than actual economic growth. This period, the post-Civil War and pre-Industrial Revolution period-was the Age of Pope, a period displaying an urgency for



order in various spheres of national life. The rise of middle class further entrenched this urgency. The period also had a second look at the morals and manners of London High Society, as reflected in plays of Congreve, Goldsmith, and Sheridan and in the novels of Fielding.

3.1 Neo-classicism

The literary scene was, thus, typically rooted in the social scene. The desire for order sent the writers back to the classics with a new purpose. For the reason the period has also been called the Neo-classical period, the silver age of the European Renaissance. The interaction of medievalism and vigorous classical and continental influences produced the ideals which formulated the background for a new literary theory. The literary patriotism of the Renaissance flared up when Dryden described himself, with a proud humility as “a Man who have done my best to improve the Language, especially the Poetry”. And when Pope defined the task of the poet as the expression of “what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed” (*An Essay on Criticism*) he was simply repeating a Renaissance idea to which Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton would have given their assent. Pope’s constant ambition to be “correct”, which appeared to the Romantics as the last excess of arid pedantry, was informed by the same excitement that animated Spenser and Milton. This Renaissance quality reflected itself in the desire of the writers of this period to translate the classics from Greece and Rome. The purpose was to show up the backwardness of English poetry in relation to the Continent, and to offer new models.

The result of all these endeavours was a period of literature dedicated to clarity, balance, and the classical tradition. Clarity meant plainness of meaning, and avoidance of obscure wit and complicated wordplay. Balance meant a tone of writing which avoided extremes of emotions. It also meant a point of view which avoided extremes of opinion. This temper has been most beautifully and typically expressed in Addison’s “Much can be said on both sides”. The classical appeal was there to offer models of excellence, not only as models for literature but also as models for social and personal morality. Literature was perceived as an effort to recreate the values of duty, piety, justice, and integrity – typical Roman and Greek ideals.

A peculiarly paradoxical characteristic is noticed in the Augustan temper. Although the State stood for order, most of the major writers were in opposition to the State. They proclaimed lofty ideals which never became reality. But they refused to celebrate the State as did the Elizabethans. The Augustan writers, driven by their corrective temper, continued to condemn their age. Almost all the Augustans were satirists, including the mild Addison. The



paradox can be explained in terms of the urgent desire of the writers to correct the morals and manners of man, society, and state. It was a purely secular desire, devoid of any religious standards as propagated by Milton.

As a personality, Pope has always presented a problem. His physical deformity has been highlighted by many writers, including Johnson. History reveals a multitude of contrary and competing portraits of Pope. Lytton Strachey describes him as a “diabolic monkey”, gleefully pouring hot oil onto harmless victims below his window. Recent scholars and critics tend to portray him as a more upright figure, a generous friend and a righteous enemy, whose high-minded satire defends a landed, patriarchal, classic civilization against the vulgarity and corruption of the emerging bourgeois opportunist such as Walpole and Ciffer. Hazlitt describes him as a poet of artifice, triviality, and the indoors. Like the diverse portraits of Pope created by his contemporary painters, these literary sketches seem to find in Pope completely different personalities. Pope has himself pointed out this problem in his letter to Martha Blount: “Everyone values Mr. Pope, but everyone for a different reason.” Undoubtedly, he was an interestingly puzzling personality. He seems to agree with Montaigne who said: “If I speak variously of myself, it is, because I consider myself variously. All contraries are there to be found, in one corner or the another...! I have nothing to say my-self entirely, simply, and solidly without mixture, and confusion.” This self-portrait of Montaigne applies aptly to Pope. Pope was many men put together in a jumbled manner, but one fact stands out strikingly: he was always interesting, whether serious or non-serious.

Check Your Progress 1

1. The Augustan Age was marked by many new developments. What were they?
2. What is Neo-classicism?

4. RAPE OF THE LOCK

During Pope’s life-time great occasional writing was produced. This fact has been underestimated by literary historians and critics. Any occasion, whether serious or trivial, could fire the imagination of the Augustan writers. *Rape of the Lock* was the result of an occasion, a highly specific occasion, that happened in the high society of London: the incident of the stealing of the lock of hair. But Pope’s major poems always manage to transcend, without



renouncing, their origins in specific occasions. *Rape of the Lock* remains entrenched in the specific episode but transcends the shackles of triviality because of its mock-epic structure.

The production of the poem has a history of its own. Young Lord Petre (1690-1713) cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair. It created a scandal in London's high society. Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre belonged to fashionable Roman Catholic families. Pope was a Romantic Catholic too. His friend John Caryl asked him to write the poem to end the family feud caused by the scandal. The first version was produced in 1712, a year after the incident. The Roman Catholic element may have a bearing on the extensive use of religious rituals narrated in the poem. In its first version the poem was structured in two parts. In 1713 Pope added the sylphs, the card game, and the Cave of Spleen. Clarissa's speech was introduced in 1717.

This tendency to revise his poems after their publication was a peculiar practice of Pope. For most poets' publication is a sign of closure. For Pope publication was not an inevitable sign of finality. A major poem seemed to him always open to change. *The Dunciad* too was produced twice (1728 and 1743). Pope claimed that he always waited at least two years after publishing. For less-skilled poets, his advice in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* was a blunt remark: "Keep your piece nine years". The remark may be exaggerated, but it points out sharply Pope's serious concern with the art of writing poetry. Creative process for him was not just a flight of imagination; it was plain, hard work. In his view, no work is complete and perfect; it is always open to revision, which may require deletion, addition, and restructuring. *Rape of the Lock*, as said earlier, went through his rigorous practice of revision.

4.1 Structure of the Poem

Rape of the Lock has a five-canto structure. Canto means chief division in a long poem. Each canto has its definite, well-thought-out place in the whole structure of the poem. They flow out forward from each other, maintaining at the same time their individual, specific significance. But the total significance of the poem depends on the specific order in which they are structured by the poet. We shall note this fact as we move from canto to canto, arrive at the end of the poem, and then recapitulate the arrangement of the cantos to fully appreciate their inter-connection.

4.2 Canto I

Canto First begins with an invocation of the Muse of Poetry in a typical classical manner. Invocation of some superhuman power for inspiration is one of the well-known classical



conventions¹. Having admitted that “Slight in the subject”, the poet moves on to a description of sunrise. The purpose of this description is not to portray the glory of Nature, but to comment, by way of implication, upon the decadence of the London High Society, whose members keep on sleeping till noon. In this case, the heroine of the poem, Belinda, is still asleep. The rays of the sun do not attract her attention but make her impatient and irritable. She rings the bell three times, knows with her slipper, and presses her repeater watch. There is no response. The staff of high society families follow the examples of their masters and mistresses.

At this juncture Pope introduces his supernatural machinery – another classical convention – in the form of Ariel, the guardian angel of Belinda. Ariel appears in Belinda’s dream as a handsome youth² and tries to prolong Belinda’s “balmy rest” by taking her into an entirely different world populated by “bright inhabitants of air”. The emphasis on the airiness” of these creatures is further enhanced by the reference to “airy elves”. Belinda is informed by Ariel that she is looked after by “unnumbered spirits”, as light as the air – “the light militia of the lower sky.” These spirits have their origin in female bodies. After death they leave female bodies (vehicles”) and move into the air. But their female vanities do not end with death; they continue in the world of spirits in sylphs. (Note the feminist aspect: Belinda, the heroine, has any army consisting of female souls, led by her guardian angel, Ariel).

Ariel goes on to describe in detail the categories of spirits. The souls of “termagants” return to the element of fire, because of their fiery temper. They are given the name of salamanders. The souls of mild-tempered women belong to the element of water. They turn into nymphs. The souls of prude ladies take the form of gnomes which are tied down to earth. And the souls of coquettes turn into sylphs and inhabit the lower sky” – they belong to the element of air. These spirits possess the power of changing their shape and sex as they wish.³ The sylphs guard the honour of beautiful young maidens.

Gnomes are wicked, mischievous beings which take young innocent girl on to the wrong path. They raise the expectations and enhance the pride of these beautiful young girls. The result is that the girls are so overblown with pride and self-indulgence that they refuse

¹ Compare Pope’s invocation with Milton’s in *Paradise Lost*, Spenser’s in *Faerie Queen* and Homer’s in *The Odyssey*.

² Another epic convention. Recall Athene’s appearance in Penelope’s dream as her sister in *The Odyssey*.

³ Another. epic convention, Recall Athene’s appearance both in male and female, forms in *The Odyssey*. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s angels also display this power of assuming any form and sex at will.



offers when they are made to them by eligible young men. Their empty brains are filled with gay ideas in the company of peers and dukes, knights, and the king. These damsels are doomed to seduction at an early age. Their pure female souls are tainted” under the wicked influence of gnomes, which do not spare even infants. They teach girls the art of coquetry which leads to their moral and social downfall. Gnomes are not good guardian angels for beautiful young girls.

Sylphs make better guardians than gnomes. Women owe their vanity, coquetry, and chastity to sylphs. The sylphs guide their wards in the right direction. They also teach their wards the art of flirtation. A woman’s heart is turned into a toyshop. In these toyshops their admirers contend like warriors. People may call this “levity” in women, but they are blind to the truth. It is sylphs that are responsible for the fickleness of the female mind.

Ariel announces to Belinda that he is one of the sylphs that guard her honour. He is her “watchful sprite”. Of late he has read her horoscope and found some dreadful event that is going to befall Belinda before sunset. Only Heaven knows the true nature of the foredoomed dreadful event. Ariel does not know what exactly will happen, how and where. He can only warn Belinda to be “most beware of man.”⁴

At this moment Belinda’s lapdog, Shock, wakes up, leaps and wakes his mistress with his tongue. It is reported that at this very moment her eyes fall upon a love-letter. The flattering, flowery words of the letter drive away everything from her head. She sits down at her dressing table to prepare herself for the grand occasion. Pope describes in detail all “cosmetic powers” that preside over Belinda’s toilet. She prepares herself with great care, like Achilles preparing himself for battle in the *Iliad*. Here, the mock-epic element reaches its first climatic point. There is reversal of the central character. It is a heroine, not a hero that forms the centre of the epic. But the cosmetic preparations are no less meticulous than the martial preparations of a warrior. The description of a woman putting on make-up in terms of martial idiom effectively evokes the mock-heroic atmosphere. The table is cluttered up with all possible cosmetic items, brought from all the corners of the world – “the various off rings of the world”. Belinda’s maid, Betty begins to “deck” her mistress with these irresistible offerings – India’s “glowing gems”, scents from all Arabia”. Piles of pins, puffs, powders, patches, bible, and billet-doux form the weaponry of Belinda. She “puts on all its (here beauty’s) arms”, watches her reflection in the mirror with great care, examining the power of each smile and each flush. Each moment of preparation increases her charm (power). Now

⁴ Supernatural warnings are another form of classical convention. Recall heavenly warnings in *The Odyssey*.



she is ready to go out into the world. She is surrounded by invisible sylphs. And for Belinda's grand toilet, Betty, a mortal, is praised whereas the praise is due to the sylphs.

Canto first ends on a note of suspense. The central character is introduced in great detail. Through the central character, Belinda, Pope seems to be satirising the decadent high society in which women have only one role-model, that of fashion conditioned female out to impress the opposite sex. But the description has such martial terms that it looks like a preparation for a battle of sexes. Vanity is the driving forces of Belinda, making her incapable of any genuine emotion.

4.2.1 Explanatory Notes and Comments (Lines)

- 1-12. The poem begins in the epic manner with 'proposition' announcing the subject. Virgil's Aeneid announces '*Arma Virumque Cano*' (Arms I sing, and the man). Milton opens with "Of man's first disobedience..." Pope's poem follows the epic convention, but the effect is intentionally parodic. Juxtaposed with the heaviness and grandeur of the propositions of Aeneid and Paradise Lost, the proposition of *Rape of the Lock* appears strikingly ludicrous: 'Slight is the subject.' The effect serves the purpose of the poet.
3. **Caryll:** John Caryll (1666-1736). An intimate friend of Pope. He asked Pope to write a poem to pacify the agitated families of Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre.
4. **Belinda:** Arabella Fermor in the poem.
5. **Slight is the praise:** References are to Virgil's fourth *Georgie* translated by Dryden and Sedley. Pope combines the two and forms a pithy statement of the subject. Virgil's fourth *Georgie* is the best example in poetry of a mundane subject such as the life of bees elevated to the dignity of poetry. Pope attempts a similar task in his poem, goddess: the muse of poetry according to classical convention A **well-bred lord:** Lord Petre-here.
- 7-11. Reference to Dry den's translation of Virgil's Aeneid (1.11): *Can Heaven 'ly minds such high resentment show; Or exercise their Spight in Human Woe?*

Pope's lines are typically mock-heroic. There is a reversal of values here. The task is "bold" and men are little; and the rage is "mighty" in the "soft bosoms" of women. The slant of satire is obvious. Moreover, there is an actual reference to Lord Petre who was short of stature. The lines clearly bring out the ludicrous incongruity between heroic actions and their weak agents.



13. **Sol:** Latin word for the 'sun'
Curtains: the curtains of the four-poster bed of Belinda
timorous: timid. The sun seems to be afraid of sending its ray.
14. op'd - reopened
- 13-14. A hyperbolic statement. The comparison of the heroine's eyes to the sun enhances the satiric import of the poem. One may suspect a serious intention of the poet in the use of the hyperbole.
- 17-20. Belinda rings the bell three times - the triple repetition is common in epic poetry. Receiving no answer, she knocks the ground with her slipper, displaying impatience. The repeater watch shows the hour of noon. It is no time for high society to get up. She goes back to sleep.
- 19-114. These lines were added in 1714. They introduce an important epic device - the supernatural machinery.
21. In epics the gods sometimes communicate to mortals in their dreams. There is a slight deviation here. Ariel first summons the dream in which he appears as a handsome youth.
23. **birth-night beau:** a young aristocrat splendidly dressed up for the ball in the honour of the King's birthday.
27. **distinguished care:** special trust
28. **right inhabitants of air:** sylphs
- 30-34. In the 17th century educationists regarded the nurse and the priest as the chief sources of superstition in young children. The nurse's teaching is referred to in lines 31-32, and the priest's in lines 33-34.
32. silver token: It was believed that fairies dropped silver pennies at night into shoes of maidens who kept the house clean and tidy. **circled green:** rings of grass of deeper green colour than the surrounding pasture. It was believed that the greener circle was caused by the midnight dances of fairies.
33. A reference to the Annunciation or Annunciation or Announcement of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, and other similar visitations.



- 37-38. A reference to St. Matthew, XI...thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'
41. **unnumbered spirits:** sylphs.
42. **light militia:** a reference to aerial sylphs distinguished from ethereal beings. Pope represents his spirits in military formations. **Lower sky:** lower air.
44. **Hang o'er the box...the:** In Pope's time two principal places for public display of beauty and fashion were the box at the theatre and the drive (the Ring, also called the Tour or Circus, in Hyde Park).
45. **equipage:** a carriage and horses with attendant footmen.
46. **chair:** a sedan chair, mode of conveyance in which a person in a closed chair was carried on poles by two men.
47. A reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XV, for the origin of the transmigration of the soul. The idea that the sylphs etc. were once women in Pope's own and does not form part of the Rosicrucian philosophy.
- 47-104. Ariel explains the world of the sylphs to Belinda. The use of supernatural was regarded as an important convention by epic poets. Homer and Virgil had chosen their machinery from classical mythology. Pope chooses to base his supernatural machinery on the Rosicrucian system, rather than invent his own.
49. **repair:** move
50. **vehicles:** the body. A pun on *vehicles* and *equipage* (line 45) is probably intended.
51. **transient:** temporary
54. Although she cannot play cards in the form of a spirit, she still loves watching a game of cards.
- 55-59: a reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*, VI, in which Virgil describes the afterlife of heroes. Here again we notice an inversion of the central character from male to female. The inversion is intentionally mock-heroic.
- Chariots:** both chariots mentioned in epics and at the same time contemporary carriages, which were called chariots. Another instance of mock-heroic.
56. **Ombre:** a kind of card game for three players



- 57-66. Pope borrows the idea of four classes of spirits from *Le Comte de Gabalis*, but the idea of their human origin is his own invention. According to *Gabalis*, the air is inhabited by a multitude of spirits having human shape, called *sylphs*. The *nymphs*, mostly of the female sex, live in waters. *Gnomes*, the guardians of treasures and precious stones, inhabit the earth. Fire is the element in which *salamanders* thrive. These elemental creatures could be made a ‘familiar’, or spirit available at call, and retained at home as a lover disguised as a lapdog or a parrot or a monkey.
58. **first:** original; dominant. Earth, Air, Fire and Water are the four elements referred to.
59. **termagant:** virago; quarrelsome, abusive, violent women
60. **salamander:** a lizard-like animal supposed to live in fire
62. **tea:** according to the pronunciation of Pope’s time, a perfect rhyme with away
66. **fields of air:** reference to *Aeneid*, VI. The phrase also occurs in Virgil’s *Georgics*: “The nimble horsemen scour the fields of air.”
- 68-78. Several hints are borrowed from Milton’s angels. Like the sylphs in *Gabalis* and Milton’s angels, Pope’s spirits can change their shape and sex at will. The sylphs in Pope’s poem are represented as invulnerable like Milton’s angels:
- For spirits when they please can either sex assume or both...*
- Paradise Lost, I
72. **masquerades:** masked assemblies, often called balls
73. **spark:** ‘A lively, showy, splendid, gayman. It is commonly used in contempt.’ (Johnson’s *Dictionary*).
79. **too conscious of their fate:** much too aware of their beauty
81. **these:** the gnomes. Pope makes the gnomes bad, wickedly contriving vexations for mankind.
- Swell their prospects:** raise their expectations.
82. **disdained:** looked down upon
89. **bidden blush:** made up through rouge
- 91-104. The sylphs are responsible for the proverbial fickleness of women. The mystique of feminine beauty and the puzzling female behaviour are explained in terms of the



sylphs. Pope's originality lies in transforming the country creatures of fairyland into the guardians of female morality and conduct in the sophisticated world of the 18th century drawing-room.

92. **mystic:** mysterious

94. **impertinence:** trifle; small, insignificant matter

96. **treat:** food and drink

97-98. **Florio-Damon:** names of imaginary gallants

100. **moving:** changing as well as *fickle*. A pun seems to be intended.

101-102. Reference to Homer's the *Iliad*:

Now shield with shield, with helmet helmet closed

To armour armour, lance to lance opposed

(Pope's translation)

Pope describes how rivals fight for the heart of a woman. *Sword-knots* formed part of a beau's attire.

105-114. Announcing himself as Ariel, Belinda's guardian angel warns her against a terrible calamity that is about to happen to her.

107-111. References to the speeches of Uriel and Gabriel in *Paradise Lost*, IV.

112. Warnings are common in epics.

115. **He said:** an epic device is imitated here.

Shock: a popular breed of lapdog brought from Iceland. The term is also calculated to *shock* the reader.

118. **billet-doux:** love letter.

121-148. A detailed description of Belinda's dressing table. The arming of the epic hero is an indispensable epic convention. Belinda's donning her beauty aids is especially reminiscent of Achilles' elaborate preparation for battle in the *Iliad*.

124. **cosmetic powers:** deities who preside over the toilet.

127. **The inferior priestess:** the maid, Betty. Belinda is the superior priestess of her own beauty. She is "both a sincere devotee and divinity herself." Cleanth Brooks calls such attitude the paradox of beauty worship.



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131. **nicely culls:** chooses with care
134. **Arabia:** source of perfumes. Recall Macbeth: “All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”
138. The combination of the articles mentioned in the line pointedly bring out the mock-heroic tone. And the presence of “bibles” among the other irreligious things brings out the decadence of the 18th century high society of London.
139. A parody of the arming of the epic hero
140. **The fair:** a beautiful woman
144. The juices of belladonna or deadly ‘night-shade’ was used by women to enlarge the pupils of the eye and darken the surrounding skin.
- 145-147. Following Rabbinical authority, Pope identifies the sylphs with the fallen angels and allots to them the supervision of the toilet.
147. **plait:** arrange the folds
148. **Betty:** almost a common, generic name for a lady’s maid.

Check Your Progress 2

1. What epic conventions are used by Pope in the opening Canto?
2. How does Pope turn the heroic elements on their head? Give some examples.
3. Do you think Belinda’s grand toilet is described in a manner that resembles a preparation for war?

4.3 Canto II

The second canto begins with Belinda’s journey by a boat to a social occasion. The journey is a parody of the journey of Aeneas up the Tiber in Aeneid.⁵ Belinda’s eyes are compared with the sun. Her eyes shine on all alike. Surrounded by other beautiful dames, Belinda stands out as an extraordinarily beautiful lady. She is the centre of attention. She is the sun,

⁵ Journey is another epic convention used by Pope. Refer to the journey of Odysseus and compare the two journeys. You will at once notice the mock-epic tone.



and the others are just planets. The solar system analogy highlights the brilliance of Belinda's beauty.

Pope finally comes to the description of Belinda's famous locks of hair, which are the source of contention in the poem. The locks have devastating power - they are the destruction of mankind". They hang gracefully in equal curls and decorate her ivory white neck like "shining ringlets." The locks are snares that attract men's hearts and keep them as slaves in their beautiful "labyrinths".

Belinda's devastatingly beautiful locks have been the ambitions of all young men of London society, particularly the Baron (Lord Petre). The Baron has long been planning to possess the locks as love tokens. Like an epic hero, he invokes divine assistance.⁶ In a parody of epic invocation to the gods, he sacrifices tokens of his former love-affairs to the god, Love. He also sacrifices twelve French romances and love letters. With his sighs he fires the pyre of his sacrificial objects, falls prostrate and preys to Love to grant him Belinda's locks. But Love grants him only half his prayer - one lock.

Meanwhile Belinda sails on her majestic boat, serenely beautiful. She feels secure and smiles on all and "and all the world was gay". Excepting Ariel, who is worried about the impending doom. He gives detailed instructions to the sylphs to guard her closely. The "denizens of air" take up their appointed positions like soldiers guarding their general. Ariel reminds his soldiers of black omens"⁷and orders them to be extra careful and attentive. If they fail in their assigned tasks, they will have to face "sharp vengeance" which Ariel describes in vivid details. Although Belinda sails on confidently, her army is tense with fear and suspense, waiting with beating hearts for the dire event." The second canto also ends on a note of suspense.

4.3.1 Explanatory Notes and Comments (Lines)

1. **ethereal plains:** the heavens
3. **the rival of the beams:** Belinda is equal to the sun in the glory of her appearance. An example of hyperbole.
- 13-14. Like the sun which shines on everyone, Belinda's eyes shine on all alike. The sun comparison carries a multiplicity of meaning. She is represented as a flirt; at the

⁶ Another epic convention.

⁷ An epic convention. Omens - good or bad - are common in epics. Refer to the *Odyssey*.



same time she is compared to a munificent prince distributing his largesse impartially.

14. *St. Matthew*: V.45: 'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' A rather blasphemous allusion to the above seems to be intended.

Describe the mingled response of flattery and censure implied by this line. Look also at line 10.

19. Is this implication serious or playful?

25. **springes**: traps or snares

26. **finny prey**: poetic diction for fish

28. *Persius*, V.247:

She knows her man, and when you rant and swear,
Can draw you to her with a single hair.

(Dryden's translation)

30. **Julius Caesar's famous saying**: *Veni, Vidi, Vici*. Is there a suggestion of bravado here?

31. **meditates**: plans

32. This kind of antithesis is an epic commonplace. *Paradise Lost*, 11.40 ff.

35. **Phoebus**: the sun

36. Ceremonies of propitiation are part of the epic formula.

38. **twelve vast French romances**: Pope is satirising the interminable French prose romances of the seventeenth century of which *Le Grand Cyrus of Mlle. de Scudery* is a typical example. To some extent the novels of Richardson (vide *Sir Charles Grandison*) are descendants of the French romances.

42. **three amorous sighs**: repeated three times to conform to the conventions of the epic

47. **secure**: free from care (from the Latin *securus*)

- 48-72. These lines were added in 1714.



52. Beneath the obvious mockery, do you detect a genuine admiration for Belinda? Clarify Pope's attitude to his subject.
- 53-54. *Iliad X.I ff.*
- All night the chiefs before their vessels lay,
And lost in sleep the labours of the day:
All but the king; with various thoughts oppressed
His country's cares lay rolling in his breast.*
- (Pope's translation)
55. **denizens:** inhabitants
56. **lucid:** in the sense of the Latin *lucidus*; clear
57. **shrouds:** the sail ropes; here, probably the sails
64. The gossamer, spun by a kind of spider, was formerly supposed to be the product of sun-burnt dew.
- 65-68. *Paradise Lost*, V.283:
- And colours dipped in heavens
Sky-tinctured grain.*
70. **Superior:** In the Latin sense of higher. Like the heroes of the epics, Ariel is represented as taller than his fellows.
- 73-142. These lines were added in 1714.
73. **sylyphides:** female sylphs. The sylphs may, of course, change their sex at will.
74. **Pope is parodying** *Paradise Lost*, V. 601:
- Thrones, Dominions, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers.*
- The rather formal and stately speeches of Ariel are intended as parodies of the grandiloquence of Homeric and Miltonic speeches.
75. **spheres:** fields of action
79. **wandering orbs:** comets
84. **painted bow:** rainbow



86. **globe:** a common word in the poetic diction of the time meaning earth
89. Pope's parody of national guardian angels found in Addison and Dryden
91. **the fair:** the fair sex
93. **gale:** poetic diction for breeze
97. **wash:** 'a medical or cosmetic lotion.' (Johnson's Dictionary)
100. **furbelow:** the pleated border of a dress or a petticoat
103. **slight:** sleight, or trick
105. **Diana's law:** the law of chastity
113. **drops:** earrings
115. **Crispissa:** The name is modelled on the verb to *crisp* meaning to curl, from the Latin *crispo*.
116. A satire on the vogue for lapdogs among fashionable ladies.
117. The reference is to the shield of Achilles forged and decorated by Vulcan. *Iliad*, XVIII. 701-4.
118. The description of Belinda's petticoat is a parody of the description of the shields of epic heroes such as Achilles and Ajax, so magnificently narrated by Homer. The elaborate 'hoop petticoat' was a favourite target of Addison's satire.
119. **that sevenfold fence:** In epic poetry shields are often made of sevenfold strength. *Aeneid*, VIII. 448.
121. **silver bound:** the silver fringe of the petticoat
123. *Iliad*, VIII. 7 ff. for Jove threatening disobedient gods with terrible punishments.
124. **at large:** unprotected.
126. **vials:** phials, small glass bottles
128. Pope plays on the various meanings of the word *bodkin*. Here it means a blunt-pointed needle: at IV.96 and 1.95, and ornamental hairpin, and at V.55, 88 and 95, a dagger for Belinda, and a spear for the sylph.
129. **pomatums:** ointments
131. **styptics:** applications to check bleeding



132. **rivelled:** shrunken, shrivelled
133. Zeus was enraged with Ixion, King of Thessaly, for making advances to Hera. He struck him with his thunderbolts and caused Hermes to hurl him into Tartarus, the underworld, where he was bound to an ever-revolving wheel.
134. **whirling mill:** i.e., the chocolate mill
138. *Paradise Lost*, V. 594 ff. The sylphs are like the angels of Milton.
139. **third:** the contemporary equivalent is *thread* (verb)

Check Your Progress 3

1. The Baron has long been planning to possess the locks as love tokens. What epic conventions does he follow to invoke the assistance of the gods? What is the effect of this invocation?
2. Beneath the obvious mockery, do you detect a genuine admiration for Belinda? Clarify Pope's attitude to his subject.

4.4 Canto III

The third canto introduces Hampton Palace, the centre of the contemporary high society of London. The Palace is visited by all fashionable men and women of London and is a hot centre of gossip. They indulge in small talks about balls and visits. Here reputations fall like cards.

The sun has started moving westward. It is the time when people return from work. But Belinda's crowd is engaged in petty games of cards. Belinda plays at ombre—a particular type of card-game to defeat two adventurous knights. The game is described in heroic terms and style as a parody of battle scenes in epic poems. The slightness of the subject is enhanced further. The implication is obvious—the energy, passion and purpose which are devoted to serious and glorious tasks are reduced to a game of cards in Belinda's world.

After defeating “both armies”—the two adventurous knights—Belinda now turns to the Baron and gets involved with him at ombre. Pope gives a detailed description of various kinds of cards to further enhance the mock-heroic aspect of the poem:

Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wilder disorder seen,

With thronge promiscuous strew the level green.



*Thus when dispersed a routed army runs,
Of Asia's troops, and Africa's sable sons,
With like confusion different nations fly,
Of various habits, and of various dye:*

Thus, giving the card game the global dimension, Pope only brings to light the smallness and fickleness of Belinda's world—the contemporary London society.

The game between Belinda and the Baron goes on for quite some time. Belinda declares trumps and starts the game. First victories go to her—she wins four tricks. Only the last trick remains to be played on which depends Belinda's victory or defeat. Her heart full of trepidation, she plays the last trick with her ace of heart. The Baron is finally vanquished. Belinda is as joyous in her victory as an epic hero.

*The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky:
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.*

The game is followed by another ritual of high society—the coffee⁸. Pope once again describes this social ritual in grand epic style, making a mockery of it, and of those who indulge in it. Coffee inspires the Baron with another plan to turn his defeat into victory. It is a treacherous and hideous plan. His “new stratagems” find the most potent weapon in Clarissa's scissors— “a two-edged weapon.” Like a lady in romances, Clarissa offers the weapon to her knight who accepts it with great “reverence”. Just as Belinda bends her head over coffee, the sylphs swiftly move to the locks and give her warnings of the coming doom by blowing back the hair. Belinda looks back thrice.

But Ariel's attention is diverted when he notices “an earthly lover” lurking in the close recesses” of her virgin heart. He is so amazed and confused that his powers fail, and he resigns himself to fate:

*The Baron's persistenc pays at last:
The meeting paints the sacred hair dis sever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!*

The result is catastrophic. Belinda “screams of horror rend the affrighted skies”. The Baron triumphs and Pope ironically compares the loss of the lock to the fall of empires:

⁸ In epic poetry a victory is followed by a grand feast – an epic convention. Here it is followed by coffee.



*Steel could the labour of the gods destroy,
And strike to dust the imperial towers of Troy;*

4.4.1 Explanatory notes and comments (Lines)

- 1-8. Here is a fine example of the mock-heroic. First, there is an elaborate description of a well-known building, Hampton Court. Notice how the *trivial* is wedded to the *grand* which is a salient feature of the mock-heroic manner.
5. Hampton stands for Hampton Court, the Royal Palace, approximately 15 miles up the Thames from London.
7. **three realms:** The Union of England and Wales with Scotland had taken place only five years earlier in 1707.
8. A celebrated example of zeugma
- 12 **visit:** a formal visit paid by one fashionable woman upon another.
- 17-18. The reference is to the *Spectator* (June 27, 1711), in which Addison ridicules the importance attached by social convention to the beau's snuff-box and the lady's fan.
19. Note how the passing of time is indicated. Point out the subtlety with which social satire is merged with this and other similar passages.
- 25-104. Added in 1714.
- 25-26. A celebrated parody of the epic convention. The game of ombre is described in terms of a colossal battle scene.
27. **ombre:** Introduced into England from Spain in the seventeenth century, it attained its fullest popularity in the eighteenth century. In playing ombre a pack of forty cards was used, that is to say, the full pack after discarding all the 8's, 9's and 10's. The value of a card depended upon its colour and whether it was a trump or not. The ace of spades (Spadillio) always ranked highest, and the ace of clubs (Basto) ranked third highest. These aces were also known as matadors. After the cards were dealt, the ombre was fixed upon. The player who considered that he had the best chances of winning the game declared himself the ombre (from the Spanish 'hombre' meaning 'man'). To win the game the ombre had to make more tricks than the others. This meant that the ombre had to make five tricks if one of his rivals made four, but only four, if his rivals made only three and two. In the game of ombre described in the poem. Belinda and the Baron are virtually the sole contestants,



since the third player is eclipsed by the other two. At the beginning of the game, each player receives nine cards. Noting her good hand, Belinda takes the initiative and declares herself the ombre.

ombre singly: Belinda is the ombre because she plays the game without a partner against the others.

30. **sacred nine:** The Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, who preside over poetry and the other arts. This number, the product of three (the perfect number) multiplied by itself, was regarded as magical. Pope probably implies that the number of cards dealt out to each player has some inner meaning.
33. **Matador:** Literally Spanish for *murderer*. The three best cards in ombre are so called because they are supposed to kill their rival cards.
34. Sylphs, like classical deities and angels, are very mindful of rank and hierarchy.
35. **succinct:** girded up (from the Latin *succinctus*—girt up). The Knave (servant) has his clothes girded up to show his menial position.
42. **halbert:** A kind of combination of spear and battle-axe.
- 45-46. Having in her hand three matadors, i.e., the ace of spades (spadillio), the two of spades (manillio) and the ace of clubs (basto), and a king, Belinda declares trumps. ‘The Ombre had the privilege of deciding which suit should be trumps.’ (Elwin). 46. Probably a facetious parody of the *divine fiat* : And God said, “Let there be light”: and there was light. *Genesis* 1.3.
- 47-50. Belinda starts the game. In order to draw out the trumps of her opponents, she leads her matadors. The tricks are won by Belinda with her ace of spades (spadillio). *Sable*: poetic diction for ‘dark’
49. **Spadillio:** From *Espadilla*, Spanish for the ace of spades
50. **Manillio:** The second in rank of the three matadors. ‘Where spades or clubs were trumps, Manillio was the two of trumps, and when hearts or diamonds were trumps, Manillio was the seven of trumps.’ (Elwin)
- 51-52. Belinda wins the next trick also with her two of spades (manillio).
- 53-55. Next Belinda leads Basto (the ace of clubs), the third highest ranking card, which counts as a trump, winning another trick over trump and a throw-away card from the third player.



- 55-64. Belinda leads her king of spades. She wins the Baron's knave and the knave of clubs of the third player.
61. *Pam*: The name given to the knave of clubs in the game of loo.
- 65-66. Thus far Belinda has made four tricks and one more would win the game for her. But now the Baron gains the initiative.
- 67-68. Belinda leads the king of clubs, which is trumped by her adversary's queen of spades.
68. **the imperial consort**: periphrasis for 'the queen'
- 75-78. The next three tricks are also won by the Baron with his powerful king, queen and knave, all of diamonds.
- 91-92. There remains only the last trick to be played, on which hangs victory or defeat for Belinda.
92. **codille**: If either of Belinda's rivals won the game, he would have given 'codille' to her. Codille is a term used at ombre when the game is lost by the person who challenges to win.
94. **nice**: In the older sense of *fine* or *delicate*
- 95-98. Belinda has the king of hearts, the card with the highest value in its suit. But she fears that the Baron may lead another diamond and give codille to the ombre. But luckily for her, the cards in her opponents' hands are both hearts. The Baron leads the ace of hearts and the game is over in Belinda's favour.
98. 'Unless hearts were trumps, the ace of hearts ranked after king, queen and knave.' (Elwin)
- 105-24. The elegant ceremonial of coffee which succeeds the game of cards takes on a new dimension when we recall that it is a parody of descriptions of fabulous feasts in the epics. Instead of the epic feasts – the beefsteak in Homer, the loads of sausages in Tassoni, the piled refectory fare in Boileau – there is in Pope the lacquer and silver ceremonial of coffee. The description is a delightful diminution of the epic feast. Notice how Pope succeeds in magnifying the coffee ritual.
106. The coffee beans were first roasted and then ground.
- 107-110. The references to Japan, China etc. serve to universalize the theme.



107. **shining altars of Japan:** lacquered or “japanned” tables
110. **China’s earth:** periphrasis for porcelain cups
117. A satirical reference to armchair politicians who frequented the coffee houses of the day
122. The story of Scylla and Nisus is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, VIII. King Nisus had a purple hair on which depended the safety of his kingdom. His daughter Scylla betrayed the secret to Minos of Crete with whom she had fallen in love. She stole the magical hair from her father’s head for which impiety she was turned into a bird. Note that the Scylla of the Scylla and Charybdis legend in the *Odyssey* is different.
128. **a two-edged weapon:** periphrasis for scissors
137. Note Pope’s use of the epic practice of doing a thing three times.
- 143-146. Remember that according to the Rosicrucian doctrine, mortals could enjoy ‘the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition....an inviolate preservation of chastity.’ (Pope’s dedicatory letter)
147. **farfex:** Latin for scissors
(Make a list of the other words used for scissors. What is their effect?)
- 149-152. These lines were added in 1714.
151. **Fate urged the shears:** i.e., the scissors (shears) were driven to complete the deed (of cutting the lock of hair). Note Pope’s use of the epic instrument of Fate.
153. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VI. 330.
But the ‘ethereal substance closed
Not long divisible
- 157-160. Note the effective use of anti-climax in these lines.
165. **Atalantis:** Mary Manly’s (1663-1724) notorious and libellous novel (1709) with its thinly disguised account of contemporary scandals.
171. **receives its date:** is brought to an end
173. **the labour of the gods:** According to the legend, Troy was built by Apollo, the sun god, and Poseidon, the sea god.



Check Your Progress 4

1. The elegant coffee ceremony which succeeds the game of cards is a parody. What is it a parody of and what effect does it produce?
2. What is the loss of Belinda's lock of hair compared to and why?

4.5 Canto IV

In the fourth canto Pope tries to give a deeper psychological explanation of the emotional state of Belinda. Deserted by Ariel and the sylphs, she is, ironically, helped by a gnome, Umbriel. Umbriel goes down into the earth – “his proper scene” – in search of the cave of Spleen. Pope, here, uses an allegorical method, describing how Umbriel imitates the descents to the underworld of epic heroes such as Odysseus and Aeneas.⁹

The description of the cave is vivid and introduces another supernatural element – the underworld. In her cave, Spleen sits like a queen and “sighs forever on her pensive bed.” Her attendants are Pain and Megrim (migraine). A perpetual vapour flies over the palace of Spleen. She is a symbol of ill nature and affectation. Her palace is full of bodies changed to various forms by Spleen. Everything is out of shape, displaying the ill-nature of Spleen.

Umbriel reaches her through this “fantastic band” and addresses her like Nisus in *Aeneid*. He begins by flattering her: She rules the female sex from fifteen to fifty; she is the source of “female wit”, hysterics, “poetic fit” which produces melancholic plays. (Here is an example of Pope's attack on some of his contemporaries). He requests the goddess to touch Belinda with “chagrin” so that she can face her sad fate. His purpose is to pray to Spleen to grant Belinda new weapons to meet with an entirely new kind of challenge.

Spleen is impressed by Umbriel's long, flattering speech, and grants his prayer. Umbriel is given a “wondrous bag”¹⁰ containing sighs, sobs, passions, bitter speech. He is also given a vial filled with “fainting fears, soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears.”

Rejoicing in his successful campaign, Umbriel comes back to the surface of earth to find Belinda lying in the arms of Thalestris in utter dejection. He opens the bag over

⁹ Journey to the underworld is an important epic convention. Recall the Hall of Hades in the *Odyssey*.

¹⁰ Recall the bag of winds given to Odysseus by Aeolus in the *Odyssey*. But the difference in the two situations is obvious. Odysseus was not supposed to open the bag. Here the bag must be opened to incite Belinda.



Belinda's head. The Furies (fiery emotions) rush into her mind and her body begins to burn with "more than mortal ire". The flame of her superhuman anger is fanned by the long, exhorting speech of Thalestris: "And all your honour in a whisper lost!" The loss of the lock would become a social scandal. Thalestris seeks the intervention of Sir Plume, her beau. Sir Plume, in a typically broken speech of a high society gentleman, asks the Baron to return Belinda's lock. The Baron declares in no uncertain terms that he intends to keep the lock till the moment of his death:

...while my nostrils draw the vital air,

This hand, which won it, shall for ever wear.

Finding the bag of no use, Umbriel breaks the vial over Belinda, and instantly her strategy takes a new turn. Finding her anger ineffectual, she uses the most potent of female weapons-tears. She appears in her "beauteous grief and with a sigh makes an appeal to the Baron, recalling the course of the whole unfortunate day and requesting him to return the lock. The canto ends with her appeal, leaving the reader, once again, in suspense.

4.5.1 Explanatory Notes and Comments (Lines)

1-15. The psychological state of Belinda is described in terms of an epic convention, a visit to the underworld.

1-2. Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI. 1-4:

But anxious cares already seized the queen:

She fed within her veins aflame unseen;

The hero's valour, acts, and birth inspire

Her soul with love, and fan the secret fire.

The Virgilian echo in the lines implies a secret fondness on the part of Belinda for the Baron and is therefore very appropriate.

8. **manteu:** a loose upper garment worn by women, also called a mantua

11-92. These lines were added in 1714.

13. The description of the descent into the infernal regions is a common feature of many epics. Pope seems to be closely following Ovid's description of the cave of Envy in *Metamorphoses*. II. Refer to also *Odyssey*, XI and *Aeneid*, VI.



16. **Spleen:** a malady which had for its symptoms lowness of spirits, or sulkiness, supposed to be caused by an excessive secretion of black bile or melancholy humour by the spleen. The most comprehensive treatise on the ailment is Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.
18. **vapour:** popular name for spleen
20. **the dreaded east:** the east wind was supposed to induce an attack of melancholia.
- 21-22. Burton's melancholies avoided light.
24. **Megrim:** migraine, severe headache
- 39-78. Look at the other medical' references in this canto. What do you gather from it about eighteenth century medical lore?
25. **wait:** wait upon
30. **lampoons:** satirical writings filled with malicious personal attacks
40. **strange phantoms:** the spleen was thought to induce hallucinations
43. **spires:** The reference is to Milton's description of the serpent approaching Eve:
.....erect
Amidst his circling spires
(*Paradise Lost*, IX)
- 40-54. Pope's lines on the cave of Spleen cleverly satirise the ailments of fashionable society. Comment on this passage as an aspect of Pope's art.
43. Pope is satirizing the scenic effects of contemporary opera and pantomime.
46. **machines:** stage devices for lowering celestial characters
51. **pipkin:** a small earthenware pot. In Homer's *Iliad* XVIII, Vulcan is described as making walking tripods.
52. 'Alludes to a real fact, a lady of distinction imagined herself in this condition.' (Pope's note).
53. The person referred to was one Dr. Edward Felling, the queen's chaplain.
56. **spleenwort:** a kind of fern. Suggested on the analogy of the golden bough which Aeneas carried as talisman in the underworld.



57. a parody of Nisus's speech to Luna in Virgil's *Aeneid*, IX.
59. Creative genius was supposed to be induced by melancholy.
64. pet. fit of ill-temper
67. 'Jealousy, envy, capriciousness, suspicion were traditional symptoms of the spleen.' (Cunningham).
69. **citron waters:** brandy flavoured with citron or lemon peel. 'There are numerous allusions in the literature of Pope's day to the fondness of women of fashion for this drink.' (Elwin)
71. **horns:** traditionally associated with cuckoldry
81. **A wondrous bag... Like that where once Ulysses held the winds:** '(Aeolus) presented me with a leather bag, made from the flayed skin of a full-grown ox, in which he had imprisoned the boisterous energies of all the Winds. For you must know that Zeus has made him Warden of the Gales, with power to lay or rouse them each at will.' (*Odyssey*, X. 19-22. Trans. E.V. Rieu).
89. **Thalestris:** queen of the Amazons; a race of warrior women; here the name stands for Mrs. Morley.
90. Unbound hair is conventionally regarded as a sign of mourning in epics.
100. The curl papers of ladies' hair used to be fastened with strips of pliant lead.
107. Reference to *Iliad*, XXII. where Hecuba foresees the death of Hector:
*Methinks already I behold thee slain,
And stretched beneath that fury of the plain.*
109. **degraded toast:** a lady whose health is no longer drunk at banquets.
114. **exposed through crystal:** set in a ring
117. **Hyde-Park Circus:** another name for the Ring (See Canto I).
118. **Bow:** The church of St. Mary le Bow is in Cheapside. 'In the sound of Bow' means the City, dominated by the mercantile classes.
121. **Sir Plume:** Sir George Browne was the original of Sir Plume.
124. **nice conduct:** affected flourishing
clouded cane: cane variegated with lighter and darker markings.



- 127-130. Sir Plume's speech is set in a lower key. Examine its features. What is its impact on the reader?
128. **Zounds:** The oath is a corruption of God's wounds. Refer to Sir Anthony in Sheridan's *The Rivals*.
133. *Iliad*, I.
Now by this sacred sceptre, hear me swear,
Which never more shall leaves or blossom bear,
Which severed from the trunk (as I from thee)
On the bare mountain left its parent tree...
135. **honours:** 'a Virgilian word, evoking pious observances and the trophies of battle. (Cunningham)
147. Reference to *Iliad*, XVIII. Containing the lament for Patroclus addressed by Achilles to his mother Thetis.
156. **bohea:** The name was given in the beginning of the 19th century to the finest kinds of black tea.
164. **Poll:** parrot

Check Your Progress 5

1. Discuss the use of allegory in the cave scene in Canto IV.

4.6 Canto V

Canto Fourth paves the way for Clarissa's speech in Canto Fifth. The purpose of Clarissa's speech is to state more clearly the moral of the poem. In a way, she performs in the poem the same task of reconciliation which Pope was requested by his friend, Caryll, to do between the two feuding families. It is ironically dramatic that Clarissa, who supplies the scissors, should be assigned the task of putting the quarrel in the right perspective.

When the arsenal supplied by Spleen fail to have any effect on the Baron ("Fate and Jove stopped the Baron's ears"). Clarissa steps into the fray gracefully and points out the vanity of beauty and self-worship. She also points out the powerlessness of beauty in certain situations:



*How vain all these glories, all our pains,
Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains:
Beauty cannot charm the small-pox or chase old age away.
Time will have its toll on beauty:
.....frail beauty must decay,
Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray:*

Only “good sense” and “good humour” can prevail where anger and screams and tears fail. It is not beauty but merit which is lasting and more powerful:

*Beauties in vain their pretty eyes roll;
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.*

Although Clarissa’s speech is well-timed and well-meant, it fails to cause any applause. Belinda is angered further as Thalestris calls Clarissa a “prude”, she declares war openly: “To arms, to arms!” and unleashes the furies of battle. Pope gives an epic treatment to the battle, thus adducing it into a farcical fight. Although he refers to the Olympian gods and goddesses, elegant ladies and gentlemen engage in a rough and tumble fight more like children than epic warriors. Umbriel watches the battle gleefully and claps his “glad wings”. The erotic quality of physical contact is also suggested in undertones. The Beaus “die” at the looks of beautiful eyes of the female combatants. The hyperbolic aspect of the combat is suggested by the memorable line:

One died in metaphor, and one in song.

In the beginning of the battle, the ladies are on a winning spree because of Thalestris surprise war-cry. But soon the effect of the surprise attack begins to lose its power because.

*Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air.
Weighs the men ‘s wits against the lady’s hair.”¹¹*

At last, “the wits” prove too much for “the hairs”. Unable to defeat “the bold lord” (the Baron), Belinda throws snuff on the Baron’s face, causing his collapse in a fit of sneezing. Then she draws “a deadly bodkin” from her side and demands her lock of hair. The Baron, although defeated, makes his last plea:

¹¹ An epic convention where the gods interfere and intervene in human affairs.



.....let me survive,
And burn in Cupid's flame, but burn alive.

Belinda cries: "Restore the Lock!"¹² and the vaulted roofs of the Palace are reverberated by the words. She is compared to Othello's demand for the lost handkerchief. But the irony is that the bone of contention is lost in the bustle of battle:

*The lock, obtained with guilt, and kept with pain,
In every place is sought but sought in vain:*

Pope invents the accidental loss of the lock to provide a suitable mock-heroic ending which is also a compliment to Belinda. The lock is supposed to have flown to the sky to become a new constellation, immortalizing the beauty of Belinda. Ultimately the victory is Belinda's since her name is now written amidst the stars.

The poem ends rather abruptly, making the attitude of Pope ambivalent. The poem is remarkable for the balance of its style and the description of things. It is also remarkable for Pope's witty use of the possibilities of the mock-heroic. But it is more remarkable for the ambivalence of its moral attitudes epitomized in Belinda. It is not certain which attitude prevails. Belinda is beautiful and dazzling, but vain, and she lacks "good sense" and "good humour." Pope seems to forgive her faults because of her extraordinary beauty. Perhaps he was supposed to have some sympathy with Belinda and her world to be able to write about it with such poise and accuracy. The sympathy is clearly reflected in the last lines of the poem, where Pope offers the prize of immortality to Belinda to soothe her grieved heart:

*This lock the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And 'midst the stars inscribed Belinda's name.*

The poem is a proof to Pope's promise to Belinda. And the credit goes to the great art of the poet rather than to the dazzling beauty of Belinda.

4.6.1 Explanatory Notes and Comments (Lines)

1-2. *Aeneid*, 1V.636ff

Clarissa: 'A new character introduced in the subsequent editions, to open more clearly the moral of the poem.' (Pope's note). Clarissa, who appears also at Canto III. 127, is new only in the sense that here she has a speaking part.

¹² In a paraphrase the poet gives the history of the deadly weapon, another epic practice.



6. **While Anna begged and Dido raged in vain:** an allusion to *Aeneid*. In deference to the bidding of the gods that he should leave Carthage and found a new city. Aeneas forsook Dido despite her passionate reproaches and the pleadings of Anna, her sister.
- 7-36. The only addition made in 1717.
- 9-34. 'Parody of the speech of *Sarpendon to Glaucus* in Homer.' (Pope's note).
14. According to accepted practice, front-boxes were occupied by ladies while the men took the side-boxes. Refer to Gay's *The Toilette*:
Not shall side boxes watch my restless eyes,
And as they catch the glance, in rows arise
With humble bows; nor white-gloved beaux approach
In crowds behind to guard me to my coach.
34. Does the moral strike you as incongruous with the lighter touch of the satiric parts?
34-44. Is there a more serious aspect to the war of the sexes?
40. **whalebones:** gowns were given a 'stiff support by a petticoat, the hoops of which were made of whalebone.
47. The reference is to Homer's *Iliad*. Pallas is Pallas Athene, the Greek goddess of industry, wisdom and war. She is represented generally by a visage in which masculine firmness is dominant. Mars is the Roman god of war. Latona was the mother of Applo and Artemis. She underwent much persecution. Hermes, also called Mercury, was the messenger of the gods. Note the comparisons to Belinda and the Baron. What effect do these evoke?
53. **sconce:** fort
64. 'The words in a song in the Opera of *Camilla*.' (Pope's note). Composed by Marc Antonia Buononcini, *Camilla* was first performed in England in 1700.
71. A common epic device. Reference to the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*.
74. the hair tips the scales
88. Pick out the contexts in which *bodkin* is used in Cantos 4 and 5. The puns on this single word epitomize Pope's satiric method.
89. 'in imitation of the progress of Agamemnon's sceptre in Homer.' (Pope's note). The reference is to the Trojan War in the *Iliad*.



105. *Othello*, Act III, Sc.IV.
122. **Dried butterflies:** a satire on natural history collections.
casuistry: lengthy scholastic quibbling to twist cases of conscience and duty.
125. The reference is to Romulus, the first king of Rome, who disappeared in a storm. It was rumoured that he had flown to heaven.
127. **liquid:** in the Latin sense of *clear*
127. An allusion to the transfiguration of Julius Caesar into a star (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) 129-30. To ensure the safe return of her husband from battle, Berenice, wife of Ptolemy III, dedicated a lock of her hair to the gods. When the lock was stolen, the court astrologer explained that it had been transformed into a constellation.
136. **Rosamonda's lake:** a frequent resort of lovers in St. James' Park.
137. **Partridge:** John Partridge was a ridiculous star-gazer, who never failed to predict the downfall of Pope and the King of France.
138. **Galileo's eyes:** the telescope
142. **bright Nymph:** Belinda
143. **sphere:** In Pope's time *sphere* was pronounced to rhyme with *hair*.
- 149-150. The transformation of Belinda's lock into a constellation provides a fitting finale to the mock-heroic atmosphere of the poem.

Check Your Progress 6

1. What is the purpose of Clarissa's speech? Does it achieve its objectives?
2. The poem ends on an ambivalent note. Do you think Belinda has the poet's sympathies?

5. TO SUM UP

Augustan literature was deeply rooted in society. English society had crossed a watershed in the middle of the seventeenth century. The social climate had become quite unstable with the explosion of new conceptions of religion and politics, and complex but unstable literary fashions in poetry and prose. These divisive trends had to be rejected in favour of modes



which would unite rather than divide men. The mood was more inclined towards harmony rather than discord. Hence, the Augustan writer had his task cut out. Pope was a leading figure in this movement towards balance, grace, and harmony. The preferred weapon for the Augustan writer was the satire, designed not so much to hurt as to correct and reorient. It held a mirror to the society, especially the high society of the lords and ladies. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope criticises the frivolity of the upper classes. To make them see the folly of their actions and laugh at it, Pope used the novel form of the Mock-epic. Pope used a heightened elevated epic style, in short, a highly dignified style, to a frivolous subject to mock at it. However, the poem seems to end on an ambivalent note. There are no victors because the lock is not recovered. But metaphorically, the victory belongs to Belinda for her locks are now immortalised as a new constellation. It seems that Pope finally forgives Belinda her frailties.

6. FURTHER READING

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Mack, Maynard. *The Garden and the City*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1969.

<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1688/satire-in-18th-century-british-society-alexander-popes-the-rape-of-the-lock-and-jonathan-swifts-a-modest-proposal>



GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

by
Jonathan Swift

Ms. Farida Nayyar

1. OBJECTIVES

Students are advised to read *Gulliver's Travels* carefully before going through this study material. As the book is full of references to contemporary events, each chapter is summarized in detail and followed by a critical commentary. After going through this study material, you should be able to;

- comprehend the overall plot and structure of the book;
- identify the numerous topical issues of eighteenth-century England;
- appreciate different elements of Swift's narrative style; and
- discuss the satirical elements in *Gulliver's Travels*.

2. JONATHAN SWIFT: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND WORKS (1667-1745)

Jonathan Swift was the son of a Jonathan Swift who had followed a more prosperous older brother, Godwin, from Yorkshire to Ireland. Jonathan's career was brief, and he died several months before his son Jonathan was born (1667). Jonathan Swift was thus brought up by his uncle Godwin. He was sent to Kilkenny school, and at fourteen, entered Trinity College, Dublin as a pensioner. In 1688 Godwin, who had lost his fortune, died and Swift was left without resources. He left Ireland and became a kind of secretary to the celebrated diplomat Sir William Temple, then living in retirement at Moor Park in Surrey, about forty miles from London. Temple's father had been a friend of Godwin Swift; Temple himself had known the Swifts in Ireland and Lady Temple was said to be a connection of Swift's mother.

Life at Moor Park was of immense value to Swift. He grew familiar with public affairs and with the rich experiences of his patron. He also had time to read and to try his hand at writing. Nevertheless, he resented his dependent status and was disappointed that



Temple had found no suitable place for him. In 1694, Swift took the only course that seemed to promise advancement and was ordained. Temple obtained for him the prebend of Kilroot, near Belfast in Ireland. There he stayed for two years, returning to Temple in 1696. At Moor Park in 1696 he edited Temple's correspondence, and in 1697 wrote *The Battle of the Books*, which was published in 1704, together with *A Tale of a Tub*, his celebrated satire on 'corruption in religion and learning.' At Moor Park, Swift met Esther Johnson, the daughter of a servant or companion of Temple's sister, with whom he formed the lasting attachment of his life. On the death of Temple in 1699, Swift went again to Ireland, was given a prebend in St. Patrick's, Dublin. But Swift frequently visited England and was by now on familiar terms with wits and ministers. He became acquainted with Addison, Steele, Congreve, and Halifax, and was on friendly terms with Dryden and Pope.

Swift wrote a series of pamphlets on Church questions in 1708-09. These pamphlets show his conviction that the Whigs were unfriendly to the Church; and when the Whigs came into power in 1708, he knew his hopes of becoming a bishop in England were vain, and he retreated to Ireland. When the Tories came back to power in 1710, Swift returned to London and the events of the following three years, with all his thoughts and hopes, are set down in his letters to Esther Johnson and Mrs Dingley. These later came to be known as the *Journal to Stella*. The Tories made serious efforts to bring the war with France to an end. Swift composed, in November and December 1711, two formidable pamphlets in favour of peace. By this time, he had attained a position of great importance as a serious writer, and the authority he possessed and the respect he received gave him much pleasure. Recognition of his services was, however, made difficult by doubts about his orthodoxy. Queen Anne was hostile towards him. At last, in 1713, he was made Dean of St. Patrick's. This was a promotion, but it put an end to his life-time ambition of becoming a Bishop in England and it once more banished him to Ireland. His health was bad and his reception in Dublin was not friendly. He again returned to London but the Queen's death in 1714 settled the matter. Swift could hope for nothing, with the Whigs coming back to power. He once again went back to Dublin.

Upon his return to Dublin Swift found trouble of another kind. His long, peaceful association with Stella (Esther Johnson) for whom Swift had a deep affection and respect was disturbed by a strange complication, A rich heiress, Esther Van Homrigh, with whom Swift had become quite friendly on his visits to London fell passionately in love with him, despite a vast disparity in age. Swift was forty-three and Esther was supposed to be just twenty. In their friendly intercourse she was 'Vanessa' and he Cadenus, an anagram for 'decanes' i.e. "dean"; and to her he wrote a poem *Cadenus and Vanessa* in 1713, which was not meant for



publication. A couple of years later, on the death of her mother, Vanessa left England to settle down in Ireland. By coming to Ireland, Vanessa caused a lot of embarrassment to Swift and anguish to Stella. Vanessa died in 1723, and Stella in 1728. Beyond this, almost nothing is known about the relations between Swift and the two women who figure in his life. Despite all this trouble in his private and personal life Swift occupied himself, 1714 onwards, with Irish affairs. He deeply resented the unfair treatment of Ireland at the hands of the Whigs. The pamphlets relating to Ireland form a very important part of Swift's works. The series began with *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture, in cloaths, etc.* (1720), advocating a scheme for boycotting English fabrics. This was followed by his famous *Drapier's Letters* by which he prevented the introduction of 'Wood's Half-pence' into Ireland. He came to England in 1726, visited Pope and Gray, and dined with Sir Robert Walpole, to whom he addressed a letter of remonstrance on Irish affairs, with no result. He published *Gulliver's Travels* in the same year and paid a last visit to England in 1727, when the death of George I created a vague hope of dislodging Walpole. He wrote some of his most famous tracts and characteristic poems during his last years in Ireland.

A Short View of the State of Ireland (1728) gives a touching account of the condition of the country and *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of the Poor People from becoming a burthen to their Parents, or the Country and for making them Beneficial to the Public* (1729) suggests that the poverty of the people should be relieved by the sale of their children as food for the rich. The pamphlet reveals with bitterness and irony the Irish helplessness and the political insensitivity.

In 1731, Swift wrote *Verses on his own Death* in which, with mingled pathos and humour he posthumously reviewed his own life and work. *A Complete Collection of Polite and Ingenious Conversation* was written in 1738 and the ironical, *Direction to Servants* in 1731. During all these years he kept up his correspondence with a number of literary figures and attracted to himself a small circle of friends and was adored by people. He set up a monument of Schomburg (a noble military General) in the Cathedral at his own expense, spent a third of his income on charities, and saved up another third to found a charitable institution at his death; St Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles.

The symptom of illness from which Swift suffered all his life, (a form of vertigo) became very marked in 1738 and for a long time before his death he was insane. He died in 1745 and was buried by the side of Stella in St. Patrick's, Dublin. The ironical fact about the extraordinary life of Swift is that though he was born in Ireland, which was an accident, he did not want to spend his entire life there because he knew that Ireland was not the land of big opportunity, suitable for a man of his capabilities and talent. He lived a life that might



almost be described as a continual flight from Ireland and a constant return to it, compelled by circumstances. Yet he became, in the end, a ‘national hero,’ and an ‘Irish Patriot.’ During the last thirty years of his life, he became thoroughly identified with Irish life, mainly through his brilliant pamphlets, which reveal the genuineness and the intensity of his indignation at oppression and unfairness. But, ironically too, it was this intensity, this ferocity in his writing that alienated from him writers like Dr. Johnson, Macaulay, Thackeray and so many others. Yet another curious irony is that nearly all his works were published anonymously and for only one, *Gulliver’s Travels* did he receive any payment (£ 200).

It may be added, as a satiric touch, that not until very recently (1939-59), was any serious attempt made to produce full, true and accurate editions of his writings.

3. DETAILED SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS*

3.1 BOOK 1: “A VOYAGE TO LILLIPUT”

Chapter One

In Book I, Gulliver gives an account of himself and his family; his education and the inducements to travel. Gulliver was the son of a man who lived in Nottinghamshire. At the age of fourteen he was sent to Emanuel Cottage, Cambridge, where he studied for three years. Because of his father’s inability to maintain him at college any longer, Gulliver was made an apprentice to Mr. Bates, a London surgeon. Along with his medical studies, Gulliver pursued navigation and other ‘parts of the mathematics’ useful to those who intend to travel. For two years, Gulliver studied physics at Leyden University. After Leyden, Gulliver served as a surgeon for three and half years on a ship called *Swallow*. He married Mary Burton, daughter of a hosier in Newgate Street, London. He again joined Mr Bates as a medical practitioner but, after two years, when Mr. Bates died Gulliver gave up his medical career. He went back to the sea for several voyages and at last he sailed on May 4, 1699, on board the *Antelope*, under Captain William Prichard, to the South Sea. Near Van Dieman’s Land, the ship was driven violently north-west by a storm and wrecked. Gulliver was thrown to the mercy of the waves, but he managed to swim, until he could touch firm ground and wade ashore. Exhausted, he fell asleep. He slept for about nine hours. When he woke up, he attempted to rise but found that he could not move as his arms, legs and hair were fastened to the ground. He was surrounded by human creatures not six inches high. These creatures carried tiny bows and arrows in their hands and tiny quivers on their backs. When Gulliver tried to rise,



breaking free from the thin ropes that bound him, the tiny people discharged such a volley of stinging arrows at him that he thought it more prudent to lie still until nightfall when, under the cover of darkness, it would be easier for him to escape.

The Lilliputians erected a platform from which, presently, a little person who seemed to be a person of importance, made a long speech addressed to Gulliver. Gulliver, however, did not understand what he was saying. But the speaker understood Gulliver's signs indicating that he was hungry. By the speaker's orders, little ladders were set up against Gulliver's sides and delicious food and wine were brought for him. The little creatures walked all over his body and poured food and wine into his mouth.

Influenced by a drug that had perhaps been put into his wine, Gulliver soon fell asleep again. When he woke up, he found that he was bound to a sort of low wagon, which was being drawn by fifteen hundred horses, each about four and half inches high. Gulliver was being taken to Mildendo, the capital of Lilliput. In the city, he was housed in an abandoned temple; very large but no longer considered sacred because of an unnatural murder committed there some years before. To this building, Gulliver was chained by one leg and had the liberty to walk forward and backward in a semicircle as the chains that held him were two yards long.

Critical Comments

1. Swift makes a serious effort to create an illusion of reality for an absolutely imaginary figure. Gulliver is projected as a real, middle-class Englishman having a definite place of birth, education, and connections. This has yet another advantage: this is a hint that we are not supposed to identify Swift with Gulliver.
2. Swift keeps everything in Lilliput proportionate to the six-inch size of the tiny people; the tallest trees are seven feet high; the largest buildings are four or five feet high and so on.
3. The "unnatural murder" is perhaps supposed to refer to the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the temple, therefore, refers to Westminster Abbey, where Charles was condemned to die. This brings us to the political element in *Gulliver's Travels*. Tory and Whig are the names of two great political parties in England. These parties had their beginning at the time of the civil war of the 17th century. The Cavaliers and the Royalists, who were on the side of the King in his confrontation with the Parliament and the church, came to be known as the Tories. The Tory party's modern incarnation is the Conservative party. As the new name of the Tory suggests, this



party is against change. It stands for retaining the constituted authority, order in church and state, and for opposing concessions in the direction of greater religious liberty and growing demands of liberalism or for widening the basis of parliamentary representation.

Those who wrested, in 1648, the government from the Royalists came to be known as Whigs. The Whigs, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, rebelled against the authority of the King and his designs to dissolve the parliament. Since the middle of the 19th century the term Whig has been superseded by Liberal but is now occasionally used to express adherence to moderate or antiquated liberal principles, and very limited fondness for liberty. The Whigs were, in the 17th century, supporters of Puritanism and against the Church of England.

It was the politics of the Whigs in his own time that made Swift a Tory sympathizer. The Whigs showed too little interest in Swift's efforts for the Irish Church in 1707-9 and that perhaps made him turn against them. He re-joined the Scriblerus club, an association of all the leading Tory writers. Pope, Gray, and Arbuthnot were some of those writers. In *Gulliver's Travels*, the Whigs are an object of mockery while glowing tributes are paid to the famous contemporary Tories.

Chapter Two

Once on his feet Gulliver looked around and saw Mildendo. The place was beautiful, it looked like a continued garden, like a painted scene of a city in a theatre. The entire prospect was very entertaining, but Gulliver was bugged by the very embarrassing problem of how and where to disburden himself, which he had not done for almost two days. He could think of nothing else except to go inside the house, as far as the chain would allow, and relieve himself there. This was an unclean thing to do but he could not help it. On creeping back out of the house, he found that the entire Royal family was there to pay him a visit. The Emperor was taller than all the other men in his company and very majestic. The Emperor and Gulliver got on well together, having taken a liking for each other at the very first meeting, but no conversation was possible between them as there was no language they knew in common. As the news of the presence of Gulliver, the man-mountain spread in Lilliput, crowds of curious people flocked to his house to see him. This resulted in a lot of chaos and the King passed a direction according to which no one could come near his house without a license from the court; whereby the secretaries of State got considerable fees.

Gulliver became a national problem and a subject of many high level and secret debates. There were apprehensions of all kinds; what would happen if Gulliver should break loose? Would maintaining him empty the treasury or cause famine in the land? Should he be



starved to death? Poisoned? Would so large a carcass cause a plague in the city and the whole country? The Emperor and his council, however, were convinced of Gulliver's goodwill and that he meant no harm when they heard the reports about Gulliver's leniency to the six soldiers who were delivered up to him for shooting at him with arrows. Being thus convinced, the Emperor sent out national orders about supplying the needs of the man-mountain and appointed six scholars to teach him his language. The King had Gulliver's pocket searched. The Lilliputians were terrified when Gulliver waved his sword in the sun and shot from his pistol.

Critical Comments

1. Swift has often been bitterly criticized for writing about the natural functions of man. Swift did so purposely. The book aims at removing man's romantic misconceptions about himself, by emphasizing his sheer physicality, his being basically an animal.
2. Swift's presentation of the King is a calculated irony since George 1, who reigned from 1714-1727, was gross and unattractive.
3. The search of Gulliver's pockets is a satirical reference to the Whig's practice of prying into the public and private affairs of the Tories, with the intention of harassing them.

Chapter Three

Gulliver was getting tired of living like a prisoner, and he knew that the only hope of getting freedom was to gain the Lilliputian's trust in himself. By his gentleness and good behaviour, Gulliver managed to convince the people of Lilliput that he was harmless. The King one day decided to entertain him with country shows performed at his court. Gulliver was highly impressed, particularly by the dexterity of the rope-dancers. He learned that only those who aspired to high offices were allowed to enter those rope-dancing competitions. How skillful they were at rope-dancing qualified them for high offices. He also learnt that many candidates broke their limbs in the attempt. By far, the most skillful in that art was Flimnap, the Treasurer. Another contest, for which prizes were silken threads of blue, red and green, tested the skill of the candidates in leaping over or creeping under a stick held by the King. Gulliver, in his turn, entertained the court by making the King's cavalry test their horses' strength by jumping over his hand or foot. At the King's request he stood like a Colossus, with legs apart, while the Lilliputian army staged a grand parade beneath him. The young officers were highly amused to see the vents in Gulliver's breeches.



By this time everyone, except one member of the Royal Council, was in favour of granting Gulliver freedom from captivity. Skyresh Bolgolam, for some unknown reason, considered Gulliver his personal enemy. Bolgolam too consented to free Gulliver but after dictating all kinds of conditions. Gulliver was, according to these conditions, to perform some duties for Lilliput in return for which he would be allowed to have his food and drink; enough to feed 1728 Lilliputians.

Critical Comments

1. The butt of ridicule here is Flimnap, who represents Robert Walpole, who was the leader of the Whig government and dominated the Irish policy for twenty-one years (1721-42). He remained in power not because of his abilities as a minister but because he was politically agile.
2. Though Gulliver is naive and uncritical, it is obvious that irony is implied: though Gulliver does not recognize this as such in the statement that rope-dancing, leaping and creeping are tests and skills required for responsible government positions or for honours from the Emperor. Those who aspire for high offices are required to be servile and to be a source of amusement. They are not supposed to be conscious of dignity and self-respect. In other words, Swift's observation is that courts do not bestow their favours on considerations of merit or character but on those who have neither morality nor capability; the court's favourites are the most corrupt and contemptible specimens of mankind.
3. Skyresh Bolgolam represents an English lord and member of parliament who had referred to Swift as a clergyman "hardly suspected of being a Christian." This lord was hostile to Swift for reasons quite unknown to Swift, except perhaps because Swift made him conscious of his inferiority.
4. Swift's purpose in this book is to expose man's hollow and utterly false claims to rationality and morality, in particular of those men who wield power and authority.

Chapter Four

Gulliver's first act after regaining his freedom was to make a tour of the city of Mildendo. He observed that the city was an exact square, 500 feet on each side, protected by a wall two-and-a-half feet high and eleven inches wide. The entire city was very neatly planned, with the Royal palace at the center. Two streets running across the city were five feet wide while the by-lanes and alleys were just twelve to eighteen inches wide. The population of the town was five thousand strong. The houses were from three to five stories. The shops and markets



looked well stocked and prosperous. Gulliver could walk only in the principal streets and that too very carefully, for fear of causing damage to the houses or trampling over the little inhabitants of those streets. By making two stools to stand on, Gulliver was able to step over the palace enclosure which was five feet high and admire the beauty of the Royal grounds and the apartments.

A fortnight later, Reldresal, principal Secretary of Private affairs, visited Gulliver. He told Gulliver that Lilliput had two serious problems: a violent division at home and the danger of invasion by a most powerful enemy from abroad. As to the first, he said, there have been, for about seventy moons (months) two rival parties in the Empire, under the names of Tramecksan, and Slamecksan; whose members could be distinguished by the high or low heels on their feet. It was alleged that the Tramecksan or High-Heel principles were more in keeping with time-honoured traditions and the ancient constitution; they were also in the majority. However, power was wholly on the side of the Low-Heels, the Slamecksans, as the King and his administration currently ruling the country belonged to this party. The heir to the crown, however, was inclined to go with the High-Heels, as the heel on one of his feet was a little higher than the other one, which gave him a hobble in his gait.

These domestic divisions in Lilliput were involved with a related quarrel between Big-Endians and Little-Endians, a quarrel dating back to an edict of the present ruler's grandfather, ordering the people under the threat of severe punishment to break their eggs at the smaller end instead of at the larger end, as was dictated by tradition. Resistance to this innovation had caused six rebellions, in which one Emperor had lost his life and another his crown and 1,000 Lilliputians had died. The Emperor of Blefuscu, calling the new manner of breaking eggs a fundamental religious error had, for generations, given refuge to Big-Indian exiles from Lilliput. Blefuscu had been preparing to help the exiles wrest power from the present monarch and reimpose the ancient discipline on Little-Indian Lilliput for 36 moons (months), Reldresal reported. A costly and bloody war had been going on over the question between the two nations and, at the moment, Blefuscu was all prepared to attack Lilliput with a powerful fleet of battleships. Reldresal told Gulliver that he had come on behalf of the Emperor to inform him of the state of affairs and to seek his help. Gulliver, on his part, promised to defend the Emperor and his state from all invaders.

Critical Comments

1. Gulliver, on inspecting the town, becomes convinced about the ingenuity and intelligence of the Lilliputians. He is all admiration for the Lilliputians who impress him as excellent town-planners, architects and as people with a developed aesthetic



sensibility. At this stage, Gulliver is hardly bothered to find out whether the Lilliputians have a developed moral character as well, to match their intelligence and ingenuity. The question is a revealing ironical comment on the British character.

2. The High-Heels stand for the Tories or the High-Church party; the Low-Heels for the Whigs, or the Low-Church party. George I favoured the Whigs; the Prince of Wales (afterwards James II) indicated partiality to both parties, which shows a divided mind, hence his hobble.
3. As Lilliput is England, so Blefuscu is France. The Big-Endians represent the Roman Catholics of England and the Little-Endians, the Protestants. The exiled Catholics and Tories from England received refuge in France or Blefuscu, from which England received threats of invasion. This episode regarding the Endians accounts for over 150 years of English history, from the time of breaking off relations with the Roman Church and the establishment of the Church of England. Charles I was the Emperor who lost his life as a result of the conflict between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. The same conflict forced James II to go into exile.

The pretty country of the Lilliputians is a victim of religious prejudices which cause bloodshed and all kinds of brutal acts. The surface of the book is comic but at its centre is tragedy transformed through style and tone into icy irony. Behind the gay, comic, fanciful inventiveness of words and episodes, behind all the mirth and liveliness, lies Swift's understanding of the dark truth about man. He provides to serious/tragic matters a cover of comedy, because his aim is to make us fully understand and experience the central truth: man's weakness and irrationality. He makes us laugh so that we may not give way to depression, that is to enable us to better grasp what he is trying to convey. Irony is intended when Reldresal tells Gulliver that the two great Empires of Blefuscu and Lilliput make up the entire universe.

Chapter Five

True to his promise, Gulliver started putting into practice his plans for preventing the Blefusculian invasion of Lilliput. Looking through his pocket-glass, across the 800-yard channel that separated the two countries, Gulliver espied 50 battleships, standing ready to sail. Gulliver immediately ordered a quantity of very strong cable and iron bars with which he made big hooks. Armed with these, he waded as far as he could and then swam across the deeper part of the channel to reach the Blefuscu country. With the help of the hooks and cables, Gulliver fastened together all the fifty ships and swam back to Lilliput, dragging behind him the entire bunch of ships which could have caused havoc to it. The Emperor, who



was watching the whole operation, conferred on Gulliver the rank of Nardac (Man of highest honour). The Emperor desired that Gulliver would take some other opportunity to capture the remaining ships of the enemy and reduce Blefuscu to absolute slavery. Gulliver, however, refused to co-operate in this with the emperor for he said he, “would never be an instrument of bringing a brave and free people into slavery.”

The Emperor took offence and began to intrigue against Gulliver. The Emperor was further offended by Gulliver’s friendly attitude towards the ambassadors from Blefuscu who arrived to make a treaty with Lilliput. The King did not approve of Gulliver’s promptly accepting an invitation to visit the Blefuscu court. Gulliver noticed definite signs of coldness in the Emperor’s treatment when he sought his permission for the visit. This coldness, he later discovered, was the result of the treachery of Flimnap and Bolgolam, who had persuaded the Emperor that Gulliver’s friendliness to Blefuscuans signalled disaffection for the Emperor.

Gulliver next made an enemy of the Emperor. At the dead of one night, it was discovered that the Queen’s apartments were on fire. Gulliver rushed to put out the fire, but finding no other means urinated upon it to extinguish the fire.

Comment

Lilliput is full of characters clearly identifiable as personages in British politics. The Queen’s horror at Gulliver’s well-intended help has usually been considered a reference to Queen Anne’s horror at Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* and her consequent refusal to make him a Bishop - all despite the fact that Swift’s book supported Anne’s Church of England against both the Catholics and Dissenters.

Here Gulliver does what is necessary to preserve the palace, using whatever means are available to him. Also, he does not share the religious prejudices of the nation and is unwilling to be inhuman for the sake of what appeared as senseless dogma to him. He cannot also see the importance of the ambition of the King. Big End, Small End - they all appear petty to him. He also does not accept the distinction between friend and enemy defined by the limits of the nations. Once again, common humanity is what he sees. At the same time, from the perspective of the Lilliputians, he is a foreigner, and if he gets friendly with the enemy, how can he be trusted? The truth of the matter is that Gulliver does not allow himself to be blindly used by any party and therefore loses everybody’s trust. This seems to be Swift’s description of his own situation and of other great men.



Chapter Six

In this chapter, Gulliver records graphic details about the life of the inhabitants of Lilliput, their learning, laws, and customs, how they educated children and how he himself lived in that country.

Gulliver found some of the laws and customs of Lilliput “peculiar.” False accusers were put to death after the accused had proved their innocence, and those falsely accused were reimbursed four-fold for all charges, from the accuser’s estates. Fraud was thought a greater crime than theft because it took advantage of trust, whereas one could easily guard against mere theft.

The Lilliputians rewarded keepers of the law, just as they punished the law breaker. In choosing people for government jobs, those with good morals were given preference to those with great abilities. Moral virtues of truth, justice, and temperance were considered to be higher and essential qualification than extraordinary intelligence. Disbelief in providence barred a man from public office. To Lilliputians ingratitude was a capital crime, for he who injured his benefactor must be an enemy to all men. They considered children under no obligation to parents for bringing them into the world, nor were parents allowed to rear their own children. Public nurseries and schools cared for the children from infancy and educated them in ways appropriate to the rank to which they belonged. There were separate nurseries and schools for boys and girls.

Gulliver gives an account of how hundreds of servants cooked and served his food, sewed his clothes, and generally looked after him. Gulliver defends the wife of Flimnap against malicious gossip with mock seriousness.

Chapter Seven

Gulliver came to know of an intrigue against him that had been going on for two months. He was taken by surprise at finding that what he had only heard of courts and princes, he was going to experience in Lilliput. An intrigue led by Flimnap and Bolgolam had succeeded in bringing charges of treason and other capital crimes against him. He was impeached for treason for “maliciously, traitorously declining to annihilate Blefuscuian power after he had captured its fleet; for aiding, abetting, and comforting” the ambassadors of Blefuscu; for preparing to travel to Blefuscu with “only verbal license from his Imperial Majesty” and thereby to “aid, comfort, and abet the Emperor of Blefuscu, so late an enemy.”

Flimnap and Bolgolam demanded “the most painful and ignominious death” for the traitor. According to some suggestions, he deserved to be blinded or starved to death.



Gulliver considered what he might do. He eventually decided to flee to the court of Blefuscu. He managed to escape to Blefuscu, where he was received with royal honours.

Critical Comments

1. Swift is again concerned with the events surrounding the Treaty of Utrecht and the conduct of the Whigs after the death of Queen Anne. He refers to the charges of treason brought against some Tory leaders, and their connection with French diplomats towards a peace treaty (1711-1772) between England and France, carried out without written authorization by the Queen.
2. The proposal to blind Gulliver shows the monstrous cruelty of the puny Lilliputians and their fatuous vanity and ingratitude. The whole chapter is an example of nice irony on the ways of the court. Gulliver's flight seems to represent Bolingbroke's escape to France, just as the Whigs were about to arrest him. Bolingbroke was a Tory leader and a friend of Swift's.

Chapter Eight

Three days after landing in Blefuscu, Gulliver happened to find a boat which he supposed had been lost by some ship in a storm. With great effort and with much help from the people of Blefuscu, he brought the boat to the shore and fitted it out for his departure. Meanwhile, the Emperor of Blefuscu was diplomatically rejecting the demands from Lilliput that Gulliver be returned for punishment as a traitor. He also proposed to Gulliver to stay on in Blefuscu, but Gulliver had now grown wise enough not to put his trust in princes. He also perceived that the Emperor and the ministers were glad to know that he would soon be gone.

Besides provisions for his journey, Gulliver put in his boat some small cattle and sheep of Blefuscu. He was, however, not allowed to take along with him Blefuscuans, even with their own desire and consent. Not long after sailing from the island, Gulliver was picked by an English merchant ship, whose captain could not believe Gulliver's story until he saw the small cattle. On April 13, 1702, Gulliver arrived home in England and earned some money by showing his little animals to rich people and by finally selling the animals to them. The little animals proved to be a welcome addition to the wool industry of England. Gulliver was happy to be reunited with his family. He earned enough money to leave his family in comfortable circumstances before he was prepared to set out on the next voyage.

Critical Comments

1. The Lilliputian experience adds to Gulliver's education about the ways of the world, of the princes and the courts.



2. Gulliver's coming back to his family and the reference to the introduction of the little animals to the woollen industry of England adds to the realism and verisimilitude of the story.

In Book One, Gulliver's character is basically humane, simple, good-natured, patriotic, and honest. By the end of the book, he is not only embittered but suspicious about the conduct of princes. In its larger meaning, the book views man as petty and small: both physically and morally. Swift would say that man is Lilliputian; his ridiculous pride blinds him to his insignificance in the face of the universe, his vices are enormous, and his efforts for doing good very small.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe Mildendo, the capital of Lilliput, as observed by Gulliver.
2. Write briefly about the dispute between;
 - the Big-Endians and Little-Endians
 - the High-Heels and Low-Heels
 - Lilliput and Blefuscu
3. Why does Gulliver have to escape to Blefuscu?

3.2 BOOK II: "A VOYAGE TO BROBDINGNAG"

Chapter One

After two months in England, Gulliver again became restless. He again sailed, on June 20, 1702, aboard the *Adventure*, bound for Surat. The ship was blown off course by two great storms. After aimless wandering for several months the ship reached an unknown island. Gulliver, with some of his fellow sailors went ashore for water. Here, they were pursued by a monster of a man. Gulliver was left behind, while the other sailors managed to escape. Gulliver hid himself in a field of corn whose stalks were forty feet high. He was terribly frightened for he saw that several huge men with huge reaping hooks were cutting corn and getting closer and closer to the spot where he was hiding. In this difficulty, he was reminded of the Lilliputians whom he had put in a similar predicament. He thought of the philosopher who had said that nothing is great or small except by comparison.

Afraid of being harmed by those enormous men, Gulliver decided to give himself up. One of the reapers picked him up carefully to examine him. As he stood on the palm of the



reaper's hand, Gulliver found that he was close to sixty feet above the ground. The master of the reapers, a farmer, took him home to his family. He was placed as a new curiosity on the table, at dinner. The family gathered round the table, the sound of their speech almost deafened Gulliver, but those huge people could hardly hear him even though he was shouting. During the meal the farmer's young son picked him up by the leg and swung him in the air; a cat three times the size of an ox frightened him; and the baby snatched up and put his head in his mouth. The nurse's breast, seen at close quarters by Gulliver, for whom everything was magnified as though seen through a microscope, showed ugly spots and holes and he remembered a Lilliputian who had told him of huge holes in his skin. After dinner, the farmer's wife carried Gulliver to rest on a bed twenty yards wide and eight yards high, in a room 300 feet wide and over 200 feet high. Here two rats attacked him, and Gulliver defended himself with his sword. With great difficulty, he conveyed by signs to the farmer's wife that he needed to "discharge his natural functions." He was set free in the garden and there, hidden behind some leaves, he relieved himself.

Critical Comments

In Book II, Gulliver becomes a real Lilliputian, but he seems more comical, more ridiculous than them as he stumbles over a crust on the table and is surrounded by hugeness of all kinds; the cat, the dog as large as four elephants, and a mouse that could have eaten him up. Dropped by the baby, the former man-mountain would have been killed. And once again Swift shows man as a slave to his bodily needs.

Chapter Two

The farmer's nine-year old daughter (40 feet tall) took complete charge of Gulliver, taking care of all his needs. She also taught him her language. The two became very fond of each other. To her he was "Gridring" (little man) and to him she was "Glumdalclitch" (little nurse). Soon Gulliver became an object of the neighbours' curiosity. The farmer decided to make money out of this curiosity by showing him in the town on the next market day. Both Gulliver and his nurse were unhappy with the decision, but the nurse was badly upset because she was afraid that her father might sell him off for money as he had done earlier with another pet of hers. Gulliver felt humiliated but consoled himself thinking that under the same circumstances the King of Britain would have perhaps fared no better.

Gulliver's shows proved to be so popular and profitable that he was soon made to put up shows every day. Two months later, he accompanied his master and nurse on a tour of the cities of the kingdom. In the capital city of the country, he was shown ten times a day to the delighted crowds.



Critical Comments

1. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver is reduced to the position of a pet, the equal of a pet lamb. His humiliation is complete when he becomes a curiosity that men pay to have a look at. Gulliver feels quite helpless though he does not lose his pride or good nature, with his sense of gratitude and love for his nurse remaining intact.
2. Though ten times bigger in body, the Brobdingnagians are not different from mankind in nature; some are loving and kindly while others are greedy and thoughtless.

Chapter Three

Too many public shows destroyed Gulliver's health. He grew thin and lost his appetite. His master, thinking he would soon die, sold him to the Queen who found the toy-like little man so amusing that she paid a good price for him. The King was rather suspicious and had Gulliver examined by three great scholars/ scientists who were ordered to determine what kind of animal the strong creature was. One of the scholars said it was an embryo, the other two disagreed. After long debates they concluded that he was a "replum Seakath," a freak of nature. This, Gulliver thought, was consistent with the findings of the modern philosophical minds in Europe.

The King ordered arrangements to be made for the best possible care of Gulliver, with Glumdalclitch's help. Along with Gulliver, she too was to live at the court. A governess was appointed for her education, and she was given a personal maid and two servants. A very comfortable box was prepared for Gulliver. He dined every day with the Queen and sometimes with the King and the whole family. Whenever he met the King, he gave him an account of the laws, religion, and education in Europe. Gulliver's account of affairs in England provoked the King to hearty laughter and he asked Gulliver whether he was a Whig or a Tory. The King reflected on "how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I." He sneered at the idea that the tiny English, "have their Titles and distinctions of Honour; they contrive little nests and Burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in Dress and Equipage, they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray." The King used to go on like that and all the while Gulliver, the insect, burned with shame and anger.

As time went on Gulliver himself thought of tiny Englishmen, strutting around in their pride and finery, quite ridiculous. He himself shrank in size in his imagination. Everything in Brobdingnag conspired against his self-esteem. The Queen's dwarf, finding someone smaller than himself, got a sense of superiority; he teased and bullied Gulliver. Once he dropped



Gulliver in a bowl of cream and at another time, he put him in the hollow of a marrow bone. The dwarf was removed from the Queen's service for he was too dangerous to be around Gulliver. One day Gulliver was attacked by giant wasps as big as partridges. Gulliver killed some of them and preserved their stings, which he brought home to England, where Gresham College put them on display.

Critical Comments

Gulliver becomes a slave, an article of sale and purchase. His job is to amuse his masters and his humiliation deepens as he becomes a specimen, a subject for laboratory examination. Swift, in fact, exploits every imaginable way for conveying the smallness of man and the stupidity of his pride. Proper names of existing institutions, for instance Gresham College - the seat of the Royal Society in London, link the known world with the unknown ones, discovered by Gulliver.

Chapter Four

Gulliver describes the geographical position and features of the Brobdingnagian country. It's a vast tract of land on the north-west part of America. The land is a peninsula cut off from the rest of the continent by 30-mile-high mountains topped with active volcanoes. It is surrounded on three sides by oceans but blocked from them by high pointed rocks. Everything in the country is on a scale that paralyses the imagination. Even the lice look like swine. Gulliver rode about the capital city in a coach as vast as a square of Westminster Hall. Gulliver was taken to see the chief temple in Brobdingnag. He was impressed by the beauty, strength, and the enormous size of the statues of gods and emperors cut in marble. He measured a little finger which had fallen from the statues and found that it was exactly four and half feet in length. His nurse picked up the finger, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and carried it home in her pocket to keep among other trinkets.

Gulliver also saw the King's kitchen and started to talk about the huge proportions of its building, its oven, pots, and pans but, at this point, stopped elaborating on the enormous size of things for fear of censorship by his readers, who might suppose that he exaggerated the wonders like other travellers. He knew that if the Brobdingnagians ever happened to read his book, they would complain that he had diminished the size of things in their country.

Chapter Five

Gulliver met with some frightening accidents in Brobdingnag because of his small size, like that of an insect, and not because he was not taken care of. There was always the danger of being crushed by falling objects of huge bulk; apples, for example, which were of the size of



barrels, falling from apple trees or hailstones, 1800 times the size of hail in England. Once a spaniel grabbed him in his mouth and carried him to his master.

Gulliver, on several occasions, happened to see the maids of honour very closely and experienced the ugliness of the body seen too closely. It was a grotesque sight to see a forty-foot blade cut off the head at an execution and cause the blood to spout into the air, higher than the fountain at Versailles, that is over 70 feet. Gulliver describes the boat and the huge trough filled with water in which he rowed his boat for the entertainment of the court ladies; sometimes their fans raised a gale for him. He recalls how he was once snatched up by a monkey and carried to the top of a building 900 feet high. Gulliver was a target of court jokes and sometimes he made himself ridiculous trying to exhibit his physical prowess.

Chapter Six

The King and the Queen of Brobdingnag were extremely nice to Gulliver and he on his part tried to please them by employing his skill at making small objects of craft; for instance, a comb from bits of hair from the King's beard and 'cane' chairs from the combings of the Queen's hair. Of the same material, he made a purse for Glumdalclitch. The King, at this point, began to ask Gulliver questions about his country and learned in detail about the climate, the soil, the institutions, and the history of England. Gulliver spoke about the House of Lords, representing the aristocracy and wealthy families. He spoke about the men of holy living; of the other part of the parliament, the House of Commons, constituted by the elected members of the people and about the judicial system in his country. Gulliver's account of England is quite Utopian. He is fired by patriotic zeal: "how often then wished for the tongue of Demosthenes or Cicero . . . to celebrate the praise of my own dear native country in a style equal to its merits and felicity."

The King listened and took notes but said nothing until the speaker had finished. Then the King indicated many doubts, raising objections on every point. He asked what kind of education and preparation was received by the Lords, how they were selected, whether the holy lords were selected for their religious knowledge and sanctity, how a commoner fought the election if it was so expensive and what did he gain by buying that office. Next the King wished to know how well qualified the judges were. He calculated and found that the annual expenditure of the government was twice the amount it earned by way of taxes. He was puzzled at the idea of a standing army in peace time and said that the English must be a quarrelsome people or must be surrounded by troublesome neighbours and their generals must be richer than their kings.



This is how the King saw through the corruption of English life and institutions. He concluded from what he was told by Gulliver that the nobles were mean and vicious, they were some kinds of imposters; the parliament a collection of ignorant, corrupt, and idle men; the laws explained, interpreted and applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them. The history of England was a record, he said, of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, and revolutions. In short, despite hints that the establishment might originally have been acceptable, Gulliver's people were "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

Critical Comments

1. Gulliver wishes he had great oratorical skills to enable him to present a magnificent account of his dear country. His account of England, its history and institutions is honest and factual, but his attitude towards it is so subjective that he does not see any faults in it. He had "made a most admirable panegyric," as the King put it and he had hoped to impress the King with England's greatness and power. Instead, he receives a most crushing and humiliating verdict, which reduces the English to "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin."
2. Here again Swift takes a solid Tory line: the Tories were against the Whig policies of financing wars by running up national debts and keeping a standing army in peace time. The Tories continuously complained against corruption in the army and the judicial system.
3. Gulliver here represents any unthinking, unsuspecting, credulous, uncritical common man who takes pride in his national institutions. He is concerned with only the surface and believes what the majority says. He has no analytical talents and would not use them even if he had them; for all his energy and time is absorbed by the necessities of daily life. Gulliver is thus made to present the Whig positions and practices before the objective and sharp intelligence of the King, who can see through it. The irony is that the more eloquently Gulliver tries to praise his country, the more he exposes the falseness of its claim to greatness.

Chapter Seven

Gulliver deeply resented the King's reaction to his account of England. He thought his beloved country was treated by the King most injuriously. Gulliver would have concealed this part of the story from the reader had he not been compelled to record it by his extreme



love of truth. Also, he was compelled to answer the King's enquiries out of a sense of gratitude to him, though he did his best to elude many of the King's questions and sometimes "gave to every point a more favourable turn by many degrees than the strictness of truth would allow." That is, he tried to hide the frailties and deformities of his political mother (England) although his endeavour "unfortunately failed of success."

To impress the King, Gulliver told him about gunpowder and its terribly destructive power. He offered to teach the King how to make it, but the King was horrified at the very idea of such a thing. The King considered the inventor of such a substance to be an enemy of mankind, an evil genius. He was amazed that such an insect as Gulliver could entertain such inhuman ideas. As for himself, the King would rather lose half the kingdom than share such a secret; and he commanded Gulliver, as he valued his life, not to mention it to anyone.

Gulliver was disappointed and thought of all those points of European superiority to Brobdingnagians that occurred to him. The King, he reflected, abominated mystery, refinement and intrigue; those usual methods of operating in European courts. He and his people reject "all abstractions and transcendentals." The laws were limited to twenty-two words, and anyone could interpret them in one reading. To write a commentary on a law was a capital offense. Though they had been printing as long as the Chinese, their libraries were small. The largest, the King's, had only one thousand volumes. In writing, Gulliver records, their style is clear, masculine, and smooth, but not florid; for they aimed at conciseness and simple, unornamental statement.

Gulliver describes the contents of a book of morality and devotion, much like those in Europe. It dwells on man's contemptible and helpless condition and laments how nature "was degenerated in these later declining ages of the world." Gulliver thought that such complaints were made in Europe too but were as ill-grounded there as they were in Brobdingnag.

The army of Brobdingnag was a citizen's army, consisting of 176,000 men who were well disciplined and well-trained. Once he saw 6,000 of the cavalries draw their swords at once upon one word of command and brandish them in the air. It was a grand spectacle. The cavalry mounted on large steeds ninety feet high.

Critical Comments

1. In a passage of splendid irony, Swift comments on the King's reaction to the gunpowder proposal. To Gulliver, the King's reaction was the result of "the miserable effects of a confined education" and "a strange effect of narrow principles and short view." But evidently it is Gulliver and the Europeans who have the narrow principles and short views, as well as confined education. Carrying on the irony,



Swift speaks of the “nice, unnecessary scruples” which the Europeans cannot even think of and by which the King misses a chance to become a complete tyrant over his people. Irony deepens when Swift makes Gulliver think that this episode would considerably lessen the regard the English readers may have developed for the King.

2. Gulliver here reverses the role he played in Lilliput, where he refused to reduce by his might, the Blefuscudians to slavery. In each case, it is the giant whose moral virtue matches his relative size. The King of Brobdingnag speaks for Swift, when he defends honest, simple arrangements in governments, with complete absence of intrigue. The King says if a man “can make two ears of corn or two blades of grass grow where one grew before,” he is worth all the politicians and war lords put together. Swift would have laws plain and so simple that no lawyers were needed to interpret them. He was also very impatient of philosophical jargon and admired whatever was practical and profitable to humanity. This indicates the moral shrinking of Gulliver, by which he is intended to earn the reader’s contempt.

Chapter Eight

Having lived in the Brobdingnag country for two years, Gulliver was sick of his captivity and longed for liberty and the society of his own kind of people. He got his chance when he journeyed to the coast in the company of the King and the Queen. Near the sea, a page was entrusted to take Gulliver out for fresh air. Thinking his small charge asleep and safe in his box, the page wandered off among the rocks. Gulliver, in the meanwhile, awoke to find his small box being carried out to the sea by a giant eagle. After four hours the eagle dropped the box into the sea, and eventually Gulliver was picked by an English ship. He sailed safely home to his wife and daughter. Having got accustomed to Brobdingnag, he amazed people by shouting when he wished to speak. He stooped to avoid striking the top of the doorframe of his house and his wife looked very small to him. It was some time before he persuaded people around him that he was indeed of sound mind.

Critical Comments

1. Swift emphasizes the psychological effect on Gulliver of living among the giants of Brobdingnag.
2. Once again Gulliver comes home in an English ship, making Brobdingnag part of the real world and indicating that what the Brobdingnagians do can be done in England as well.
3. Swift’s device in Lilliput and Brobdingnag is to take moral and intellectual differences and project them in physical dimensions. From this simple change,



everything else follows. In Lilliput, Gulliver is a giant, both physically and morally. Conversely, Gulliver is a Lilliputian - both morally and physically in Brobdingnag. The King of Brobdingnag is high-minded, benevolent and, in Swift's sense of the word, rational; that is, he and his people think practically, not theoretically; concretely, not metaphysically: simply, not intricately. Brobdingnag is a Swiftian Utopia of common good sense and morality; and Gulliver, conditioned by the corrupt society from which he comes, appears naive, blind, and insensitive to moral values. Gulliver's account of the history of England in the 17th century evokes the King's crushing retort; "it was only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, revolutions, banishments, and very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice and ambition could produce."

Swift is at his satiric best in such passages. However, the Brobdingnagians are not all saints: greed and cruelty exist among them but the best of them, those in a position to represent their people, the King and Queen, show no such faults. And their government, unlike that of Lilliput, has not suffered corruption caused by intrigues. Brobdingnag remains a utopia, in spite of the presence of fallen human nature with its weaknesses and evil propensities.

Check Your Progress

1. What does the farmer do with Gulliver after taking him home?
2. Mention some of the mishaps Gulliver faces in Brobdingnag, on account of his small size.
3. What opinion of humans does the King form after listening to Gulliver's account of European life and institutions?
4. What does Gulliver observe about the laws, army, and political parties in Brobdingnag?

3.3 BOOK THREE: "A VOYAGE TO LAPUTA, BALNIBARBI, LUGGNAGG, GLUBBDUBDRIB AND JAPAN"

Chapter One

In 1706, Gulliver set out on yet another voyage. Once again, his ship was blown off course in a storm, and when the storm stopped, he was chased by two pirate ships. Gulliver's ship was



slow, being overladen with merchandise, and was soon overtaken by the pirates. The pirates took control of Gulliver's ship and he narrowly escaped death at the hands of a malicious Dutch pirate. He was set adrift in a small canoe with eight days' provisions. Gulliver sailed towards a group of islands at some distance, which he had discovered with the help of his pocket-glass. He reached the last island, which appeared to be a deserted one, and there he got off his boat and spent the night in a dry cave. Next morning, he came out of the cave when the day was far advanced. It was a hot sunny day and Gulliver had to keep his face turned away from the sun, but suddenly it became dark, the sun having been eclipsed by a huge opaque body in the air. Gulliver was startled to see an island floating in the air at a height of about two miles above the island. Viewing it through his pocket glass, Gulliver saw that there were a large number of people on the island, and it was divided up into several levels. The island came down to about a hundred yards above the spot where Gulliver was standing, and he was pulled up with the help of a chair tied to chains.

Critical Comments

1. The Dutch pirate is an evil man as compared to the Japanese pirate. Bias against the Dutch people was common among the Tories. Though allied militarily against France, Holland and England remained vigorous commercial rivals. Moreover, Swift detested the Dutch policy of religious tolerance which undermined the concept of a national church. And so here he makes his pirate a Dutch and anti-Christian.
2. Swift's flying island is built on scientific principles in the manner of today's science fiction. It remains suspended on the principle of attraction and repulsion of magnetic bodies.

Chapter Two

The people on the flying island looked alike: their heads were inclined either to the left or to the right, one eye was turned inward and the other looked directly at the zenith. Their clothes bore images of suns, moons, and stars, with figures of musical instruments like fiddles, flutes and harps and so many others. Then Gulliver saw something quite amazing. There were servants everywhere, carrying short sticks to which were attached bladders containing dried peas or pebbles. With these, the servants would flap the mouth or ears of people nearby. Gulliver learned that these people were so lost in thought that they had to be woken up whenever there was an occasion for them to speak or listen.

Gulliver was taken to the royal palace at the top of the island but several times his escort had to be reminded by the flapper, as to where he was going. Gulliver found the King



absorbed in a problem, perhaps a mathematical problem, and he remained like that for more than an hour before he paid any attention to his visitor. Gulliver could not communicate with the King because he did not understand his language. He decided to learn the language of the island. In the meantime, by the King's order, Gulliver was provided with an apartment in the King's palace, two servants, and a language teacher.

Gulliver noticed that even the food; pieces of meat, ice-creams, puddings, and bread were all shaped either like musical instruments or like geometrical or mathematical figures. The tailor who was ordered to make clothes for him made such a fuss about taking his measurements. The clothes he made were ill-fitting and quite out of shape, but no objections were raised about that. On his second day on the island, Gulliver's ears were deafened by the crashing music performed by the entire court for three hours, without a break. Each person played his own instrument to accompany the music of the spheres, which was audible on certain occasions. Gulliver's own knowledge of mathematics and science helped him a great deal in quickly learning the language of the island. He learned that the island was called Laputa which in their old obsolete language signified 'high.'

Everything in Laputa was expressed, even the standards of good and beautiful, in mathematical or musical terms. Gulliver found evidence in every field, of the same error of calculation that the tailor had, obviously in making ill-fitting clothes for him, made in everything. Laputans were abstract theoreticians; they despised practical geometry and there was not a straight wall or an exact right angle in their buildings. Their theoretical bent of mind made them great failures in all affairs of practical life. Even their vocabulary was limited to the sciences of mathematics and music.

The people of Laputa were also keen students of astronomy. It caused them a lot of trouble and fear. They dreaded changes in the position and movement of the celestial bodies and all the time feared the destruction of the earth. Because of these fears they never had a peaceful sleep and never enjoyed the simple joys of life. The King of the island questioned Gulliver about the state of mathematics in England but showed no interest in English religion, government, laws, history, or manners. How different he was, thought Gulliver, from the King of Brobdingnag who showed a keen interest in such practical subjects and had great clarity of thought about those subjects. The frequent need of the Laputan King to be brought to attention by a flapper even during the conversation deepened the contrast.

The women of the island were vivacious but bored with their absent-minded husbands. They were very fond of the strangers who came to the court from the continents below. Though they were treated very well as wives or daughters they were unhappy as their



men folk, being mostly lost in the world of abstraction, had no time for them. Their failure to keep their women happy was yet another consequence of the impractical character of the men of Laputa. Fun and satire are combined in the description of Laputa. Swift has a good laugh at the eccentricities and impractical ways of those devoted to the pure sciences. Swift makes them perfectly comical, both in appearance and action. Significantly, Swift says nothing here about the applied sciences.

Chapter Three

The flying island was perfectly circular, its diameter about four miles and a half, its thickness 300 yards. It contained 10,000 acres. Its movement was controlled by a magnetic loadstone, so perfectly poised that anyone could move it, in order to lift it towards the earth or away from it.

Laputans had highly developed telescopes because of which their knowledge of astronomy was much more advanced as compared to that of the European's. The King of Laputa was prevented from being an absolute tyrant because his ministers owned estates on the mainland below and refused to support his efforts or designs to subject the entire country to his will. The common people living on the land below the island were, in fact, many a times saved from destruction because of the ministers, whose own interests were involved with theirs. Gulliver learns about a revolt in Lindalino, second largest city in the kingdom, about three years before his arrival.

Critical Comments

1. Swift gives a long and "philosophical account" of the structure and operation of the great loadstone. He imitates the Royal Society's learned papers, to make them look ridiculous.
2. Laputa's manner of government, which has little communication with the mainland, suggests the absentee type of government from which Ireland suffered in the 18th century. Its small landlords were far from London, but the controlling power of the Irish government was in London. The country was miserable, being subject to a government that was too far to be approached: Lindalino is Dublin, and the revolt figuratively represents the uproar over the introduction of cheap money of small denomination in Ireland and the granting of the patent for its manufacture to one William Wood, an Englishman.
3. This chapter is an excellent piece of symbolic writing which can be read like an allegory as well.



4. Gulliver's position in Laputa differs from his position in the first two books. Here he takes no part in the activities of the life around him. He is a silent spectator, writing his reports.

Chapter Four

Gulliver was bored in Laputa and so he decided to leave the island after two months. He received permission to leave through the influence of a great lord, a close relation of the King, but very different from him; less interested in mathematics and music, more interested in listening to what others said, did not really need the flappers, and was generally a man of honour and integrity.

Gulliver descended to Balnibarbi, the mainland and travelled to its capital city Lagado. He was received there by a great Lord called Munodi. Making a tour of the town, Gulliver saw men working on excellent soil with all kinds of tools and equipment but there were no signs of harvest. The people appeared to be poor and miserable. Munodi's estate just next to this place presented a striking contrast, with its greenery and abundance. Munodi told him the secret of his own prosperity and of his neighbour's failure. He said that he avoided the new agricultural methods of his neighbours and practiced the old, tested methods only.

Munodi informed Gulliver that, about forty years earlier, some men had gone up to the floating island, acquired a smattering of mathematics and returned to build an academy of projectors in Lagado. All the other towns had since built similar academies, which taught new methods of agriculture and building. But as none of these projects had been perfected, the country lay in miserable waste. By way of illustration, Munodi showed Gulliver an ancient mill formerly on his property that had been turned into a ruin by the projectors. They had planned to pump water up the hill to secure the advantage of falling water for turning the mill, instead of using the river that already existed. But after a hundred men had worked on the project for two years, it was abandoned and Munodi was blamed for its failure.

Critical Comments

1. Swift here tries to satirize the thoughtless and headlong dash into novelty and rash meddling with established methods, as abstract speculation and practical application of knowledge are two completely different things. Swift is not against scientific innovations or scientific curiosity; he is against a wasteful and fanciful or unscientific attitude to practical problems of life.
2. Munodi is either Swift's friend Bolingbroke or Oxford, or perhaps a composite of both.



Chapter Five

Gulliver visited the Academy of Lagado, which contained 500 rooms. He saw a man working on a project to extract sunshine from cucumbers so that man might warm the air on cold days. In another room, a filthy-looking man was working on a project to reduce human excrement back to its original food. Other researchers were trying to build a house from the roof downward, as do spiders and the bees; to produce gunpowder by heating ice; to plough fields by putting into the soil a huge quantity of acorns and chestnuts and other vegetables and letting the hogs dig them up. In another part of the building, Gulliver met a projector in speculative learning. He had invented a machine that would enable anyone to write great books on philosophy and arts. At the school of languages, Gulliver met professors who were trying to remove language barriers and make communicative processes simple and less strenuous.

Critical Comments

1. This chapter is an example of Swift's great capacity for inventing comical images and fantastically comical details. Behind the hilariously comical images is hidden bitter satire on the impracticality and wastefulness of research proposed to be undertaken by learned societies of his time.
2. The "philosophical account" is Swift's parody of the typical scientific papers published in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society.

Chapter Six

Gulliver next visited the school of political projectors. The professors there appeared to him wholly out of their senses for proposing to work out schemes for persuading the monarchs to choose their favourites for their wisdom, capacity, and virtue; for the ministers to be able to promote public good. He found the professors trying to devise schemes by which merit, great abilities and eminent public services could be rewarded. And, according to Gulliver, they were following "many other wild, impossible chimeras" that had never been conceived by man.

One of the professors, however, was more practical as he understood the nature and system of government and was engaged in finding effective remedies for all diseases and corruptions to which public administration was subject. To correct the poor memories of court favourites, for instance, he would have their associates activate their memories by giving "a tweak by the nose or a kick in the belly, or tread on his corns or lug him thrice by both ears, or run a pin into his breach, or pinch his arm black and blue, to prevent forgetfulness." Senators, he advised, should be obliged to vote contrary to the way they



argue, for that way of acting would ensure the public good. To end violent party divisions in a state, he would take a hundred leaders from each party, cut their brains in half, and put together for each man two halves of brains from different parties. This would bring moderation and quiet in the state. Gulliver found two professors engaged in a warm debate about how to extract taxes without “grieving” the taxpayers. One of them argued that each man should be taxed for his vices and follies; the other that a man should be taxed according to the qualities in him. The highest tax would be on the men who were greatest favourites of the other sex. Women would be taxed according to their beauty and style of dressing; but constancy, chastity, good sense, and good nature would not be considered, since they are too rare and would not bear even the expenses for collecting the tax.

Gulliver was shown by another professor, a paper of instructions for discovering plots and conspiracies against the government. His advice was to examine the diet of the suspects, the times of their meals, their sleeping habits, the colour of their excrement, which is the key to their thoughts and designs. Gulliver told him of Tribnia (Britain), also called Lengden (England), where most of the people are spies, accusers, informers, prosecutors, perjurers, false witnesses, and the like; all serving under ministers of state and very skillful in framing whoever is required to be ruined. They employ artists who are very clever at deciphering secret meanings in words and in finding what other sentences could be formed out of the letters that they have.

Critical Comments

1. In this chapter, it is no longer irony but bitter satire, for here, the possibility of right conduct in public affairs becomes an impossible chimera, something that could never enter man’s head. Here Swift shows bitter contempt for the state of affairs in the world and for his own kind. He despairs of any possibility of reform. According to him the entire political system is so horribly diseased that it is beyond correction or cure. Hence the best thing to do is to laugh at its expense. This is black humour: black comedy that shows despair and still makes the reader laugh.
2. Gulliver’s critical comments on the political situation in his country surprise us. He seems to have already revised his opinion about his “ideal country.” In the last few passages, Swift is mimicking the methods employed by Whigs to investigate the charges, mostly trumped up, against holy persons of Tory leanings and against some politicians. Bolingbroke, for example, was Secretary of State in 1710, and a victim of dirty Whig politics.



Chapter Seven

Gulliver decided to visit the island of Luggnagg as it lay en route to his voyage back to England, but because he could not find any ship bound for this island, he decided to take a trip to the island of Glubbdubdrib, the island of sorcerers and magicians where the entire governing tribe practiced magic. The Governor was served by the dead, whom he had power to command. On his way to the palace, Gulliver passed between two rows of guards dressed in what he thought was a very antique manner and something in their countenance made his flesh creep with horror. By the turn of his finger the Governor dismissed his servants, and to the utter astonishment of Gulliver, they vanished in an instant “like visions in a dream when we awake on a sudden.” A new set of ghosts served at the table. Gulliver saw so many ghosts or spirits all day long that he became, in a day or two, perfectly used to the presence of spirits. The Governor permitted Gulliver to call up from the underworld whatever spirits he wished to speak to. Alexander and Hannibal appeared and cleared some misconceptions about themselves. The senate of Rome looked like an “assembly of demigods, whereas another assembly of somewhat later age,” seemed to be a “knot of pedlars, pickpockets, highway men and bullies.” Gulliver enjoyed the conversation of noble men like Brutus, Socrates, Cato, Thomas More and so on. Gulliver also admired the sight of the destroyers of tyrants and usurpers and the restorers of liberty to nations.

Critical Comments

Swift presents the modern politicians in a satirical light by comparing them to the members of the Roman Senate. Swift also debunks the stories that pass for history.

Chapter Eight

Gulliver, continuing the programme of meeting the spirits of the dead, summoned up Aristotle and Homer, along with their commentators and was told that they had never even heard about them. Aristotle, speaking about Descartes and Gassendi, said that their philosophy and principles were based on conjectures and had proved wrong; same as, in time, Newton’s theory of gravitation would be.

Summoning up the ghosts of noble families, he was disappointed to find that they had short histories and could trace their lineage only a very few generations. Gulliver saw their scandalous secrets laid bare and he ceased to wonder at the degeneration of nobility when he saw their blood lines interrupted by pages, lackeys, valets, coachmen, gamesters, fiddlers, players, captains, and pickpockets. Gulliver realized that it was what Polydore Virgil, a 16th century Italian, who composed a history of England, says of certain great houses “Not a man of them brave, not a woman pure.”



Gulliver was chiefly disgusted with modern history for he discovered that the prostitute writers had totally misrepresented the facts. These writers made heroes into cowards and wise men into fools. Those who were known for heroic patriotism were misrepresented as traitors. Known villains had been exalted to offices of high trust; the virtuous had been executed through the devices of the wicked ministers. He discovered the true causes of some great events; “how a whore can govern the back stairs, the back stairs a council and the council a senate.” He discovered how some renowned figures of history had secured high titles and great estates by perjury and fraud or by prostituting their wives and daughters.

Critical Comments

Gulliver shows the blackest face of the so called noble, illustrious, and royal families. All these had, barring a few exceptions, acquired great wealth and positions of power: either by accident or by treachery, falsehood and cunning or by bribing those in power or by pandering to their whims. To put it in short, those who rose to occupy high political positions were men of dishonourable disposition. After saying all this, Gulliver says that he does not have his own country in mind regarding what he has said on this occasion. Nobody is fooled by this explanation, which only renders the irony more effective. The special target of satire here is the pride of great houses in their ancestry and reputation.

Gulliver now laments, as did the philosophers of Brobdingnag, how much man has degenerated in the last hundred years. Men had lost the vigour, valour, sense of justice, and spirit of liberty of the English yeomen of the old stamp. Every journey adds to the education of Gulliver.

Chapter Nine

In Luggnagg, Gulliver represented himself as a Hollander in the hope of getting to Japan, for the Dutch alone were allowed to enter that country. He sent to the King of Luggnagg the conventional request to have the honour of licking the dust before the royal footstool, but he found the words to be more than mere form. He was commanded to crawl on his belly towards the throne, licking the floor as he moved forward. Gulliver being a stranger, the floor was cleaned for his approach; but he learnt that for those who had enemies at the court, extra dirt was put on the floor and for those who were to be destroyed, a form of poison was sprinkled on the floor.

Critical Comments

Swift’s travel books, with their stories of Oriental despotism seem to be reflected in Gulliver’s encounter with the King of Luggnagg. That only Dutch could find entry into Japan



is a fact of history. This reference to a real fact of history adds to the realism Swift has tried to give to the book.

Chapter Ten

Gulliver found that the Luggnaggian people were polite and generous, although they were not without some share of pride which is peculiar to all Eastern countries. Gulliver heard about Struldbruggs, immortal men. He was told that to any family a child might be born, whose forehead was marked with the red circular spot of immortality. “Happy people!” was Gulliver’s first reaction. “Happy nation blessed with so much ancient wisdom for a guide,” thought Gulliver. Then he fell into a long dream in which he was a Struldbrugg. But the Luggnaggians laughed at his ignorance, for it was based on the supposition that the Struldbrugg would remain young forever and not decay mentally or physically into old age. But whenever a Struldbrugg saw a funeral, he wished he might have one, for after a certain stage in old age, there set in a rapid decline of mental and physical faculties: they remembered nothing at all, could not perform their natural functions properly, could not converse with anyone, and generally became a ghastly sight.

Critical Comments

Here, Swift mocks at a pride which is peculiar to Eastern countries, as he says. Actually, this is another one of man’s vain desires anywhere in the world. Swift’s purpose is to show that man commonly desires what is bad for him and neglects his real good.

Chapter Eleven

The Japanese became suspicious about Gulliver’s claim to be a Dutchman because he asked to be excused from the ceremony imposed on the Dutch, that of trampling over the crucifix. The Emperor was almost sure that Gulliver was not a Hollander, that he was a Christian, But he was so considerate as to give secret orders to the officer to allow Gulliver to quickly pass out of the country and to be excused from the ceremony and then pretend that this had happened not due to deliberate omission but as a result of forgetfulness. Gulliver then reached the port of Nangasac after a very long and troublesome journey. He soon found there a company of Dutch sailors belonging to a ship called *Amboyne* of Amsterdam; a stout ship of 450 tons. Gulliver’s knowledge of Dutch language once more came very handy. He made friends with the Dutch sailors and sailed home with them on the *Amboyne*. He finally reached home after five and half years’ absence.

Critical Comments

The third voyage has always been considered the least successful, but none the less interesting. Structurally it is loosely episodic, lacking unity of action and tone. Into it, Swift



seems to have put all the material that he could not work into the other three voyages. It is fantasia on two themes, which Swift treats under a single metaphor. The metaphor is science; the themes are politics and the abuse of reason. In short, the voyage is a digression on madness, on the divorce of man and good sense in the modern world.

Check Your Progress

1. Describe the inhabitants of Laputa.
2. Mention some of the experiments going on in the Academy of Lagado.
3. Who does Gulliver meet in Glubbdubdrib?
4. Who are the Struldbruggs? Why is Gulliver excited to hear about them?

3.4 BOOK IV: “A VOYAGE TO THE COUNTRY OF THE HOUYHNHNMS”

Chapter One

Gulliver spent five months at home with his wife and children and set out on yet another voyage. He was this time the captain of a merchant ship. In the West Indies he hired some sailors to replace some of his men who had died of a tropical fever. The newly hired men proved to be former pirates. They seized the ship and put Gulliver in chains. After sailing for some weeks, as soon as an island was sighted the pirates got rid of Gulliver. They put him in a boat and sailed away. In this desolate condition, Gulliver kept rowing till he got upon firm ground. He was tired in body and soul, so he rested for some time and then went up into the country.

Soon he observed some repulsive animals, thickly hairy in some parts of their body. They had no tails, but had long claws and climbed trees as nimbly as squirrels. Gulliver felt a strong aversion for them. As he moved along a road, one of these beasts approached him, stared at him, and raised one of its forepaws towards him. To fend him off, Gulliver gave him a blow with the flat side of his sword, at which the animal drew back but roared so loudly that a herd of at least forty came flocking around him from the next field. They howled and made faces around Gulliver, who moved to defend himself with his back to a tree. Some of the brutes leapt up into the tree, from where they began to discharge their excrements on his head. Gulliver defended himself by waving his hanger but was quite stifled with the filth falling all around him.



Suddenly all the beasts ran away. A horse had appeared. He looked with wonder at Gulliver, examined his hands and feet and blocked him from leaving the spot, but all very gently. Gulliver attempted to pet him, but the horse shook his head, removed his hand with his forefoot and seemed to say something, neighing all the time. Another horse came up, greeted the first ceremoniously and said to him something about Gulliver. The two again examined Gulliver's hands and feet with wonder. Their behaviour was so orderly and intelligent that Gulliver believed them to be two magicians in the form of horses. He addressed them as magicians, asking them to give him a ride up to a village or a house. The horses again discussed the situation, frequently using the word Yahoo. As soon as the horses were silent Gulliver boldly pronounced Yahoo in a loud voice, imitating as well as he could, the neighing of a horse, at which both the horses were visibly surprised. They taught him the exact pronunciation of that word and of another, Houyhnhnm (Whinnum). Gulliver's learning ability amazed the horses. At last, the horses parted, and Gulliver accompanied the first, a Dapple grey.

Chapter Two

After walking for about three miles, Gulliver and the horse came to a kind of long building made of straw and timber. Gulliver now began to feel a little comforted and began to take out the toys and trinkets, such as travellers carry, as peace-offerings to whoever lived in that building. The horse neighed with authority to three horses and two mares in a large room with a smooth clay floor. Gulliver was to wait in the second room, where he again got ready his trinkets for the master of the house. He heard the horses conversing in the next room. Gulliver feared his mind was disturbed by his sufferings and misfortune. He pinched himself to test whether he was dreaming and waited to be taken to the master of the house. Instead, he was introduced to a lovely mare, a colt, and a foal sitting on well-made straw mats in a third room. Gulliver was again examined, again heard the word Yahoo several times, and was then taken outside to be compared with one of the filthy animals he had first met in that land.

Gulliver was absolutely horrified to notice in that abominable brute, a perfect human figure - with the face flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large and the mouth wide. Gulliver also noticed that the forefeet of the Yahoo differed from his hands in nothing else but the length of the nails, the coarseness and the brownness of the palms, and hairiness on the backs. There was the same resemblance between their feet, with the same difference which only Gulliver knew because he was wearing shoes and stockings. To the eyes of the horses, Gulliver's clothes made his body unlike that of the beasts. The horses had no conception that Gulliver was wearing clothes which were detachable from his body. The horses offered their food to Gulliver, but he turned from it with loathing. He was offered a



piece of root, a piece of ass's flesh, hay and oats but Gulliver could eat none of those things. He began to fear that he was doomed to starve to death if he did not get to meet some of his own species. The master horse noticed that Gulliver simply detested the Yahoo and that he badly needed food, but Gulliver did not know how to tell him what kind of food he could eat. At that point Gulliver noticed a cow passing by and he pointed to her and expressed a desire to go and milk her. At this he was led into the house where there was a large store of milk. Gulliver was offered a large bowl of clean and cool milk which made him feel quite refreshed.

An old horse, drawn in a sledge by four Yahoos arrived for dinner, during which Gulliver was discussed. Gulliver's gloves perplexed the old horse who was very pleased when Gulliver took them off. Pleased with his conduct, the horses taught him several new words. He also got their permission to make barley bread which he ate with milk, herbs and butter. He occasionally had rabbit or a bird. All this kept Gulliver in excellent health during his three years among the horses. He slept in a separate building between the house and the Yahoos' stable.

Critical Comments

1. Gulliver asserts that he was a great lover of mankind, but he found the Yahoos, who had a close resemblance to man, absolutely detestable. The point is that Gulliver is beginning to think of man and Yahoo as belonging to the same species.

Chapter Three

Gulliver's principal endeavour was to learn the Houyhnhnm tongue, which he thought was very much like high Dutch or German. The master horse was convinced that Gulliver was a Yahoo, but he was perplexed at his un-Yahoo-like qualities; his teachableness, civility, cleanliness, and clothes. At the end of three months, Gulliver could begin to satisfy the Houyhnhnm's curiosity, but the master first doubted Gulliver's story, sure that he must be saying "the thing that was not," in telling of people across the sea, and of wooden vessels controlled by brute Yahoos.

The word Houyhnhnm means a horse and in its etymology, "the perfection of nature." All the Houyhnhnms of the neighbourhood came to see Gulliver, the wonderful Yahoo, conversed with him and helped Gulliver so much that in five months he was able to master their tongue. They could not think of him to be a Yahoo because of his clothes and some other minor differences from the beasts. Gulliver took all possible care to never allow himself to be seen without his clothes. But the secret of Gulliver's clothes was discovered one



morning when a servant horse happened to see him sleeping without them. The master Houyhnhnm could not understand why anyone should hide some parts of the body that nature had given; nevertheless, he allowed Gulliver to remain partly dressed while being examined again. To him, Gulliver appeared a perfect Yahoo despite his smooth skin, the absence of hair on his body or of long claws and his habit of walking upright on his hind legs. But the main difference was his capacity for speech and reason. Gulliver begged the master not to call him a Yahoo.

As the horse continued to doubt his story, Gulliver at last extracted a promise that he would not be offended. Then he informed the horse that in all other known countries, men like Gulliver are the presiding rational creatures and horses are brute animals; that Gulliver had been as surprised to find rational and ruling horses as the Houyhnhnms had been to find a rational Yahoo; and that if Gulliver ever told his own kind about the rational horses and their control over a country, he would be accused of “saying the thing that was not.”

Critical Comments

The Houyhnhnms are ruled completely by reason and since lying is against the reasonable and natural purpose of speech, they have no such word as ‘lying.’ They have no need of such a word - hence the only expression that they have for lying is “the thing that was not.” That reason has its limitations is proved by the fact that they cannot grasp conceptions outside their own confined experience: countries other than their own, countries where horses do not rule, and where there are ships that are managed and navigated by Yahoos.

Chapter Four

The horse was deeply distressed by Gulliver’s information. Being unused to doubting or not believing, he did not know how to behave when doubts occurred; and he could not understand Gulliver’s explanation of how men lie and misrepresent. On being questioned and commanded by the master horse, Gulliver had no choice but to describe the care, the uses, and abuses of horses in England. The master was quite upset to hear some parts of Gulliver’s information; for example, to hear that the English horses were beaten, castrated, and trained to serve the Yahoos, or that the Yahoos ride upon the backs of the horses. After some expressions of indignation, the master wondered how a Yahoo dared to ride upon a Houyhnhnm’s back for he was sure that the weakest servant in his house would be able to shake off the strongest Yahoo. Nevertheless, the master found Gulliver different from the Yahoos of Houyhnhnm land. Gulliver was cleaner and less deformed but had fewer real advantages than the Yahoos. His nails were of no use, and his forefeet were of no use for walking. Using only two feet for walking, he was always insecure while walking; his face



was flat; the position of his eyes forced him to turn his head to see to the sides, and he could not feed himself without using his forefoot.

Gulliver's account of his voyage to the country of horses also greatly puzzled the Houyhnhnm, especially the part that explained why pirates dared not return to their native land. Neither could he understand why men committed evil acts like treason, murder, theft, rape, sodomy, perjury, forgery, poisoning, and robbery. Gulliver's explanation of these crimes makes the horse lift his eyes with amazement and indignation, "like one whose imagination was struck with something never seen or heard of before."

Critical Comments

The Houyhnhnms are ruled by reason. They show very little passion; a little indignation here and there, but never lust, envy, or anger in the violent sense; or covetousness and other vices inspired by passion, by which men are carried away. Thus, the Houyhnhnm master cannot understand man's habit of lying, a vice which comes from passions. To him, lying is a violation of the natural function of speech. Whatever is rational will be done easily and as a matter of course by the creature ruled by reason.

Chapter Five

The Houyhnhnm master wished to hear from Gulliver an account of English history after Gulliver had told him whatever he could about trade and industry, arts, and sciences in his country. So, at his master's command, Gulliver related to him the revolution under the Prince of Orange: the long war with France, which was entered into by the said Prince, and renewed by his successor, the present Queen. Giving a detailed account of the war, Gulliver informed that several great countries of Europe were involved in it, that millions of people had been killed by it, hundreds of cities had been captured and hundreds of ships had been sunk. On being asked by the master, what were the usual causes or motives that made one country go to war with another, Gulliver answered that these were innumerable: princely ambition for wider power, corruption of ministers, religious disagreements, anticipation of attack from another country, rivalry between neighbouring countries over some piece of territory, opportunity to seize a country after having been called in to help defend it; and so many others. Some beggarly princes of Europe also hired out their citizens to serve other princes for large personal profits. Gulliver explained what a soldier was; a Yahoo hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who had never done anything to harm him, as he possibly could.



Upon hearing this account, the master's comment was that the account of war had very satisfactorily put before him the effects of that reason Gulliver's race pretended to have. But, still unaware of the artificial means by which wars were carried on, he found comfort in thinking that nature had left men utterly incapable of doing much mischief for, he said, with their mouths lying flat with their faces, they could hardly bite each other to cause deep injury. Then as to the claws on their feet, before and behind, they were so short and tender that one of his Yahoos could chase away dozens of Gulliver's species before him. And, therefore, the master concluded, Gulliver had lied to him about the numbers of those who had been killed in the battles.

Gulliver, on his part, continued to educate the horse about man's use of weapons. He said man does not fight with his natural weapons nor is he satisfied with merely winning his point, and so he told the master about firearms and swords: bayonets, bombardments, and about the corrupting and dehumanizing effects of wars. The Houyhnhnm stopped him, afraid that simply by hearing such things he would grow accustomed to them and become corrupted.

Gulliver had told the master that some sailors left their country for the fear of laws. He had explained the meaning of the word, but the master was puzzled over how a law, framed to preserve everyone, could harm anyone. For the master, reason and nature were sufficient to guide a rational animal, he therefore became curious about such terms as laws and lawyers. Gulliver explained to him that lawyers were a kind of people who were brought up from their youth in the art of proving, by words invented for that purpose; that "white was black and black was white," according to what they were paid to do. If a lawyer were to use or devise words to uphold truth and justice, he would be a miserable failure, because this was an animal who was from his very cradle trained to defend falsehood. Since lawyers also enforce a rule that what has been done before may be done again, they carefully preserve records of court action against justice and reason, so that such actions may be urged as reasons for doing them again. The judges too favour the worst kind of precedents in their decisions. Lawyers have a jargon of their own and keep on multiplying laws in this jargon, by which the very essence of truth and falsehood is wholly confounded, and it takes thirty years to decide a case. Gulliver concludes that lawyers are far from the brilliant creatures one might suppose them to be, that they are in fact the most ignorant and stupid people in England.

Critical Comments

1. Dealing with the religious causes of wars, Swift ridicules the controversy over Christ's real presence in the consecrated objects, the controversy whether bread be



flesh or wine be blood. This is Swift's objectivity and a satirical comment on man's deformity which allows him to shed blood, even in the name of God.

2. What Gulliver says in this chapter shows that his attitude towards his own country is no longer indulgent. He freely talks about the corruption in various parts of English life; be it foreign policy, law courts or army action. He has lived long enough in the land of the Houyhnhnms to be affected by their honesty and reason.

Chapter Six

On hearing from Gulliver, the tales of evil and injustice prevailing at the law courts in his country, the Houyhnhnm master was wholly at a loss as to what could be the incentive for the lawyers as to want to injure their fellow animals and what was meant by the word *hire*. At this, Gulliver tried to explain to the master the use of money and how its possession permitted an English Yahoo to obtain whatever he wanted - the choicest clothing, land, food, and females. This power of money made the Yahoos accumulate as much of it as possible. Indeed, they thought they could never have enough of it to spend or to save. Money was power but the number of people who had it was small - one to a thousand and these thousands laboured to generate money for the rich and yet themselves lived in misery and poverty. This phenomenon was again incomprehensible to the master who believed that all animals had a right to their share of the earth's products. Gulliver's description of trade: that "this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female Yahoos could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in," referred to the English practice of selling to countries all over the earth, its surplus food in exchange for items of luxury, which brought diseases, folly, and vice.

Speaking of diseases and physicians, Gulliver explained the physical evils that follow unwise eating and drinking. Being a physician, Gulliver says that since the basic cause of disease is repletion (over-fulness) the first remedy is, therefore, evacuation - either upwards or downwards. The English physicians, Gulliver said, were very skilled at prognosticating death which they could not always bring about although they could not always keep it away. They were very useful to those who wished to be rid of their mates, to eldest sons, to government ministers and to princes. That Gulliver was being ironical, was evident.

Next, Gulliver described to the master, the nature of the English government and of the English constitution. He began by speaking about the position of a first or Chief Minister of state and said that this was a creature who had no other passion, except a violent desire for wealth, power, and titles. This was Gulliver's portrait of a politician. To secure the office of



the chief minister, all kinds of means - murder, betrayal, hypocrisy - were used and were justified.

The chief minister's power is perpetuated by wholesale bribery, and his house is the breeding ground for future chief ministers, pages, lackeys, and porters. They all learn, by imitation; insolence, lying, and bribery. The first ministers are usually ruled by some "decayed wench or footman," who is the true ruler of the country and the channel of all favours.

Being impressed by several qualities of Gulliver's personality and intelligence, the Houyhnhnm supposed him to from a noble family in his own country. Gulliver corrected the horse's notions of nobility which, in England, meant being bred in idleness and luxury; noble blood is commonly known by a sickly appearance as a healthy nobleman is suspected to have been fathered by a coachman or a groom. The minds of the nobility matched their feeble bodies. But ironically the assembly of nobles is the court of highest appeal in England, and no law could be enacted without its consent.

Chapter Seven

Gulliver explained why he could give an honest account of his own species among the Houyhnhnms, who were naturally disposed to think the worst of mankind. The virtues of the horses, contrasted with the corruption of mankind, had opened his eyes and sharpened his understanding. He now saw man's actions and passions in a new light and found man's honour unworthy and incapable of defence before the sharply intelligent Houyhnhnms. Gulliver also decided never to go back to his kind but to live and die surrounded by the noble horses.

The master Houyhnhnm concluded, after seriously considering Gulliver's story, that Gulliver's people were animals who, having received a small pittance of reason, used it only to increase their natural corruptions. They had cast away their natural advantages and lived a totally artificial existence. Even Gulliver, he now decided, was inferior to the Yahoo in natural strength, speed, agility, and other qualities, but in mental disposition his kind was very much like the Yahoos who hated each other more than they did any other species. The reason was not, as he had earlier thought it to be, the odiousness of their shapes, but like Gulliver's kind, they detested each other and all because each one wanted to "have all to itself." He described how the Yahoos would fight over food articles or shining stones that they loved, though, because they lacked the weapons of the Europeans, they seldom killed one another. The master told Gulliver that the most odious thing about the Yahoos was their gluttony. They ate everything that came their way, and they enjoyed eating it more if they had



got it through stealing or plunder. The Yahoos, Gulliver observed, were the only animals in the country subject to any diseases, owing to their haste and greed. Of the European man's learning, government, arts, and industry, the Houyhnhnms found no parallel among the Yahoos; unless it was the possession, by the ruling Yahoo, of a favourite whose office was to lick his master's feet and posteriors and drive the females to his kennel. The favourite, hated by the whole herd, held office till a worse could be found and when he lost favour, was covered entirely by the excrement of all the other Yahoos.

Critical Comments

In both the account of the first minister as well as of the toady, Swift attacks Robert Walpole.

Chapter Eight

Having a great desire to observe and study the nature of the Yahoos, Gulliver received permission to walk among them, accompanied by a strong servant horse. He found them to be the most unteachable of all animals. They were very nimble, but they were fit only to draw or carry burdens, which is why the Houyhnhnms employed them as servants to draw their carts and sledges. The Yahoos could swim like frogs from their infancy but generally their biggest defect was their restive disposition. They were cunning, malicious, and revengeful. They were strong and hardy but of a cowardly spirit and, by consequence, insolent, abject and cruel. Gulliver had a horrible experience when a young Yahoo female leapt into the stream where Gulliver was bathing and embraced him violently and let go her hold only with the greatest reluctance when the horse escorting him came to his rescue. The horses were greatly amused by the incident. Gulliver suffered horrible mortification for he feared now that he was a real Yahoo too, since the female showed a natural inclination for him.

By sheer contrast to the Yahoos, the principal effort among the Houyhnhnms was to cultivate reason. They had no idea what evil in a rational creature could be. For them, truth was instantly and clearly obvious and so they had no conception of the meaning of opinion, nor could they argue the plausibility of two sides of a case. The master horse laughed when Gulliver presented to him several systems of European philosophy. There was one truth, everything else was conjecture, the master believed. Friendship and Benevolence were the two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms, equally extended to a friend and a stranger. They practiced decency and civility and did not care much for ceremony. They treated their neighbour's colts with the same affection that they had for their own. Nature, they believed, taught them to love the whole species unless reason made a distinction of persons where there was a superior degree of virtue. They produced two colts to a family. The servant class were allowed to produce three children of each sex, to ensure a sufficient number of domestics for



noble families. Their marriages were arranged very reasonably, with a care to choose colours that would mix well. They had no ideas - nor words for love, courtship, presents, and marriage settlements, but marriage they regarded as a necessity imposed by reason and undertaken because family and friends approved of it. Among them marriage was never violated, though each partner bore the same friendship and benevolence towards the others as he did towards all the Houyhnhnms.

Young Houyhnhnms, both male and female, were taught lessons in “Temperance, industry, exercise, and cleanliness.” Gulliver’s master thought it monstrous that English females should receive a different kind of education from males and that too in nothing except in some skills in domestic management; whereby, he observed, one half of their natives were good for nothing but bringing children into the world and to trust the care of their children to such useless animals he said was yet a greater instance of brutality.

The Houyhnhnms were very methodical not only about the education of their youth, but also about managing their administration. Every fourth year, a representative council of the country met to consider the problems of the land and remedy them.

Critical Comments

The Houyhnhnm’s life is appropriate for animals, for they lack man’s complexity. Therefore, they cannot be taken literally as suggesting how man should live. But Houyhnhnms do stand for reason or rationality, a capacity to think, to distinguish good from bad and this rational faculty is supposed to distinguish man from beasts, same as it separates the Houyhnhnms from the Yahoos. Swift seems to be saying that if man were rational, if he could truly be ruled by reason, he would live as do the noble horses. The presentation of Houyhnhnm life seems to be exhorting man to do some introspection, self-examination, self-judgment, and to recognize the need for reform.

Chapter Nine

Just three months before Gulliver’s departure from the Houyhnhnm’s land, a great council of horses gathered to debate the only great question they ever debated, whether and how to exterminate the Yahoos. Having taken the tip from Gulliver’s account of how the horses were tamed in England by castration, the master Houyhnhnm suggested that young Yahoos be castrated so that after a generation or two they would cease to exist. He also suggested that asses should be trained to carry out small services.

The Houyhnhnms have no letters, so all their knowledge is traditional, that is passed orally from generation to generation. They had no history; no international or commercial



relations, and the people were reasonable and orderly. They had no diseases and no physicians, but they had effective herbs for dressing ordinary cuts and bruises. They measured the year by the sun and the moon; knew of eclipses but knew little about astronomy. In poetry, they excelled all other mortals according to Gulliver's judgement. Their buildings were rude and simple, being made of straw with their forefeet. They were remarkably skillful at even such a minute task as threading a needle.

The Houyhnhnms died only of old age, and they died reasonably, that is without joy or grief on their own part or of their relative's. They normally lived to the age of seventy or seventy-five. A few weeks before its death, the aged horse met his friends and relatives to take a last farewell. The only term the Houyhnhnms had to devote deficiency was the word Yahoo - which they added to the name of the defective thing.

Chapter Ten

Gulliver was beginning to feel quite comfortably settled in Houyhnhnm land, all his problems of food, clothing, furniture and housing having been gradually solved, by his own efforts and the friendly co-operation and support from the master. He enjoyed perfect health of body and tranquillity of mind. He could breathe freely for he felt that at last his life was free from the harassments and humiliations of a corrupt society: no treachery or inconsistency of a friend, nor the injury of a secret or an open enemy. There was no occasion of bribing, flattering, or pimping to procure the favours of any great man or his minion. He needed no safeguard against fraud or oppression and neither did he need a physician or a lawyer. He was happy that he had the advantage of listening to noble horses. He found that the master understood Yahoos better than Gulliver himself did; "he went through all our vices and follies" Gulliver reported.

Gulliver unhesitatingly confessed that all the little knowledge he had of any value was acquired by the lectures from his master and from the discourses of his friends: to which he was prouder to have listened to, than he would have been to the greatest and the wisest assembly in Europe. To put it briefly, he was quite happy and reconciled to his situation in the land of the Houyhnhnms. When he thought of his family and his countrymen or of the human race in general, he considered them as they really were; Yahoos in shape and disposition, perhaps a little more civilized and qualified with the gift of speech; but making no other use of reason than to improve and multiply those vices of which their brothers in that country had only the share that nature allotted them. Gulliver was so enamoured of the Houyhnhnms that he even began to imitate their gait and gesture.



Suddenly, when Gulliver was thus settled to a happy, carefree life among his new friends, he received an agonizing message: the Houyhnhnm assembly had decreed that he must leave. The representatives had taken offense at the grey horse's keeping a Yahoo as if he were a Houyhnhnm. Gulliver's master was distressed too for having to lose Gulliver, but the neighbours' pressure was too much for him to withstand. Gulliver was miserable but agreed to leave. In six weeks, with the help of a servant horse, Gulliver constructed a canoe covered with Yahoo skins and a sail of the same material. He stocked his boat with boiled rabbit flesh and other provisions, kissed the master's foot and sailed towards an island he could see about five leagues away.

Critical Comments

The unfeeling decision of the horses shows how far pure reason can go in successfully managing human life. Gulliver, on the contrary, felt disturbed at the prospect of having to leave. Yet, since he had lived among the Houyhnhnms, he had the good sense to agree with the wisdom and justice of their action as they saw it; that is, Gulliver could control his feelings and impulses by his rationality. Gulliver had also achieved a measure of humility.

Chapter Eleven

After a tender parting from his Houyhnhnm friends, Gulliver thought out his plans. He hoped to find an uninhabited island on which he could support his life. Returning to civilization, with its corruptions and its incitements to viciousness, was an intolerable idea to him. On the island on which he landed he was pursued by savages and wounded in the knee but when he saw a ship, he tried to avoid it. He was found by a party of men who had come to the shore in search of water. They spoke to him in Portuguese and wondered at his strange clothes. Meanwhile, Gulliver trembled in fear and hatred. The Portuguese captain, a very courteous and a generous person, spoke to Gulliver in a very kind and civil manner, but Gulliver was only amazed to find such civility in a Yahoo and remained silent and sullen. He was, in fact, ready to faint at the very smell of him and his men. At last Gulliver wanted to eat something out of his own canoe: but the captain ordered for him a chicken and some good wine and then directed that he be put to bed in a very clean cabin. After remaining in the cabin for some time Gulliver stole out of it when he thought nobody was looking and tried to leap overboard but was prevented and was chained to his cabin. The captain, Pedro de Mendez was so polite and showed such a moving concern for him that at last Gulliver decided to treat him as a creature having some little portion of reason.

Bound by an oath not to destroy himself, Gulliver spent most of the voyage to Lisbon shut up in his cabin, away from the crew. He shunned wearing clothes touched by Yahoos



and, in Lisbon, he had himself led to the highest room at the back of the house. After listening to Gulliver's story, the captain patiently tried to persuade Gulliver to accept his own kind again, and at last Gulliver was induced to walk in the street with his nose stopped up with cotton or tobacco to keep out the Yahoo smell. He was also persuaded to return home where the sight of his family revolted him. He fainted when his wife embraced him. For a year, he could not bear the presence of his family; "to this hour" he said, "they dare not presume to touch my bread," nor would he permit them to take him by the hand. For five years, he lived in the stable, talked with horses and of all men welcomed only the groom - because he smelled of horses.

Critical Comments

Gulliver's mind is seriously unhinged. He suffers from what the Greeks called *hubris*, arrogance and excessive pride characterized by a man stepping out of his proper place in the world. Gulliver's position is that of a man, but he acts as though he were a Houyhnhnm or a god - immeasurably above his own kind. The paradox about Gulliver's life or situation is that, in his complacently stupid pride, he violently denounces all men's pride except his own. He is arrogant with Captain Mendez. He reports that with the passage of time his terror of men gradually lessened but his hatred and contempt increased. Even for his own family he has nothing but hatred and contempt. His memory is "perpetually filled with virtues and ideas of those exalted Houyhnhnms." His pursuit of reason and virtues, divorced from feeling and emotion, has resulted in madness and so he lives with horses and shuns his family.

Had Swift meant us to take seriously Gulliver's "antipathy to humankind" he would have made the captain, Don Pedro an unmistakable Yahoo. His emphasis on Don Pedro's virtues is clear indication that he wanted us to think of Gulliver, at this final stage, as a person so infatuated with a false or one-sided theory of human nature that he is blind to any fact which contradicts it.

This conclusion of Gulliver's story in fact saves Swift from the old charge of morbid misanthropy at the expense of the hero, who now becomes the vehicle of an argument which does discourage us from thinking well of our fellow men but which, in its ultimate point, is reassuring as to the capacity of at least some human beings for rising far above the Yahoo level. Gulliver's mind is infected by the complacency and pride of the Houyhnhnms, their sense of superiority to the Yahoos, otherwise Gulliver was a good man. He had to be one to be able to recognize and admire "virtue and ideas" superior to his.

The last voyage of Gulliver needs to be given, not the moral emphasis that it was given in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but it needs to be given intellectual emphasis.



Gulliver's reaction to mankind on his return is extravagant and violent, but it serves Swift's avowed end of vexing the world by shocking it violently, but wittily, out of its complacency with itself; and it does this perfectly. Moreover, we must avoid, while reading *Gulliver's Travels*, identifying Swift with Gulliver.

Chapter Twelve

While taking leave of the reader, Gulliver insists on having been absolutely truthful in what he had recorded, simply because his purpose was to inform, not to amuse. A traveller's chief purpose, he said, should be to make men wiser, not dazzle them with wonders and he wished there were a law making it compulsory for the travellers to publish what is true. Particularly after the Houyhnhnm experience, he could not be induced to write anything that was not absolutely true. When Gulliver wrote the account of his voyages his sole intention had been the public good. That intention is proved by his presentation of the virtues of the noble Houyhnhnms, which will necessarily shame men in their vices. At this point, Gulliver reminds us of the morality and wisdom of the Brobdingnagians, a different but noble model for our conduct and institutions. The Brobdingnagians are real men, with passions like ours but unlike the horses, they are models possible to imitate. It is Swift's way of urging man to be big; to think and to act like a giant, not like Lilliputians or Yahoos, nor should he madly try to think of himself as a Houyhnhnm.

Gulliver goes on to claim that what he wrote was without passion, prejudice, or ill-will. It was solely for the information and instruction of mankind. Gulliver justifies his not registering the countries he discovered for the crown of Great Britain by saying that Lilliput is not worth subjugating and that other lands would be too dangerous to attack. He rather wished that the Houyhnhnms sent out missionaries to civilize Europe by teaching it their virtues. Besides he has had visions of the brutality and injustice by which new dominions are acquired and modern colonies set up. England, of course, was innocent of all such barbarity. (Swift/Gulliver is obviously being ironical here.)

Gulliver had come back to humanity, but he could not still bear their smell. Making a strong statement he says; "I am not in the least provoked at the sight of a lawyer, a pick-pocket, a colonel, a fool, a lord, a gangster, a politician, a whore-monger, a physician . . . or the like: this is all according to the due course of things: but when I behold a lump of deformity and diseases, both of body, and mind, smitten *with pride* it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together." In his humility, Gulliver entreated those who had "any tincture of this absurd vice" not to "presume to appear" in his sight.



Swift's message is unmistakable. The worst vice or fault in man is pride. Gulliver becomes a living example of what this vice can do to a man; alienate him and render him ridiculous.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a brief note on the Houyhnhnms' customs and traditions.
2. What observation does the Houyhnhnm master make about humans, after listening to Gulliver's account of the laws and institutions of England?
3. Why is Gulliver asked to leave Houyhnhnm land?
4. Describe Gulliver's behaviour towards his family after returning home.

4. NARRATIVE STYLE IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

Swift's most famous and most popular book was published anonymously at the end of October 1726. It belongs to the years of his maturity and disillusionment. Its full title at the time of its first publication was, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver, first a Surgeon, and then a captain of several ships. Gulliver's Travels* is perhaps the only major work in all English literature that has continuously led a double life: the book has been, from its first appearance, successful with children as well as with their elders, "from the cabinet council to the nursery," as Pope and Gray wrote to Swift. For children the book is a collection of marvellous adventure stories, while for the elders the same stories are pungent critiques of humanity, addressed to their mature imagination. The book is an incredible amalgam of pleasantly exciting explorer's tales and the disturbing satire behind it; the child can rarely see behind the exciting facade and the adult reader can never cease seeing what lurks behind it, however inconspicuously. These opposite readings of the book are possible because there are times when Swift is entirely concerned with the façade - with the elaboration of the details of the story for its own sake, for instance, in the military drill in Book I, chapter 3, and the description of the floating island in Book III, chapter 3. The presence of such passages allows the young reader to take the whole story at the simplest level of meaning. Moreover, throughout Books I and II, there is the fascinating change of perspective - from very small to very big. In Books III and IV the superficial charm is that of the 'Wonders of Science,' mysterious phenomena and strangely shaped creatures. All this



gives zest to the narrative without in any way coming in the way of its philosophical interpretation.

Gulliver's Travels has survived, in fact, grown in importance over almost three centuries. There are several reasons for this. First, a careful reading of the text shows that Swift is not casual about his material; rather he treats it with utmost seriousness. He makes the narrator, Gulliver, an earnest, solid, trustworthy traveller, who is scrupulously careful in reporting exactly what happened; he is far from being flippant or having the self-consciousness of one who is engaged in an elaborate hoax. Swift takes great pains to invent a multitude of such concrete facts that an honest voyager would record in his diary. Swift's technique of circumstantial realism makes the voyager's record perfectly reliable.

Secondly, Swift is extremely diligent in establishing the inner consistency of the strange worlds which Gulliver discovers: all aspects of life in Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Houyhnhnm Land are carefully worked out according to scale and pattern. For instance, Lilliputians are six inches tall, and the same scale is maintained for everything and every creature in their land. The same is true about the Land of the Brobdingnagians, whose inhabitants are ten times the size of man. This gives order to something that lies outside our usual sense of order; this combines the rational and the fantastic in such a way that it both astonishes and convinces. This is superrealism. Thirdly and lastly, the most impressive quality of the book is its narrative manner. Gulliver discovers all kinds of strange lands and their strange inhabitants but never shows any amazement; he accepts their actuality. This is reflected in his calm plainness of style - his simple vocabulary and orderly, simple sentences. The ironic discrepancy between the matter-of-fact plain style and the deeper levels of meaning of the story is one of the sources of the pleasure of reading this book.

It can perhaps be said that Gulliver's simplicity, that is the simplicity of the character who is created by Swift to narrate the fantastic discoveries, makes it a tale not for children but for the perceptive reader, who is aware of the symbolic dimension of the narrative. The same simplicity of style reveals Swift's deadpan subtlety; a source of ambiguity and irony. For instance, Gulliver tells us that Lilliputians cannot approach him "without license from court, whereby the secretaries of State got considerable fees." What Gulliver says, on one simple plane, means that he was a very popular side show but what Swift actually means to tell us is about the various ways in which the secretaries of state acquired their wealth. Gulliver records that the giant farmer's wife, on seeing him, "screamed and ran back, as women in England do at the sight of a toad or a spider." From Gulliver, this is a simple image supplied by his memory; from Swift, it is an ironic comment on the smallness of Gulliver and hence of humanity generally, and on the amusing timidity of women. Gulliver naively admires the



destructiveness of modern weapons of warfare; the naive admiration of his narrator is Swift's ironic comment on the hollow and sinister achievements of civilization. Its only occasionally that Swift forgets his role as an uninvolved creator and of Gulliver as an ordinary English sailor and uses, for both of them, a single voice railing not only directly but violently against the state of affairs in Europe. This happens most frequently in Book III, in which Swift fails to keep Gulliver's usual character as a mild, factual, patriotic, middle class-Englishman.

Gulliver's Travels is a fabulous entertainer and, at the same time, a bitter criticism of society. It has been interpreted to be hitting at a number of contemporary characters and events; Lilliput is England, Blefuscu is France, Flimnap is Sir Robert Walpole; the leader of the Whig party and the Secretary of War, from 1708-10, and so on. The historical references and commentary on them are only a minor achievement of the book. Its real achievement and its universality of appeal lies in the use of the method of fantasy for a profound concern: on human nature, as it may be observed at all times and places. The littleness of the Lilliputians symbolizes the moral and spiritual pettiness of which humanity is capable - its jealousy, malice, infidelity, ingratitude, its lust for power and, above all, its hatred of greatness; and conversely, its worship of mediocrity and pettiness. The hugeness of the Brobdingnagians is a symbol of large-mindedness; so that, from their point of view, Gulliver's normal humanity seems, in both size and character, to be something vicious. In Book III, various symbolic devices are used to suggest the unsocial behaviour, unimaginativeness, and pedantry of various scientists and scholars. And in the final section of this book, is suggested the fundamental error of human beings who want to live forever.

Swift is a strong critic of human folly, as is evident in the early books, but it needs to be strongly emphasized that he is not a mere cynic, for he is as aware of moral potentiality as of failure. His central theme, indeed, is the dual nature of man: man's capacity for both good and evil, and man's potentiality for being both an angel and a beast. In Book I, for instance, even the ordinary Englishman Gulliver, in contrast with the Lilliputians, comes to embody the best human qualities and, in chapter 6, Swift paints a Utopian picture of certain aspects of Lilliputian life. Similarly, the Brobdingnagians are both idealized and given human defects.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Swift shows an uncompromising sense of man's potential for evil, and it has had the effect of making the readers overemphasize this part of his world view. This has resulted in an unbalanced reading, especially of Book IV. Swift is not just saying, as has often been thought, that mankind is only a tribe of Yahoos, that is bestial creatures: rather, in creating Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, he is splitting man into certain component elements - the animal and the rational. Yahoos are devoid of rationality and the Houyhnhnms are rational beings, but their rationality is quite limited, dry, and devitalized;



founded on the elimination of emotional aspects of life. Gulliver is so impressed by the Houyhnhnms that he aspires to live by their rationality, stoicism and simple wisdom; and being persuaded that he has attained them, he feeds his growing misanthropy on pride, which alienates him not only from his remote kinsmen the Yahoos, but eventually from his brothers, the human race. Deluded by his worship of pure reason, he commits the error of the Houyhnhnms in equating human beings with the Yahoos. Captured by a Portuguese crew and forced to return to humanity, he trembles with fear and hatred. The captain of the ship, like Gulliver himself, shares the nature of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos; and, like the Gulliver of the first voyage, he is tolerant, sympathetic, kindly, patient, and charitable; but Gulliver can no longer recognize these traits in a human being. With the myopic vision of the Houyhnhnms, he perceives only the Yahoo and is repelled by Don Pedro's clothes, food, and odour. Gradually, however, he is nursed back to partial health, and is forced to admit that his benefactor has a "very good human understanding." Swift does not preach; he makes the narrative conclusion of the last book itself point to the meaning of this brilliant travelogue.

Interestingly, the use of fantasy for serious statement has come back into vogue in our times after having been eliminated by almost two centuries of emphasis upon social realism that documents and catalogues.

5. IRONY, SATIRE, AND THE COMIC SPIRIT

Irony denotes a rhetorical figure and a manner of discourse in which, for the most part, meaning is contrary to words. With its double-edginess, its contradiction between the meaning and the words, irony becomes a very fine instrument for expressing the comic-spirit. Irony, in fact, strikes a balance between the serious and the comic and springs from a perception of the absurdity of life, its being both tragic and comic. According to one definition, irony, in the widest sense, begins with the contemplation of the fate of the world, where the artist becomes a kind of god, viewing creation with a detached ironical smile. The human condition as such is, therefore, to be regarded as potentially absurd, deserving an ironical response and treatment. An ironical response depends on the perception or awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results or between appearance and reality. In all cases there may be an element of the absurd and the paradoxical.

The two basic kinds of irony are verbal irony and irony of situation, also described as structural irony. Verbal irony simply means saying what one does not mean. The literary works that exhibit structural irony are not totally ironic. In such works, irony is not just an



occasional verbal feature, but irony or duplicity of meaning is sustained by the very structure and situation of the work. One common device of this sort of irony is the invention of a naive hero or else a naive narrator or spokesman, whose simplicity makes him interpret situations and actions in such a way that a perceptive reader would not accept his views literally or uncritically. The hero/narrator of *Gulliver's Travels* is an example. Gulliver is not Swift. Gulliver is in fact a contrast to Swift and an instrument for projecting an ironical view of human frailty, folly and vices.

Irony has several functions. It is often the witting and unwitting instrument of truth. It chides, deflates, and scorns. It is not surprising, therefore, that irony is the most efficient weapon of the satirist.

The satirist is made of sterner stuff. He is not contented with just eliciting an amused smile at the absurdity of life or its policies. He is outspoken and hard hitting. He comes down heavily on human follies. He censures, ridicules, and directly attacks and denounces the follies and vices of society and thus brings contempt and derision upon aberrations from moral and social norms. Satire is a kind of protest born out of anger and indignation and the satirist is a kind of therapist whose function is to destroy the fundamental causes of sickness of the human spirit, such as hypocrisy, pride, and greed. The satirist does not necessarily confine himself to such moral disorders. Swift, for example, apart from attacking hypocrisy, pride and cruelty, attacks lust for power and money. *Gulliver's Travels* attacks corruption in law courts, rivalry and intrigue in royal courts, incompetence of physicians, unjust economic systems that perpetuate inequality, and irresponsible scientists.

Gulliver's Travels is a bitter attack on Swift's contemporary 18th century England and, at the same time, an attack on mankind in general. The voyage to Lilliput is especially an ingenious political satire of great interest and enjoyment for a student of 18th century history of England. He can relate the events of the story to the actual historical controversies and personalities of Swift's time. But *Gulliver's Travels* has a universal appeal. It's a classic because it exists outside space and time. It's the story of man and has continued to be enjoyable and relevant to a man who knows nothing about 18th century England. Human nature is as corrupt today as it had been at the time when *Gulliver's Travels* was written. *Gulliver's Travels* is a complex book. Its complexity lies not only in the multiple levels at which it can be read but also in the variety of stylistic devices by which this complexity is produced. It is a straight narrative, a comedy, a comic satire, a bitter satire, and there is the double voice of irony. There are quick shifts in technique, and a variety of techniques interpenetrating with absolute ease and comfort.



The book opens with an apparently factual and straightforward narrative and we readily accept Gulliver as a representative Englishman who falls into the hands of the little men in the toy-kingdom of the Lilliputians. In passages of sheer comedy, we laugh at the acrobatic skill of the politicians and courtiers, at the absurd jealousy of the diminutive minister who suspects an adulterous relationship between his wife and the giant Gulliver. The comedy turns into irony when we gradually realize that the six-inch midgets, in fact, are ourselves and Gulliver is only an outsider, an observer. Irony is part of the entire structure of the book, so that the deeper meaning is seen obliquely. Gulliver boasts about “our noble country, the Mistress of Arts and Arms, the scourge of France” and at the same time he betrays every available scandalous fact about the country he professes to love. Comedy turns into comic satire in the passages concerning the High-Heels and Low-Heels, and the Big-Endians and the Small-Endians. Gradually, with perfect ease and timing, we are led to see the most evil and brutal aspect of humanity. The funny and the comical, with which the first book opened, turns into contempt and derision as Swift shows the limits of the hypocrisy, ingratitude, and treachery of the Lilliputian court. Gulliver, who has deserved the highest gratitude from the Lilliputians is impeached for capital offenses; ironically, for making water within the precincts of the burning royal palace, “under cover of extinguishing the fire” and refusing to bring the empire of Blefuscu under the domination of Lilliput and put to death all the Big-Indian exiles. The court’s debate on how to dispose of Gulliver turns into bitter satire. In the Lilliputian episode, the object of satire is human pettiness, especially moral pettiness and the triviality of the forms, titles, customs, and pretences by which men assert their dignity and about which they carry on their quarrels. Characteristically, the vices Gulliver meets with in this country are those of little men: pomposity, intrigue, and motive.

In Brobdingnag, we laugh at the plight of Gulliver, the “giant” of Lilliput. He is frightened by a puppy, rendered ludicrous by the tricks of a monkey, stands in awe of a dwarf, embarrassed by the lewd antics of the maids of honour and contented to be fondled and nursed by a little nine-year old girl. All this continues till Gulliver relates to the King the history of England and recommends to him the use of gunpowder. The King becomes the spokesman for Swift when he makes a scathing comment on the Europeans “as the most pernicious race of little vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the face of the earth.” The King has nothing but contempt for the destructive and utterly cruel ways of men. Gulliver is all disapproval for the King’s refusal to use gunpowder. He dismisses it as “a nice unnecessary scruple” and a sign of backwardness. We have no doubt about who is on the side of the good and of the evil. We also know that Swift’s opinion is quite opposite to Gulliver’s



and that the irony lies in Gulliver, the hero, being quite naive and absolutely wrong. He is small, petty, and stupid in his thinking as well as in his physical appearance.

To take another example of the quick transition from one technique to another in *Gulliver's Travels* we consider some episodes from Book III. The professors at Balnibarbi are presented as progressive scientists, but we quickly find that they are devoid of common-sense, and that unless we want to approve of such extravagant projects, such as “softening marble for pincushions,” we have to dismiss them entirely. Significantly, the people at work in it are described as ‘projectors,’ that is, people not engaged in disinterested research but are merely on the look-out for gadgets which will save labour and bring in money. As we move on to the School of Political Projectors, we are told that Gulliver was ill-entertained there and the professors appeared to him “wholly out of their senses” and bitter satire takes over from this point. Swift tells us that these unhappy people were following, “wild, impossible chimeras.” They were proposing schemes for persuading monarchs to choose favourites “upon the score of their wisdom, capacity and virtue . . . of rewarding merit, great abilities and eminent services.” The remedies suggested for curing people of corrupt ways are highly comical. But they make you laugh and cry at the same time, because here only the surface is comical. At its centre is tragedy, transformed through style and tone into icy irony. Those who try to devise means of correcting mankind are busy in the pursuit of chimeras because human nature is beyond correction. *Gulliver's Travels* shows the dark and the grim truth about man. Irony and humour make this truth palatable.

6. QUESTIONS

1. Swift is usually charged with being a misanthrope. Does your reading of *Gulliver's Travels* justify this?
2. Can we read Book 1 of *Gulliver's Travels* without being conscious of the satire? Give reasons in support of your answer.
3. Which episodes in Book I of *Gulliver's Travels* make you feel that the book is a satire rather than merely an adventure story? Give reasons in support of your answer.
4. Describe the picture of Brobdingnagian society as given by Swift in Book II of *Gulliver's Travels*. What evils of contemporary society was it designed to expose?
5. What are the objects of Swift's satire in *Gulliver's Travels* Book I and II?
6. “Swift's picture of Brobdingnagian society is not merely a piece of satire but also a vision of society as he would like it to be.” Discuss.



7. Examine the complex use of irony that Swift makes in *Gulliver's Travels* Book I and II.
8. "The Voyage to Lilliput" is the neatest and most diverting of the four voyages . . . It holds our interest chiefly as imaginative narrative." Discuss.
9. "Though Gulliver makes the error of identifying himself and the other human beings completely with the Yahoos, we and Swift do not." Do you agree with this view? Give a reasoned answer.
10. Bring out the significance of Gulliver's voyage to the country of the Houyhnhnms in terms of irony and satire.
11. Bring out the significance of Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.
12. Comment on the narrative technique of Swift in Book I and II of *Gulliver's Travels*. What does Swift achieve by this technique.
13. In *Gulliver's Travels* Swift holds up a mirror to human defects and depravity. Elaborate.
14. Beneath the comic storyline of *Gulliver's Travels* lies the savage satire of Swift. Illustrate with examples.



VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

Aisha Qadry

Part- 1: Introduction, Summary and Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Vicar of Wakefield* also known as *The Tale, Supposed to be written by Himself*, is a novel written by Oliver Goldsmith. Written between the years 1761 to 1762, the novel was published a few years later after several revisions in 1766. The novel boasts of an interesting backstory that led to its eventual publication.

In the famous biography *Life of Johnson* (1791), author James Boswell recounts an anecdote from the life of Samuel Johnson, friend and contemporary of Oliver Goldsmith.

I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was drest, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return, and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill.



That's how *The Vicar of Wakefield* was published- in a state of financial emergency. Johnson sold the novel to his nephew Francis Newbery who published it after two years and since its publication the novel has managed to capture the attention of readers and critics, as Goldsmith expertly combines elements of satire, domestic fiction, comedy, tragedy and sentimentalism to produce a charming tale of the misfortunes of the virtuous Dr. Charles Primrose, also known as *The Vicar of Wakefield* and his family that includes his wife, Deborah and six children.

In this unit we will familiarize ourselves with the author's background, the development of the novel in the eighteenth century, sentimental novel and the summary and analysis of the text.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the times and life of the author and context in which the work was written
- Understand the development of a genre in the eighteenth century
- Summarize and critically analyse the novel
- Understand the literal depth of the work and be able to appreciate it

3. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Goldsmith was an Anglo-Irish poet, novelist, and playwright. Born in Pallas or Pallasmore in the county of Longford in 1730, Oliver was the fifth child of reverend Charles Goldsmith and Anne. A few years after Oliver's birth, Charles received the opportunity to move to Kilkenny-West as a vicar. This position came with a significant increase in income, from a humble forty pounds to two hundred pounds. The Goldsmiths moved out of Pallas to a spacious home near Lissoy. Little did Charles know that his decision to move to a new parish as its vicar would one day serve as the setting for his son Oliver's story, *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Oliver attended a number of different schools while he was a child. At these schools, he acquired skills in reading, writing, and knowledge of the classics. According to his teachers, he was considered to be a remarkably dull and stupid child. A bout of smallpox which proved to be almost fatal for Oliver changed his face completely. He was left with deep scars on his face that invited unwanted attention and mockery from people around him.



All in all, he grew up being verbally tormented by his peers and teachers, yet close members of the family and guides insisted that he was intelligent, kind, and witty.

Unexpected changes in the family's circumstances and fortunes affected Oliver's education. After completing his schooling, he joined Trinity College as a sizar. To be a sizar, young Oliver had to excel academically while also undertaking miscellaneous menial tasks at the university. But, Oliver on the other hand was missing lectures, getting into brawls, attending parties, and faring poorly as a student. In addition to this, the news of his father's passing put him in an even worse situation financially. The last straw to his already eventful college education was his getting involved in a riot, which led to his expulsion. After getting expelled, he organized an exhibition, saved some money, and decided to move to America. But his plan was shot down as his brother made arrangements to send him back to the university. Oliver graduated in 1749 with a Bachelor of Arts.

To pursue a career in medicine, he then enrolled at the University of Edinburgh but left the university soon without a degree. Oliver travelled the continent, played the flute, and had a good time only to return back home to a life of extreme penury. He was employed in odd occupations such as an usher at a school, a tutor, and an apothecary's assistant. But when nothing worked, he started translating, writing and sending pieces for publication. He wrote reviews, stories, newspapers, and magazine articles. His rise to prominence was slow and gradual. He met Johnson around 1746 and became an important member of the *Literary Club* or *The Club*. Oliver Goldsmith's sad childhood marked by difficulties may elicit sympathy in our hearts, but after he had gained prominence, his life of destitution was his own doing. In addition to being a flagrant spender, he enjoyed clothes, fine dining and courting women.

His notable works include the philosophical poem, *The Traveller; or, a Prospect of Society* (1764), the sentimental novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), the comedy *Good Natur'd Man* (1768), the celebrated pastoral poem *Deserted Village* (1770), and the classic comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771, first performed in 1773).

Goldsmith died on 4th of April 1774, at the age of forty-six after misdiagnosing his ailment.

4. THE RISE OF THE NOVEL

Remember that the novel or any other form of literature did not wondrously materialize at a particular period of time in history. Every literary epoch you have studied or will study is characterized by a literary spirit that supports or encourages a particular literary form or many forms for that matter. In order to grasp and comprehend a literary work or text better, always



position it in its historical and cultural context. When we state that the eighteenth century can be seen as a watershed moment for the English novel, what we really mean is that it allowed the novel genre to mature into the shape that we are all familiar with today.

The development of the English novel in the eighteenth century was fraught with numerous revisions and experiments before it finally took on the name “novel.”. The origins of storytelling can be traced back to the classical era, which produced the first epic, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Homer’s works, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* established the tradition of epics. The epics told remarkable tales of extraordinary warriors, frequently endowed with supernatural abilities, who fought fabled battles or altered the course of history. Belonging to the oral tradition, epics were not meant to be read but rather to be performed in front of large audiences. Their oral nature also gave them the ability to travel far and wide. The oral tradition continued up until the medieval ages when wandering minstrels performed stories of faraway, distant lands. The minstrels were also known to improvise their narratives to suit localized interests.

The Romances and prose from the middle ages and medieval periods can also be used to determine the novel's ancestry. Let’s look at a few examples that are considered antecedents to the novel. We have the *Decameron*, a collection of short stories by the Italian author and poet Boccaccio in 1350, which served as inspiration for Chaucer's celebrated work, the *Canterbury Tales*. In the *Canterbury Tales*, we have a group of pilgrims, each telling a different tale. The Romances written during this period mainly focused on the values of honour, chivalry, knighthood, and courtly love. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, is a famous prose romance that was composed around 1470. It tells the story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which came to England as a translated text, is another central text in our literary inventory. Written originally in Spanish, it is considered to be the first modern novel. Lastly, we have the allegorical tale *Pilgrim's Progress* written in 1678 by John Bunyan. Claimed to be one of the first works written in English, it garnered lasting success for its realistic characters and conversations.

While the above-mentioned works paint a rich tapestry of the novel’s literary history, now it’s time we focused on its socio-historical background. With the invention of the printing press and the Industrial Revolution, people had more time to rest and pursue a vocation. As many of them turned toward reading, the need for and popularity of more material gradually arose. The printing press helped in producing and disseminating magazines, periodicals, and novels widely in a short amount of time. The result of greater circulation also indicated an improvement in the age's literary level. Regarding subjects and



themes, the everyday lives of men and women took precedence over the lofty ideals of the past represented in epics and romances. As Ian Watts puts it:

the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable... This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience-individual experience which is always unique and therefore new.

This unique force that challenged “literary traditionalism” was Realism, where authors write about the ordinary or the mundane. Additionally, as the mercantile class or the tradesmen began visiting far-off places, they returned with fresh and exciting accounts of their travels and adventures, which aroused the curiosity of many back home. Finally, the birth and rise of circulating libraries encouraged and facilitated reading in not only men but also women, who now had easier access to literature from the comfort of their own homes.

Now that we have looked at how the socio-historical milieu proved favourable for the growth of the literary form, it's time to understand the impact of other literary forms on the novel. The plays written during the Renaissance era contributed to the portrayal of the character. The form of drama gave the novel a scaffold to build characters that grew, developed, and changed through the course of the narrative. Another significant aspect of the play that the novel adapted from the drama was the blending of genres, such as comedy and tragedy. The periodical essay written during the latter half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century is the other literary genre that is also recognized for its important contributions to the rich, detailed descriptions of the character in the novel.

Now, let's look at some important names that experimented with the form and nature of the novel. The first name to consider during this period is Daniel Defoe. His classic adventure story, *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719, heralded the birth of realism as a literary form. In *Robinson Crusoe*, we saw a definite plot, a variety of characters, and a deeper psychological insight into the minds of those characters. Along with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe* is also thought to be one of the first novels to be written in English. When discussing the novel's form, women writers also made an important contribution with titles such as Aphra Behn's travel narrative *Ornooko* (1688), *Love Letters between a Noble Man and His Sister* (1689), and *Love Letters between a Noble Man and His Sister* (1690).



5. THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL OF THE 18TH CENTURY

The novels of the eighteenth century shifted their emphasis from the public to the private as they attempted at comprehending the psychological underpinnings of the mind. In contrast to their literary predecessors from the Neoclassical Age or the Augustan age, which prioritized “reason,” and “rationality,” sentimental novels of the eighteenth century emphasized emotions or sentiment. The sentiment theory of philosopher Anthony Shaftesbury serves as the foundation for this genre. He claimed that people were made to be impressed by order. He says that a person's intentions might show whether or not they are moral. Additionally, they possess the capacity to discern virtue, which enables them to feel compassion for others. On the use of sentimentalism in the eighteenth century, John Mullan says

Underlying sentimentalism is the belief that a capacity for deep, and even disabling, feeling renders individuals fit for society. To possess heightened sensibility is to feel more readily the pleasures and pains of sympathy, to be able to escape self-interest, and therefore to be virtuous.

Let's take a close look at Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) which is considered to be a classic example of this form of writing. Pamela is an epistolary novel about a young maidservant named Pamela Andrews. She is caught in an unfortunate situation with her master, Mr. B who makes indecent advances toward her. In a series of letters, Pamela spills out her woes while clinging tightly to her moral and religious values. The epistolary form gives Richardson a clever hand to create an intimate bond with the readers, thus evoking a heightened sense of sympathy in their hearts for his protagonist's sufferings. The book's subtitle is “To cultivate the principles of virtues and religions in the minds of youth or both sexes,” and it was written with a single, focused goal in mind—to inspire virtue in the hearts of its readers. Richardsons's Pamela also bore the title of being a sentimental novel proudly on its cover pages.

A name that is synonymous with sentimental fiction is Laurence Stern. His texts, such as *Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* and most popularly, *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), Another celebrated example of this genre is *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith.

The idealisation of nature, the highlighting of the corruptions found in society's upper classes, and the protagonist's lack of worldly wisdom—represented by a character who can be classed as a wise fool or simpleton—are all traits of sentimental novels.



Check Your Progress -1

1. Describe the formative experiences of Oliver Goldsmith.
2. Discuss the growth and development of the novel.
3. What are sentimental novels? Give a few examples.

6. SUMMARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS

Goldsmith has divided *The Vicar of Wakefield* into thirty-two chapters, each titled with a short description.

Here, we have divided the novel for you into three parts for a better understanding.

6.1 Part-I

The novel opens by introducing the readers to the Vicar and his family. The Vicar is not just the central protagonist but also the narrator of this tale. He invites the readers into his happy and content life, which includes living in an elegant house with a loving wife, Deborah and six children named George, Olivia, Sophia, Moses, Dick, and Bill. Incredibly proud of his brood, he believes that each one of them is beautiful, noble, and virtuous in their own right. He also adds that their kind demeanour invites admiration from the entire neighbourhood. All in all, we get a sense of the Vicar thriving and happily leading a fulfilling life.

As a man of the Church, the Vicar tells us that he enjoys giving sermons on the subject of marriage and he proudly declares that he is a “strict monogamist”. He also adds that his passion for the subject has made him write several tracts on the subject of matrimony which may not have been read as much as he had hoped. As we move ahead, we learn that the Vicar’s eldest son, George, is set to marry his father’s fellow clergyman’s daughter, Miss. Arabella Wilmot. Both families are happy about this union until the Vicar wants to publish another one of his treatises on marriage. Arabella’s father Mr. Wilmot, who has a fourth wife, is irritated by Vicar’s views on the subject of marriage, which leads to a disagreement that jeopardizes their children’s alliance. Amidst the heated discussion, a relative informs the Vicar that he should back out of the argument and let the couple get married because he has received some unpleasant news regarding the Vicar’s financial situation. He tells the Vicar that the man who handles the family’s accounts has absconded, leaving them bankrupt. As soon as this piece of information reaches the ears of Mr. Wilmot, he hastily breaks off the



engagement. The Vicar hopes that the news of their bankruptcy is false, but after careful investigation, it is confirmed that the Vicar and his family have now been reduced to a state of financial destitution. In contrast to Goldsmith's own private life, the Vicar and his family have to move to a more humbler settlement than the one they are living in now.

The vicar tells his children to give up their life of splendour in favour of a simpler one as they prepare to start their new life. To lessen the family burden, the Vicar sends off his eldest son George to the city to fend for himself. As they journey toward their new home, the Vicar and his family make a stop at an inn. Here, the inn's manager acquaints them with their new landlord, Squire Thornhill (also known as Mr. Thornhill). Described as a philanderer, Squire Thornhill's description displeases the vicar, but piques the interest of the women in the family. The readers along with the family meet Mr. Burchell, an important character of the narrative for the first time. Mr. Burchell is introduced as a kind, intelligent man of poor means. He tells the Vicar that the Squire is the nephew of his uncle, Sir William Thornhill. The Squire is also dependent on his uncle's fortune. On being asked about the uncle, Mr. Burchell tells the vicar that after spending much of his youth living foolishly he now prefers an introverted and solitary life. The narrative progresses with Mr. Burchell accompanying the family on the rest of their journey. In one of the first displays of his gentle nature, Mr. Burchell comes to the family's aid by rescuing Sophia after she falls into a rapid stream.

The Primrose family arrive in their new neighbourhood where they are welcomed warmly. The Vicar observes that his family, especially his daughters and wife, are still adhering to their values of the past in terms of their materialistic attachment to their clothes and adornments despite his plea for moderation and humility.

When the Primroses first meet their new landlord, Squire Thornhill, he appears to be exclusively interested in the women of the family and requests them to sing a song. The Vicar seems upset by this misplaced civility. Later the Primroses invite him to their house where Deborah and Olivia fuss over him. Deborah is extremely excited about Squire's visit, as she sees him as a prospective match for one of her daughters. The Vicar notices that, unlike Olivia, Sophia isn't as charmed by the Squire. Observing the family's attitude towards Mr. Thornhill, the Vicar expresses his discomfort by reminding them that they should be mindful of making connections, especially when they are above their rank or status. Later, the Squire sends the family some venison as a gift.

As the ladies cook the venison, they gush about the young Squire. As they are doing so, Mr. Burchell joins them. In comparison to the Squire, we see that the Vicar seems to enjoy the company of Mr. Burchell as he appears to be a respectful and noble man. Mr.



Burchell, too, chooses to spend most of his time with the Primroses. Soon he starts showing particular fondness towards young Sophia which distresses the Vicar slightly.

The Primroses and the Squire meet together for an elaborate dinner party at the latter's home. At the dinner, the Squire's humour makes the Vicar uncomfortable, he also notes that his daughter Olivia is utterly floored by the Squire's charms. Deborah, the vicar's wife, is overjoyed at the Squire's visit as the Squire shows interest in Olivia which she sees as a personal triumph. She earnestly hopes that her daughters successfully find a way out into a better situation than they are in now. The Vicar dashes the hope of his wife by confessing that he will prefer a poor and honest man to someone like the Squire who was a "free-thinker" and a man notorious for his infidelity. Here, the Vicar's harsh judgment takes his family by surprise. Deborah and Olivia defend their views about the Squire. An important moment in the narrative is to be noted as the Vicar's son Moses reminds his father that judging the Squire on rumours and thoughts of other men is perhaps unfair and that the Squire should not be blamed for what other people think of him.

As we move ahead, we are told that Mr. Burchell's affection for Sophia becomes more and more apparent to everyone around him. On one hand, this development fills the heart of her mother with expectant glee, on the other, it enrages the Vicar tremendously. On his visit to the family, Mr. Burchell goes on to sing a ballad that enamours Sophia greatly, but a sudden gunshot in the air takes everyone by surprise as Sophia leaps into Mr. Burchell's arms. Much to the Vicar's annoyance, Deborah again appears to be chuffed about Sophia's and Mr. Burchell's growing intimacy. The Squire's messenger interrupts their soiree and invites Olivia and Sophia to a ball that is to be held at the Squire's residence.

At the ball, the Squire, joined by two other women, meets the Primrose family. We are told that the two women are dressed fashionably, and they seem to have taken a particular liking to Olivia and Sophia. The ball worries the Vicar, as he feels that soon he and his family's hobnobbing with people above their class may make them appear as pretentious social aspirants.

Over time, the Vicar notices that things have started to change in the Primrose house. The family is getting more laid-back in its chores and has started to live a life of comfort and indulgence. The girls get their fortunes read by a gypsy, who tells them they will each get married to a Squire and a Lord. According to the gossip in the neighbourhood, the squire is rumoured to be in love with the vicar's daughter so they hope that the Squire will propose to Olivia anytime soon. The Primroses get invited to an event at the church where Deborah demands that they go "genteelly", implying that the girls must take the horses instead of



walking to the event. The next morning, as the Vicar sets off to the Church, his family is nowhere to be seen. When he goes back to search for them he finds out that they have met with many mishaps and Mr. Burchell has once again come to their rescue.

The two women that the girls meet at the dance invite them to the city. Deborah convinces the Vicar to allow the girls to go to the city once the reputation of their hosts is confirmed. The family decides to make some provisions in order to send the girls to the city so Olivia, Sophia and Moses go to the fair to sell their horse, Colt. Back at home, Deborah and Mr. Burchell get into an argument about the girls going to the city. In the meantime, Moses returns happily, having sold Colt. In exchange for the horse, instead of receiving money from the buyer, Moses accepts “a groce of green paltry spectacles!”. His mother is horrified as, after a close examination of the spectacles, it turns out the rims are actually not silver as promised by the seller. Everyone is heartbroken because it is revealed that poor Moses was duped by a swindler. Deborah and Mr. Burchell continued their argument. As Mr. Burchell puts his foot down and says that he is leaving the country. Deborah feels that Mr. Burchell's argument is selfish and biased, as he wants Sophia all to himself, so he is uncomfortable about the girls' going to the town. Deborah believes that going to town will improve the girls' prospects and that they will not have to settle for “such low-lived fellows as he [Mr. Burchell].” Deborah's outburst thoroughly displeases the Vicar and he confronts Sophia about her thoughts on Mr. Burchell's behaviour. Sophia tells her father that Mr. Burchell is a gentleman of pleasing nature.

The Vicar takes his other horse to sell at the fair. He meets an interesting buyer named Mr. Ephraim Jenkinson, who wants to buy a horse for his tenant. In a comedic episode, the buyer flatters the vicar by asking him if he was related “to the great Primrose, that courageous monogamist, who had been the bulwark of the church.” When the buyer informs the vicar that he doesn't have any change on him, the vicar is obviously duped by his words and accepts an arrangement with him. The buyer lets the Vicar know that he is an old acquaintance of Solomon Flamborough, his neighbour, so that when the Vicar returns home, he may get the money for the horse from him. The Vicar sells the horse after acknowledging the buyer's goodwill. On reaching his neighbourhood, he goes immediately to his neighbour to collect his money, but Flamborough breaks the wretched news to him that the Vicar got duped by a local ruffian who has been using his name for quite some time. At home, the Primrose women are distraught because they have been told that someone has been spreading malicious rumours about the family. The Primroses are determined to find the individual responsible for damaging their reputation.



One day while playing, the youngest child finds a case. As they look closely, they realize that it belongs to Mr. Burchell. Their hearts sink as they find a letter addressed to the two ladies at Thornfield castle. Mr. Burchell, the family believes, is the base informant responsible for spreading rumours about their family. They read an ambiguous letter in which someone is warning the other party not to breach the peace of a household by inviting impropriety. The Primroses assume that it is them, Mr. Burchell is talking about, and they are ready to confront him when they see him walking towards them. Deborah bursts on Mr. Burchell. Hurt and angry, Mr. Burchell promises to stay away from them.

Following Mr. Burchell's exit, the Squire begins to visit the Primrose household more often. His intentions toward Olivia cheer her mother's heart, and she wholeheartedly corroborates his interests. Inspired by their neighbours, they get a family portrait painted where the Squire is included too. But, after the completion of the painting, they realize that it is gargantuan in size. To their chagrin, the portrait attracted everyone's attention, and the inclusion of the Squire added fuelled the flames. Deborah again strives to understand the Squire's feelings for Olivia, but his responses leave her and the family puzzled, albeit hopeful for a proposal.

While having a beautiful family moment, the Vicar and the family learn that Olivia has run away with two men. It completely devastates the Vicar, who is furious and heartbroken over his beloved daughter's transgression. He curses the men and says that all his "earthly happiness? has now come to an end. Equally outraged at their daughter's actions, the Vicar's wife, Deborah joins him in his outrage. Vicar inquires about the nature of the incident amid the curses. Dick responds that Olivia voluntarily entered the cabin after being kissed. The Vicar calls this "as first of our real misfortunes." The Vicar realizes that his outrage at the incident was impious, and if given a chance, he would most certainly reconcile with his daughter.

Check Your Progress -2

1. Why did the Primroses move to a new neighbourhood?
2. How are Mr. Burchell and Squire Thornhill introduced to the readers?
3. Who duped Moses and the Vicar?
4. Comment on the reaction of the Primroses after reading the letter.



6.2 Part-II

With a heavy heart, the Vicar sets out to find his daughter. He begins his search at Thornhill Castle, believing the young Squire to be the man responsible for his family's bad reputation. But he quickly learns that the Squire is surprised to hear this piece of information. The Vicar's doubts about Mr. Burchell's involvement soon get confirmed when an eyewitness informs the Vicar that he had seen Mr. Burchell and Olivia were heading together somewhere. The Vicar ponders that this may be a time when he could have given incorrect information about his daughter, but he resolves to continue his search for her. Upon reaching town, he receives information to go further ahead. The search continues until the next day when he runs into a company of actors. Here, he thinks that he may have caught a faint glimpse of Mr. Burchell but as the Vicar moves ahead, he suddenly starts feeling sick. He retires to a nearby alehouse for three weeks to recuperate. On his way back home, he boards a wagon that is carrying players from a theatre group. Their journey comes to a halt as they decide to rest at another alehouse.

The Vicar accompanied by a companion goes to a mansion for a performance. Here, the Vicar finds himself at loggerheads with the host. The host's political views do not sit well with him and as the host threatens to oust him from the mansions, the actual master and mistress arrive. It is only then that the vicar realizes the host is actually the butler of the house. The master and mistress of the mansion, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, embarrassed by their butler's disguise, graciously greet Vicar. The couple is accompanied by Miss. Arabella Wilmot, who is surprised to see the Vicar. Along with the Vicar we learn that Miss. Wilmot is the niece of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold. After learning about the Vicar, from their niece, they invite him to extend his stay at their home. Here, the Vicar recounts all of the family's misfortunes to Miss. Wilmot. She empathizes with their situation and tells him that she has rejected several proposals of matrimony after her doomed nuptials with George. The manager of the theatre group interrupts their conversation to sell tickets for an upcoming performance where a new actor is set to debut.

The Vicar proceeds to the performance along with others, and much to his dismay, the debutante is none other than his son George, who is stunned to find his father and his ex-fiancée in the crowd. As George runs away in tears, the Vicar is unable to process the situation. He retires to Mr. Arnold's home with Miss. Wilmot. On learning that the Vicar's son was in the play, Mr. Arnold invites him too. George shares all the misfortunes he suffered when he moved to the city. George, like Goldsmith, tried his hand at various jobs, including usher and poet. George reveals that he had a difficult time establishing a career of his own. He adds that not receiving recognition put him in a difficult position. And one day, as he sat



on a park bench, he chanced upon his university companion, Ned Thornhill. Finding George in a poor state, Thornhill helped him with clothes and employed him at his place, where George did several odd jobs but mostly he got involved in assisting Thornhill with his lascivious activities. To repay George for getting him out of a particularly thorny incident, Thornhill recommended him to his uncle, Sir William Thornhill, but even that didn't work out, and George wound up at the theatre company.

The butler later informs the Vicar that the Squire is courting Olivia, and her uncle and aunt approve of the match. Later at the mansion, the Vicar also runs into the Squire who inquires about Olivia's infamous incident. The Vicar confesses that nobody knows about it, including his son, George. Over the course of a few days, the Vicar observes the Squire getting closer to Arabella. To help George, the Squire purchases a commission in the armed forces for a hundred pounds. He lets the vicar know that he can pay him later, and the vicar thanks him.

George is scheduled to leave the next day. As he leaves behind everything, the Vicar reminds his son of his duty, much like his grandfather, who died while serving the country. The Vicar takes his leave from the kind master and mistress of the house and returns to search for his daughter. He stops at an ale house where he joins the landlord for a drink. While discussing politics, the conversation moves to the Squire where the landlord tells the Vicar that the Squire was hated by the people in the county, "just how much his uncle Sir William was loved". While conversing, the landlord's wife reminds him to collect the rent for the lodging from the girl that just moved. He tells his wife to allow the girl some more time as she appears to be from a good family. The wife turns away angrily and heads to the girl's room, abusing her while the girl apologizes profusely. In a sudden moment of revelation, the Vicar realises that it is none other than his poor daughter, Olivia! The father and daughter reconcile, and she narrates the events that led her to the unfortunate situation.

Olivia tells the Vicar that Mr. Burchell saved her from the tricks of the Squire and the letter that they all thought was written for them was in fact a letter to reproach the fashionable city-women, who were in fact prostitutes that were used by the Squire in his scheme to defame Olivia. She further informs her father that Mr. Thornhill married her in the presence of a priest, who also married him to eight different women. He put her in an uncomfortable situation where she continued to live with him, hoping things would change. The final straw that drove Olivia away from the Squire's dishonourable arrangement was when he tried to prostitute her to a young Baronet. This prompted her to run away immediately.



After hearing her story, the Vicar and Olivia begin their journey back home. To prepare the family for Olivia's return, the Vicar sets her up at an inn and proceeds to go home to his wife and other kids. As he nears his house, he is amazed to see that the house is on fire. In an unexpected dash of courage, he runs into the blazing fire to rescue his young children as the rest of the family stood outside in absolute shock. After some time, the Vicar notices that his arm has been burned in the fire. The neighbours rush in, and like the family, stare silently as the fire engulfs all the possessions of the Primrose family. The neighbours help the Primroses by giving them clothes and a place to rest.

Olivia returns to her family, and the vicar reminds the Primroses to stick together and be forgiving of one another during these trying times. In a heartfelt appeal, he says, “the real hardships of life are now coming fast upon us, let us not, therefore, encrease them by dissension among each other” The Vicar notices Olivia's unhappiness and silent suffering. He tries to remind her of things that actually matter. The Primroses then receive the news that Arabella and the Squire are getting married. The Vicar and the family want to inform Arabella of the truth about the Squire by writing a letter to her but the letter they write doesn't reach her because she and the Squire are travelling. Their nuptials have brought everyone, including Sir William Thornhill to the countryside. Finding themselves in this terrible predicament, the Vicar advises his wife to take care of Olivia and after some time, they notice a slow but gradual change in Olivia's demeanour. In a quiet family moment, the family urges Olivia to sing a song. As she sings a song of melancholy and betrayal, the Squire makes an upsetting appearance.

As the Vicar confronts the Squire regarding Olivia, the Squire unabashedly asks the Vicar to pay the rent that he owes him. Appalled, the Vicar tells the Squire that, despite his many transgressions, he forgives him. Not one to take things easily, he threatens the Primroses as he bids them farewell. The very next day, the Primroses' are asked to pay rent, and when they are unable to do so, their cattle are appraised and sold for less than their value. The family entreats the Vicar to comply with the Squire's wishes out of fear of being sent to jail, but the Vicar is unrelenting. He reminds them that he can only forgive him but cannot pardon his many offences. The very next day, officers arrive at their home to take the Vicar away to jail for non-payment of rent. Before leaving, the Vicar directs his family to pack their bags and leave.

As the Vicar and his family leave, all the people in his parish come in throngs to save him, but he interrupts their impassioned appeals and instructs them to go back home. Overcome with remorse at being addressed by their Vicar like this, each member of the crowd bids them a sorrowful farewell.



The Vicar sets his family at an inn and heads to the jail. The vicar presumes that the atmosphere in the jail will be gloomy, but instead, he is welcomed by an air of glee, which makes him wonder how wicked men can be happy. Here, he makes an unlikely friend, Ephraim Jenkinson- the same man who duped him when buying his horse. The vicar forgives him, and in exchange, Jenkinson lends him his things to keep the Vicar comfortable at night. The next day, the Primroses visit their beloved patriarch in jail. Later, the Vicar gives a sermon to the inmates, which is warmly received. Jenkinson shares his experiences of being a thief, while the Vicar tells him of his troubles. A reformed Jenkinson tells them that he'll see what he can do about it. The Vicar gives a sermon to the inmates on crime, punishment, and the unjust laws of society that often favour the rich over the impoverished.

At the Vicar's request, Olivia comes to meet her father. Painting a pitiable figure with sunken cheeks and pale skin, Olivia implores her father to apologize to the Squire, but the Vicar turns down her request. On hearing their conversation, an inmate advises the Vicar to write to Sir William Thornhill about his nephew's exploits. In the meantime, we are informed along with the Vicar that Olivia's health deteriorates, and she has passed away, leaving the Vicar completely shattered. Jenkinson urges the Vicar to reach out to the Squire's uncle, Sir William Thornhill. The Vicar writes to him, but his pleas remain unanswered. Another misfortune hits the Primrose family when Sophia gets kidnapped. As the family laments this piece of information, another bit of news involving George reaches them. He writes to them that he is happy and on his way to becoming a lieutenant. This soothes the heart of the family, but after some time, they see George all bloodied and hurt. He tells them that he tried to attack the Squire on learning of his many offences against his family.

Check Your Progress -3

1. Comment on Olivia's misfortunes.
2. Why do you think the Vicar was disappointed to see George?
3. Why does the Vicar end up in prison?

6.3 Part-III

The Vicar gathers the strength to give another sermon to the inmates on suffering and the importance of piety. In the meantime, Moses arrives with news that Sophia has been found and rescued by Mr. Burchell. As Sophia returns she describes in detail how bravely Mr. Burchell saved her. In a turn of events, it is revealed that Mr. Burchell is actually the Squire's



introverted uncle, Sir William Thornhill and that Mr. Burchell in reality was a man of the Senate. The Vicar offers Sophia hand in marriage to Mr. Burchell. After teasing Sophia a little, Mr. Burchell happily accepts the offer.

The nefarious Squire is brought in front of his uncle, Sir William Thornhill, to furnish details of his past activities. As Sir William Thornhill interrogates his nephew, many details of the Primroses' agony spill out. In the meantime, Jenkinson also hauls in the rogue who abducted Sophia. He tells everyone that the Squire hired the rogue to abduct Sophia and threaten her. And when the time is right, the Squire was expected to swoop in to rescue her as her defender. The butler of the Squire also speaks out against his master. He narrates how he abducted Olivia and brought in a fake priest to conduct their wedding. In the meantime, Arabella joins the party too. We are told that Arabella's father has signed away all his wealth and assets to the Squire rendering him and his daughter penniless. In a happy turn of events, George reunites with Arabella and Jenkinson reveals that Olivia is alive as he brings her along with him. Jenkinson reveals that, despite what the Squire thinks, their marriage was real and not a sham.

George informs his father that the man who swindled them out of all their money has been caught and their fortune has been restored. The newly engaged couples decide who should get married first, so the Baronet and the Lady are married and are then followed by George and Miss. Arabella Wilmot. The tale ends as happiness and harmony are restored to the Vicar's family. The protagonist and the narrator, the Vicar, ends his tale with an air of solemn gratefulness, he says, "had nothing now on this side of the grave to wish for, all my cares were over, my pleasure was unspeakable. It now only remained that my gratitude in good fortune should exceed my former submission in adversity."

Check Your Progress -4

1. Comment on the Vicar's stay at the prison.
2. Discuss the use of disguise by Mr. Burchell.
3. Comment on the ending of the novel.



VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

Aisha Qadry

Part-II: Characters, Background and Themes

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we familiarized ourselves with the background information of the author, the context in which the novel was written and the narrative of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. This unit will provide you with several access-points into the text to help you formulate your own interpretations of the novel.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will learn about:

- The characters in the narrative.
- how the text can be interpreted from various perspectives
- significant themes that are knitted in the text, such as religion, family, class, gender.

3. CHARACTERS

3.1 The Vicar, Dr. Charles Primrose, is the protagonist and the narrator of the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Based on Goldsmith's own father, who was also a vicar, Dr. Charles Primrose performs many roles in the text, such as a vicar to his parish, a father to his children, a husband to his wife, and a friend.

We are introduced to the Vicar as a happy and content man living with his wife and six children. As a man of the church, the vicar tries to live by the word of God. He gives sermons, writes religious treatises, and promotes the idea of marriage and monogamy in particular. On most occasions, the Vicar is seen promoting qualities such as patience, virtue, forgiveness, and the goodness of men. Each time the Vicar is in a crisis, he tries to hold on to his belief in morals and ethics rather than resorting to plots and conspiracies. Even when the vicar is incarcerated, he attempts to deliver sermons in the hope of bettering the battered souls of the inmates. He informs his fellow inmate Jenkinson, "It even appeared a duty incumbent upon me to attempt to reclaim them." In moments such as these, he comes across as a sweet,



benevolent, and poor old man. But, on some occasions, as he adheres to his principles, it offends many around him, for example, when he gets into an uncomfortable, futile argument with Mr. Wilmot that broke off his son's engagement. But in the end, when harmony and peace are restored to the Primroses after a long time of suffering, the vicar ends by re-establishing the idea of perseverance in the face of difficulty.

As readers, we should also note that the Vicar adopts an essentialist perspective in all of the roles that the author assigns him—the Vicar always sees the world in terms of good versus evil, morality versus immorality, and honesty versus guile. This attitude makes him a gullible fool whose lack of worldly knowledge gets him swindled or lied to.

As a husband and a father, we see him fulfilling his role dutifully. He adores his wife and his children, despite their many shortcomings. He tries to remind them to be virtuous, and self-aware and to always look for the good in others. On every occasion, the Vicar rises to the opportunity to save his family. He forgives his son after learning that he works as an actor for a theatre company, jumps into the fire to rescue his children, and promptly sets out to find his eldest daughter, Olivia, despite condemning her many actions.

As the narrator, he serves as the mouthpiece for the author's satirical intent. The Vicar's views and actions toward the people or the circumstances around him inform the reader of the story's development. Critic George Haggerty says, 'The Vicar, a private self, is so easily imposed upon because he has no basis for established objective truth. He can only be certain of the experience of his own emotional response. But it is from within that response that a new form of truth emerges.' So, as readers, we must exercise caution by setting aside his narrative in order to discover the other details in it that we are interested in. This "new form of truth" should be divested from the Vicar's perspective and thoughts. In doing so, we will realize the veneer of irony that Goldsmith has wrapped around this tale, which appears to be a simple moralistic fable.

3.2 Mr. Burchell, or William Thornfield, is the proverbial good man, whose courteous, charitable, and respectful nature makes him a favourite of the Primrose family. The reader and the Primroses are introduced to Mr. Burchell in golden words,

a man whose virtues, generosity, and singularities are so universally known? ... one of the most generous, yet whimsical, men in the kingdom; a man of consummate benevolence.

In addition to becoming a close companion to the Primroses, he also plays an unusual role as their guardian angel. Mr. Burchell enjoys spending time with the children and the family, as



seen on many occasions, but despite his goodness and amiable demeanour, the Primroses suspect him of being a rumour monger and push him out of their lives. His appearances and disappearances in the Primroses' lives and in the narrative have a profound effect. Whenever he is around, he saves them and helps them, but whenever he is away, the Primroses find themselves in deeper and deeper trouble.

Goldsmith uses him to heighten the goodness and simple living of the countryside, as we were told at the beginning that Sir William Thornhill moved away from a life of mindlessness to pursue a life of peace. In the end, Mr. Burchell's goodness is also rewarded as the Vicar gives him his daughter, Sophia, in marriage.

3.3 Squire Thornfield is the nephew of Sir William Thornfield. He is the nefarious villain who is known for squandering money and womanizing. His reputation for defiling every woman in the area is confirmed when he elopes with Olivia and gets married to her, kidnaps Sophia in order to 'rescue' her, and courts Arabella while usurping her inheritance from her. The young Squire has been single-handedly responsible for ruining the peace in the Primrose family.

In the end, too, he doesn't claim his fault until witnesses, including his butler, are produced, to tell the truth. He is shown as a conniving, base character devoid of moral scruples.

3.4 Deborah Primrose, wife of Vicar Primrose is a feisty, opinionated woman. Deborah's actions in the novel are mostly guided by her role as a mother to her daughters, Olivia and Sophia. She is presented to us as a simple country woman, "She could read any English book without much spelling, but for pickling, preserving, and cookery, none could excel her.". Deborah, unlike her husband, enjoys the pleasures of material life, she indulges herself and her daughters in dressing up and caring about appearances. To find a marriage for her daughters, she has no qualms about mingling with young men in the parish. She comes across as a pompous, babbling status seeker.

3.5 Olivia and Sophia are the two beautiful daughters of the Vicar. Like her mother's, Olivia's actions are governed by her singular interest in social mobility. Despite her knowledge of the Squire's libertine attitude, she was completely smitten by him. Her rash decision to elope with him later causes the family pain and tarnishes the family's honour. The Squire gets married to her and leaves her a broken woman. She learns her lesson when he tries to prostitute her to another man. Sophia is patient, kind, and thoughtful. She looks beyond appearances and values the goodness of nature and purity of heart. Despite Mr. Burchell's (Sir William Thornhill) lack of money, she is attracted to him for his gentility. Her



patience is rewarded as she marries the love of her life, Mr. Burchell, who is actually Sir William Thornhill.

3.6 Moses, named after the prophet Moses, is the second-eldest boy of the Primrose household. He is attentive and responsible. He brings an active change to the narration of the tale when he reminds his father of the power of fortitude. Moses supports his father and family through all of their difficulties while his older brother George is away, never becoming frustrated or overwhelmed. **George Primrose** is, widely believed to be modelled on the author himself. He is an Oxford-educated scholar who is sent away after his family's financial ruin. He does a lot of miscellaneous jobs to support himself. After his failed debut as an actor, he sets off on another long stint to serve the country.

Check Your Progress -1

1. Elaborate on all the roles played by Mr. Charles Primrose in the text.
2. Compare and contrast Mr. Thornhill with his nephew Squire Thornhill.
3. What role does the Vicar's wife play in the narrative?

4. THEMES

Now, let's look at a few dominant themes in the novel.

4.1 Satire

There have been several debates around the novel regarding the use of satire. While some critics assert that Goldsmith utilizes irony and satire to make social commentary, the opposing camp contends that the author was merely telling a sentimental story about a simple-minded vicar who doesn't comprehend society's machinations. If we choose the former stance, then we must examine Goldsmith's deft, astute, and meticulously crafted sarcasm and irony to make a statement about society's fixation on values associated with class.

Now, before we move ahead, let's first understand the meaning of irony and dramatic irony, as we will be looking at a few examples of them when we move ahead.

According to the Oxford English dictionary, irony can be defined as, "the funny or strange aspect of a situation that is very different from what you expect." On the other hand, dramatic irony can be described as a "situation in a play when a character's words carry an



extra meaning to the audience because they know more than the character, especially about what is going to happen.”

Goldsmith employed both in measured proportions in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The Vicar or Mr. Charles Primrose may come across as 'prim' and 'proper', as his name implies, but he is obviously oblivious to his own myopic view towards others. As readers, we can note several instances of dramatic irony when the Vicar responds incredulously in situations that call for humility and patience while being judgmental of others' actions. It is his son, Moses that reminds him to have fortitude when circumstances are out of control. Making use of the Vicar as a protagonist and a narrator is a clever ploy on the part of the author, as it leads to several ironic situations throughout the text that perhaps would not have been possible if there was an omniscient narrator. For example, arguing with Mr. Wilmot, getting duped into selling his horse to the stranger who flattered him, not being able to understand the sheer goodness of Mr. Burchell, or participating in frivolous activities such as portrait painting.

Goldsmith directs his satire at the upper echelons of society as well as those who aspire to move upward by any means possible. This two-pronged nature of his satire is meticulously laid out on a scaffold of reality and appearances. In addition to that, the vicar introduces his family, particularly his children, as an obedient, humble group of young men and women who have won the admiration of the neighbourhood. However, we soon discover that the family has their own set of characteristics that contradict their supposed impression. The Vicar, along with his family, is unable to understand reality and often falls for the appearances of people. Deborah, the Vicar's wife, and Olivia, the Vicar's daughter, get themselves entangled in a web of social hierarchies based on class and gender. Their actions are shown to be condemnable and desperate. The satire is subtle yet forceful in Olivia's case as her narrative becomes a cautionary tale for young women who are blinded by the hollow conventions of society.

Closely connected to the use of satire is the use of both figurative and actual disguises in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Goldsmith employs physical disguises, such as a new name, a new face, or a new role, to conceal the true intentions and realities of the characters. In order to be able to step away from being someone who is only admired for being wealthy and be able to help people without any obligations, Mr. Burchell, who is actually Sir William Thornhill, dons a disguise. We also have the con artist Ephiram Jenkinson who deceives people in a sophisticated manner by dressing as an elderly, intelligent man. The Squire parades streetwalkers as rich, fashionable ladies to lure the Primrose girls into his wicked web of lies and seduction. Sophia is taken hostage by Squire Thornhill so that he can intervene later in his own staged crime to rescue her as her 'savior'.



The newly destitute and penniless Primroses, on the other hand, dress up in all their splendour to seduce Squire Thornhill. The family's women go to tremendous lengths to assume a persona that would ensure their upward mobility in society. Additionally, we can examine the painting in which the Primroses appeared. Every member of the Primrose family was dressed in a persona they wished to embody or, more accurately, to project to the world. They make blatant and extraordinary efforts to fool those around them, but they fail terribly. Disguises and deceptions are therefore used in the tale to satirize the pious pride of the Vicar who is unable to comprehend the crude and pragmatic realities of life, and also to mirror the viciousness of society.

4.2 Family

The Vicar of Wakefield is also a tale of family endurance. The novel presents to us a family unit that is composed of several distinct personalities, where each member contributes to the development of the tale through their unique foibles. The vicar takes great pride in his family, which is described in the first chapter as “the family of Wakefield; in which a kindred likeness prevails, as well of minds as of persons.” As readers, if we understand the Wakefield family as a unit headed by the Vicar, we will notice that much like the Vicar, the family displays ignorance and a lack of worldly wisdom. They keep adding to the narrative by miserably failing to understand the minds of the people around them or the workings of the world.

As they move to a new neighborhood, the Primroses get themselves painted—a gigantic portrait that seems unnecessary and unwise to a family that has just lost its fortune. Christopher Flint studies this portrait as “collective self-fashioning” in line with the famous tradition of “family portraits” of the eighteenth century. Family portraits were a popular type of portraiture in which the family was photographed as a unit. The members of the family sat or stood in various poses, joined together by a common theme. However, here the Primroses collectively fail as they each individually choose to represent an alter-ego that clashes with the other members. The result of the portrait is a chaotic confusion that invites mockery from the people around.

Although the family suffers together, they are all constantly seeking each other out. As the family patriarch, the Vicar is always there as a father and a husband. He forgives his children's transgressions and advises his wife on her excesses. Even though her actions are sometimes disgraceful, Deborah is determined to fulfil her obligations as the mother of two young girls. George and Moses, dutifully fulfil their roles, as brothers and sons who defend the family's honour while also bearing the family's troubles.



4.3 Religion

Another way to approach *The Vicar of Wakefield* is as a retelling of the Book of Job from the Old Testament. The main character in the Book of Job, Job, has many personal setbacks, including the loss of family, possessions, and health, but Job steadfastly clings to his faith in God and his justice. Here, we see that God punishes Job severely and tests his resolve to the very limit.

Now, let's examine the parallels between Job and the character of the Vicar for a better understanding. Job was a prosperous person who lived in Uz. He had eleven kids and a sizable household, but within a day he lost all of it. In addition to that, he was afflicted with painful, oozing sores all over his body. But, he battled and accepted the challenges that God kept putting in front of him instead of cursing God. The main themes of Job's narrative are perseverance through adversity and preserving faith in God.

Throughout *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the Vicar and his family confront several setbacks. They lose their fortune, George loses his bride, Olivia elopes, their house burns down, they are cheated, Sophia is kidnapped, and the vicar is imprisoned in poor health. Even though the Primroses' difficulties may not seem to be as harsh or trying as Job's, the family's happiness is ruined by the interminable tragedies and struggles. The Vicar prays and cries out to God at each obstacle to remind himself and his family to be steadfast in the face of difficulty. The Vicar perseveres and finds strength in his faith in God and his justice, much like Job did. Although the Vicar's faith may provide him a moral pedestal to stand on, as we discussed in the previous sections, it is also this very faith that exacerbates his troubles since it makes him a proud man rather than a humble one and therein lies the difference between Job and the Vicar. But, the Vicar's son, Moses, who is named after the prophet, is a figure who stands out throughout the story for his humility and virtue, supporting his father during times of waning patience and resolve and serving as a constant reminder to him and his family of the worth of Christian virtues like patience and fortitude.

4.4 Gender

The Vicar of Wakefield gives a panoramic view of the century's ideals of femininity and masculinity. The women in the novel, represented by Deborah, Olivia, Sophia, and Arabella, are shown to be primarily interested in matters of love and marriage. Their conversations, actions, and emotions are governed by their possible or current relationships with the men around them. Deborah is introduced to the readers by the vicar as a simple woman whom he chooses for her domestic skills:



I had scarce taken orders a year before I began to think seriously of matrimony, and chose my wife as she did her wedding gown, not for a fine glossy surface, but such qualities as would wear well. To do her justice, she was a good-natured notable woman; and as for breeding, there were few country ladies who could shew more. She could read any English book without much spelling, but for pickling, preserving, and cookery, none could excel her.

Although painted as a simple country wife, Deborah can be seen as a niggling woman, utterly obsessed with society's privileges. She persistently meddles in the affairs of her daughters, nagging Mr. Burchell and the Squire for a proposal to her daughters, and appears disinterested in adjusting her values after the family relocates to a new parish. She is completely blinded by the sheen of the rich and fashionable women who surround the squire and who are in fact prostitutes. Later, we see that Deborah is willing to send her daughters to the city with them thinking they would help Olivia and Sophia's prospects. The desperation of her acts demonstrates the hollowness of the ideals of womanhood, as marriage was seen as the ultimate goal of a woman's life.

The narrator introduces Olivia and Sophia to the readers as being strikingly beautiful. The only currency they are told repeatedly that they possess to mobilize in the social structure is their beauty and their honour. Their paths, though intertwined, are diametrically opposed. Olivia is the cautionary tale in the narrative. Her entanglement with Squire Thornfield ruins the family's honour and her prospects. In the end, when she feigns her own death, the novel unequivocally mirrors the culmination of women who ruin their family's honour. She is the proverbial wanton who has to bear the repercussions of her sex. On the other hand, her sister Sophia, who is shown to be a paragon of goodness, patience, and virtue, is blessed by a happy alliance with Sir William Thornfield. Arabella's character represents the inconsequentiality of women in the marriage market. In the beginning, her father breaks off Arabella's engagement with the Vicar's son due to the family's bankruptcy. But later, in an unexpected turn of events, Arabella's father is left fuming because he has signed off her inheritance to the Squire, thinking that his daughter will marry him. But virtue is rewarded in Arabella's case as well, and she marries her love, George, and escapes the Squire's tricks.

Men, on the other hand, are assigned roles as gatekeepers of morality and honour. The father is the patriarch who leads the family, Mr Burchell becomes the knight in shining armour, George is the patient lover whereas the Squire desires to become a rescuer. The Squire's elopement with Olivia demonstrates his profound villainy. His philandering ways and his dalliances with streetwalkers make him the villain of the novel. His elaborate plan to demolish Wakefield includes eloping and marrying Olivia, as well as kidnapping Sophia and



later pretending to rescue her. On the other hand, his uncle, Mr. Burchell, has always rescued the family in more ways than one. He has been given the role of the saviour who saves the family and rescues the women and in the end, his reward for all the goodness is a woman that he gets to make his wife. As it is a moralistic novel, gender politics is laced with stereotypical notions of womanhood and femininity. The roles Goldsmith allotted to his female and male characters are quite clearly marked— while the women try to win men's favour and end themselves in difficulties the men rescue, instruct, and help them.

5. RECEPTION

The Vicar of Wakefield gained prominence gradually and steadily. The novel's seventh edition was published seven years after its initial publication, and it had already been translated into several languages. Goldsmith enjoyed his early success but passed away before realizing the profound impact his writing had on literature and the lives of readers. Today, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is regarded as a moral and literary classic. Goldsmith demonstrated his skill as a master craftsman by skilfully fusing humour with didacticism and a dash of satire.

The novel has been translated into many Indian languages as well. The Tamil version is titled *Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram*.

Let's sum it up!

In Unit I, we learned about how a pock-marked, penniless boy named Oliver Goldsmith imprinted his name into the annals of literature by delivering a remarkable text that incorporated the collective ideas and thoughts of the 18th century. We briefly looked at the plot while analyzing with careful consideration significant pieces throughout the tale.

In Unit 2, we looked at several ideas that interweave the fabric of the novel and give it its timeless appeal. Here, we looked at each character and their roles in the development of the text. Themes such as satire, family, religion, and gender were examined in great detail with the use of examples from the text to help you form an informed interpretation of this text.

Your study of Units 1 and 2 will provide you with a thorough understanding of the text that tells you the story of the Primroses, who embark on an eventful journey to find happiness and contentment.



Reading List

Forster, John. *The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*. Vol 1. Bernard Tauchnitz, 1873

https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_SwjVAQ8p1aAC/page/n11/mode/2up

Christopher Flint, “The Family Piece”: Oliver Goldsmith and the Politics of the Everyday in Eighteenth-Century Domestic Portraiture

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053279>

George E. Haggerty, SATIRE AND SENTIMENT IN “THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD”

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41467505>

All the references are from *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith, Oxford World’s Classics.



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