

Block**2****JONATHAN SWIFT: *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS***

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block introduces **Jonathan Swift** as a writer and his works and a detailed study of his most famous novel *Gulliver's Travels*. This block will examine the times he lived and wrote in and also look at the circumstances that shaped and coloured Swift's writings. Swift as you may be aware was a satirist who wrote about his times and his own ambivalent feelings towards Ireland his eventual home. Jonathan Swift was born in 1667 after the end of the Puritan rule (1660), and died in 1745, and may be regarded as an Anglo-Irish author, who is primarily remembered for his political satire *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). We must remember that it was a tumultuous time politically as England was torn between the Whigs and the Tories and then the Puritans and the Catholics. In the midst of all this chaos emerge the writings of Jonathan Swift. This block will also discuss his other important works briefly.

Unit 1: Jonathan Swift: Life and Works

Unit 2: *Gulliver's Travels*: Philosophical and Political Background

Unit 3: *Gulliver's Travels*: Book I –III: Character, Summary, Themes, and Analysis

Unit 4: *Gulliver's Travels*: Book IV: Summary, Themes and Analysis

Please read *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift for this block.

UNIT 1 JONATHAN SWIFT : LIFE AND WORKS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Swift's Background
 - 1.2.1 A Whig or a Tory
 - 1.2.2 *A Tale of a Tub* and Swift's Disenchantment with his English Lineage
 - 1.2.3 *The Battle of the Books* and Neoclassicism
- 1.3 On the Irish Language
- 1.4 Satire in the Classical and the Neoclassical Age
 - 1.4.1 Horace, Juvenal, and Swift
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 - 1.4.3 Definitions of Satire in the Neoclassical Age
- 1.5 *Gulliver's Travels* and Other Works
 - 1.5.1 Swift's Ambivalent Attitude towards Ireland
 - 1.5.2 Publication and Secrecy
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 - 1.5.4 Victory for the Irish Patriots and the *Draper*
- 1.6 A Misanthrope or a Philanthropist
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.

(Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books*)

This unit aims to provide a biographical account of Jonathan Swift and discuss his significant works at length. It proposes to analyse his Anglo-Irish identity and its implications on his writings and political affiliation. We will examine terms like Whig, Tory, satire, and neoclassicism closely, to comprehend the age in which Swift wrote. We will also look at the similarities between Swift and the Roman satirist Juvenal (55 ADE- 2nd Century ADE), for indignation is at the heart of their writings. The unit will seek to answer the question as to why Swift concealed his true identity and chose different pseudonyms while writing his satires. A critical examination of his satires, including *Gulliver's Travels*, *A Modest Proposal*, and others, would enable us to understand Swift's trenchant critique of English colonialism. It will also help us analyse Swift's ambivalent feelings towards Ireland. We will attempt to answer how an Englishman began to be perceived as an Irish patriot. The last section of this unit questions Swift's identity as a mad misanthrope and foregrounds his philanthropic nature.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), an Anglo-Irish author, is primarily remembered

for his political satire *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which is also read as a child fable in abridged form. He was a posthumous child, born of English parents in Dublin, where he was educated at Trinity College. He constantly moved between England and Ireland during his formative years and eventually became Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, in 1713. Thereafter, he settled down in Ireland forever. In 1660, the Restoration brought an end to the Puritan rule that had succeeded the English civil war of the 1640s and the 1650s, (that we know of from Block 2 of BEGC 107). Shortly afterwards, a large number of Protestant English men and women were encouraged to settle in Ireland, where they were awarded land that used to be owned by the Catholics. Swift's parents and uncles became the beneficiaries of this scheme when they decided to try their fortune in Ireland (Damrosch, Ch. 1).

But Swift always adored London. "The best and greatest part of my life", Swift wrote to his friend John Gay from Dublin in a letter dated January 1722, "I spent in England; there I made my friendships, and there I left my desires." He lamented further, "I am condemned forever to another country." While living in London, he made friends with **Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot**, and formed the *Scriblerus Club* with them. Subsequently, he became a propagandist for the Tory administration. Despite his desire to live in England, Swift had to overcome his ambition and spend most of his life as a dean in Dublin. He regarded his return to Ireland as an exile but eventually wrote for the Irish cause. As a political satirist, poet, pamphleteer, and member of the English settlement in Ireland, he opposed British colonialism. He challenged the policies of the English government in Ireland and became a trenchant critique of the atrocities of the British perpetrated against the Anglo - Irish population. Consequently, he was celebrated as an Irish patriot. Swift himself was painfully aware of his double identity as an Anglo-Irish. He reveals in the *Drapier's Letters* (1724) that "he both is and is not Irish, both is and is not English" (Oakleaf, 29). His life was characterised by a number of paradoxes and mixed loyalties. Despite his divided allegiance, he has appealed to the successive generation of writers and political thinkers for his ability to oppose colonialism and the dehumanising side of colonial modernity. **W B Yeats, George Orwell, Mahatma Gandhi, and Edward Said** found in Swift's writings, an incisive critique of authoritarianism, totalitarianism, political absolutism and condemnation of modern civilisation. Let us now look at Swift's background.

1.2 SWIFT'S BACKGROUND

One of the most significant features of 18th century England was the constant conflict between several religious and political denominations. Society was politically divided between the Whigs and the Tories, liberals and conservatives, sympathisers of the parliament and those of the king. Similarly, on religious grounds, there were sharp divisions between Catholicism and Protestantism, between Puritanism and Catholicism, and the Anglican Church and the dissenters. In the English Civil War and the years following the war, which saw the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the Whigs supported the cause of the Parliament whereas, the Tories extended their support to the monarch and the aristocrats. When **Robert Walpole**, a Whig, became the first Prime Minister of England in 1721, the power of the Tories began to decline. Poets, priests, and politicians often shifted their political allegiance to seek favour from the ruling party and to evade state censorship. We need to situate Swift's life and works in this political and religious context to comprehend the factious age that shaped him.

1.2.1 A Whig or a Tory

“Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory”, wrote the neoclassical poet Alexander Pope in his translation of the first satire of the Roman poet **Horace** (about whom we studied in BEGC 102). Swift, too, began his career as a Whig and later became a Tory. He found a political mentor in **Sir William Temple**, a retired Whig diplomat, who hired Swift as a secretary. He worked as Temple’s amanuensis and read aloud his letters in Latin and English. Upon Temple’s death, Swift defended Whig Lords impeached by the House of Commons in *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome* (1701). Shortly afterwards, he dedicated his prose satire *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) to *Baron Somers*, an influential member of the Whig Party. Let’s see what *A Tale of a Tub* is about next.

1.2.2 A Tale of a Tub and Swift’s Disenchantment with his English Lineage

A Tale of a Tub tells the story of three brothers – Peter, Jack, and Martin – who represent Roman Catholicism, Calvinistic dissent, and Anglicanism, respectively. The narrative is characterised by parody, gaps, subversions and long digressions on hack writers, madness, and on ancient and modern literature. The book is perceived as an “effervescent attack on Catholic additions to, and Protestant detractions from”, the fundamental tenets of the Christian Church. The basic doctrines of the Church are represented in the form of a coat, which the brothers inherit and alter according to their whims (Sanders, 281). As the story constantly oscillates between the main plot and long digressions, it can be seen as a precursor to a novel like **Laurence Sterne’s** *Tristram Shandy* (1759). Sterne’s protagonist and the narrator, Tristram, too, constantly digress and the plot barely moves.

Swift had written this allegory to please Queen Anne and to seek her favour. But to his utmost surprise, the satirical representation of the English Church infuriated the queen so much that his chances to rise within the English Church ended forever. This could have happened because of the character Martin, a representative of the Church of England, who gambles, and whores like his brothers, and which the queen may have found objectionable. This incident left Swift utterly disenchanted with his English lineage, as he wanted to be the bishop of an English church. Much later, Swift humorously fictionalised this episode in *Gulliver’s Travels*, where he briefly recast himself as Gulliver and the British queen as the queen of the imaginary island Lilliput. As Swift’s allegory had scandalised the queen, so his fictional creation Gulliver had to face the wrath of the queen of Lilliput for extinguishing the palace fire by urinating on it. After dousing the flames, Gulliver expects some reward from the queen for this commendable job. But later he gets to know that the queen refuses to stay in the defiled palace and he is faced with impeachment. There are parallels between the disenchantment of Swift with Queen Anne and the disillusionment of Gulliver with the queen of Lilliput. His other early work *The Battle of the Books* will be examined next.

1.2.3 The Battle of the Books and Neoclassicism

The Battle of the Books or *An Account of a Battle between the Ancient and Modern Books in St. James’s Library* is a short satire published along with *A Tale of a Tub*. The allegorical squib was a tribute to his Whig patron *William Temple*, who defended classical literature against contemporary vernacular literature. In the various salons and academies of Europe, the question of superiority of the ancient vis-à-vis the modern was widely debated. In France, scholars who were trying to free science from ancient Greece and Rome championed the modern over the

ancient. **Charles Perrault**, known for his collection of fairy tales, claimed that the French poet **Boileau** was better than the ancient poet **Horace** and the French playwright **Corneille** greater than the Greek playwright **Sophocles** (Damrosch, ch.4). As a neoclassical author, Swift overruled this model. He rejected the notion that the accomplishments of modern authors rivalled those of the ancient world. For him, classical Greek and Roman models of literary excellence were sacrosanct and could not be surpassed. Let us begin by trying to understand what neoclassicism means.

The term neoclassical literature refers to the works of authors such as Alexander Pope, **John Dryden**, Jonathan Swift, **Joseph Addison**, **Samuel Johnson**, and some others who wrote in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. These authors shared certain common traits. They had great respect for the writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Classical works provided models of excellence and imitation, for they had survived the test of time. Poetry for the neoclassical poets was to be an imitation of human life and nature. It was characterised by reason, restraint, decorum, and moderation. Great literature was to provide both instruction and pleasure to the readers. The neoclassical authors were inspired by the ancient Latin poet, Horace, who in his work *Ars Poetica*, that is, *The Art of Poetry*, wrote that the aim of poetry was to entertain and to instruct. Neoclassical art, therefore, was not guided by the maxim, 'art for art's sake' but by a newer maxim, 'art for the sake of humanity'. Since there was an emphasis on instruction and reform as the objectives of literature and art forms, the genre of satire both in prose as well as verse became popular. Pope pioneered the genre of verse satire whereas Swift was the master of prose satire.

In the allegory *The Battle of the Books*, Swift uses characters, including **Aristotle**, **Virgil**, **Aesop**, **Bacon**, and **Descartes** from both the ancient and contemporary times in a humorous fashion to capture the conflict between the ancient and the modern. In the book, Aristotle shoots an arrow at Bacon but hits Descartes inadvertently. The ancient poet Virgil encounters his modern translator Dryden in a mock-heroic fashion.

After the fiasco of *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift became the chief propagandist for a Tory Ministry headed by **Robert Harley**, who had himself begun his career as a Whig and later became a Tory (Oakleaf, 2). Swift also wrote for the Tory journal *The Examiner*. Harley, a great reader and collector of manuscripts, appreciated Swift's charm and wit, and liked to call him Martin, a character in *The Tale of a Tub*. Despite this friendship, Harley could not persuade the Queen to change her mind and appoint Swift a Bishop. Only the queen could appoint Bishops whereas, other influential people had the right to appoint Deans. A Dean is a priest who is in charge of the daily affairs of the cathedral whereas the Bishop is the head of the diocese as a whole. Swift eventually gave up on becoming a bishop after having waited patiently for years and accepted the post of Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral at Dublin, an office he held for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, Queen Anne was happy to get rid of Swift. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in Swift's life, as he gradually began to enjoy the administrative and religious responsibilities of a Dean in Ireland. It appears that he liked his new title, for in his poems he refers to himself as "the Dean" over 170 times (Damrosch, Ch. 18). Let's now look at his life in Ireland next.

1.3 ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE

In Ireland, he continued to be torn apart between his English lineage and the Irish cause, between the English language and the local Irish tongue. He was no

admirer of the Irish tongue and thought that it trapped its speakers “in a cultural ghetto”. He called it “barbarous” and was critical of “its abominable sounds”. He believed that the native language did more than anything else to “prevent the Irish from being tamed.” Surprisingly, like a true Englishman, he talked about “civilizing” the Irish in much the same way that the English would talk about its subjects in colonial India. As an English citizen and defender of the English language, he emphasised that the Irish language should be abolished, and English should be made compulsory on every occasion of business in shops, markets, fairs and other places of dealing. (Damrosch, Ch.18). However, known for writing polemical satires, he defended the Anglo-Irish Protestants of Ireland against the atrocities of the English Whigs, especially in the *Drapier’s Letters* (1724), *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), and *A Modest Proposal* (1729). We said that Swift was a satirist, let us now examine satire as a genre – both in the classical age as well as in the neoclassical age in the next section.

1.4 SATIRE IN THE CLASSICAL AND THE NEOCLASSICAL AGE

A satire according to *Literary Devices: Definition and Examples of Literary Terms*, is “a literary device for the artful ridicule of a folly or vice as a means of exposing or correcting it. The subject of satire is generally human frailty, as it manifests in people’s behaviour or ideas as well as societal institutions or other creations. Satire utilises tones of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation towards a flawed subject with the hope of creating awareness and subsequent change”.

Lit Charts describes a satire as making use any of the following tactics such as, “humor, irony, sarcasm, or ridicule to criticise something or someone. Public figures, such as politicians, are often the subject of satire, but satirists can take aim at other targets as well—from societal conventions to government policies. Satire is an entertaining form of social commentary, and it occurs in many forms: there are satirical novels, poems, and essays, as well as satirical films, shows, and cartoons. Satire is a bit unusual as a literary term because it can be used to describe both a literary device and the specific genre of literature that makes use of the device. Just like a comedy is comedic because it uses comedy, a satire is satirical because it uses satire”. This is basically to refresh your memory on satire as a literary genre, as we have already studied this genre earlier (BEGC 102, Block 4). Let us continue with our discussion on the ancient satirists and the neoclassicists who used the satire.

1.4.1 Horace, Juvenal, and Swift

One of the ways to analyse the continuity and discontinuity between the classical and the neoclassical age is through literary forms and genres. The poets and authors of this age borrowed the genre of the satire and the epistle from the ancient Greco-Roman world and used them widely to articulate their concerns. Although one may find some precedents for satire in ancient Greece, the genre of satire, strictly speaking, is of Roman origin (again, recall what we studied in BEGC 102, Block 4). **Lucilius** (148 BCE-103 BCE) is proclaimed as the founder of Roman satire. Apart from Lucilius, **Persius** (34 ADE-62 ADE), and **Quintilian** (35 ADE- 100ADE) were some of the prominent satirists in ancient Rome. But Horace (65 BCE- 8 BCE) and Juvenal (50 ADE-2nd century ADE) brought perfection to the genre of satire in Rome. To acknowledge their contribution to satire, English satire is classified into two parts: the Horatian satire and the Juvenalian satire. The former is characterised by playfulness whereas the latter

by resentment. In the Horatian satire, the narrator is a city-dweller, who writes for the sake of amusement at the sight of human folly and pretentiousness. Horace, a contemporary of the Roman emperor **Augustus Caesar**, celebrates the new *pax romana* – Roman peace – established by the emperor after years of civil war. He gained the patronage of **Gaius Maecenas** (70 BC- 8 BC), a close friend and ally of the emperor. Maecenas gave Horace the Sabine farm, where he led a carefree life and wrote witty and urban satires.

Unlike Horace, Juvenal could not gain the support of a powerful patron. His biting satires, therefore, lack his predecessor's witticism and are known for indignation and denunciation of Rome. While Pope in his satires oscillates between the Horatian and the Juvenalian model, Swift is closer to Juvenal. Both Juvenal and Swift remained on the margins of society. They both lacked an influential patron and hence, anger became the central force of the bleak world that they represent.

1.4.2 Swift and “savage indignation”

A common trope in Juvenal and Swift is indignation. In *Satire I*, Juvenal writes that it has become impossible to live in the monstrous city of Rome. Given the decadence of the city, it is hard not to write satire. He argues further that though it is against nature to be angry, yet indignatio (indignation) constitutes his verses (Juvenal, 9). In *Satire III*, the narrator Umbricius is so upset with the corrupt ways of city life that he decides to leave Rome and sets off for the countryside at Cumae. The satire inspired Samuel Johnson so much that he modelled his poem “London” after Juvenal's *Satire III*. Juvenal decides not to remain silent and to speak against the corruption of Rome. What Rome was to Juvenal, London was to Swift. The Latin satirist excoriates the moral depravity of Rome indignantly whereas, Swift satirises London. Swift, to a great extent, surpasses even Juvenal. For Juvenal, Rome is the object of satire but for Swift, the object of satire in *Gulliver's Travels* is not England alone but entire humanity.

Swift uses the Latin word indignatio in his epitaph that he composed for himself in Latin. The Irish poet W B Yeats (1865-1939), translated this epitaph later into English. Yeats's translation uses the word “savage indignation” in the opening stanza of the poem: “Swift has sailed into his rest;/Savage indignation there/ Cannot lacerate his Breast.” The Irish Dean knew that there was no escape from indignation as long as he lived. Only death could put an end to his anger. The satirist was incensed and aghast at a society that had lost its moral purpose. The reason behind this anger was to reform a decadent society through satire.

1.4.3 Definitions of Satire in the Neoclassical Age

“The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction. And he who writes honestly is no more an enemy to the offender, than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease”, wrote John Dryden (1631-1700) in the preface to his verse satire *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). As a physician treats an individual, a satirist cures the society of its illness. Similarly, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) defines satire in his Dictionary (1755) as a “poem in which wickedness or folly is censured.” Like Dryden and Johnson, amendment was central to Swift's project of writing satires. “I wrote for their amendment, and not their approbation”, maintained Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, while discussing the objective behind writing this book. To achieve the goal of amending the ills of society, the Anglo-Irish priest did not shy away from either displeasing the high and the mighty or expressing his antagonism against the entire human race. He is often called a misanthrope owing to his lacerating satires and resentment against the species of man, mainly in *Gulliver's Travels*,

Book IV, where Gulliver concludes that horses are superior to men. Without much further ado, let us begin looking at his *Gulliver's Travels* and some of his other important works in the next section.

1.5 GULLIVER'S TRAVELS AND OTHER WORKS

As mentioned earlier in section 1.1 and 1.3, Swift had a very ambivalent relationship with Ireland. Remember he was an Englishman now appointed as a Dean in Dublin, Ireland.

1.5.1 Swift's Ambivalent Attitude towards Ireland

In his pamphlets and satires, Swift foregrounds the political and economic wrongs of Ireland under British rule. However, he defended only the interests of English settlers and neglected the natives, who he despised. The despicable creatures called Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels* can be seen as a fictional representation of these natives. It is ironical that despite his condemnation of the Irish language and the local people, later he was hailed as an Irish patriot and appropriated as a symbol of Irish nationalism. Nevertheless, writing from the perspective of a white settler, he produced a trenchant critique of English colonialism in *Gulliver's Travels*.

1.5.2 Publication and Secrecy

The story behind the publication of *Gulliver's Travels* is as intriguing as the text itself. The original title of the book was *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*. It was ostensibly written by Lemuel Gulliver, "first a SURGEON, and then a CAPTAIN of several SHIPS". The name *Gulliver's Travels* by which the book is universally known now is a shortened version. Swift's name was nowhere mentioned as the author of this polemical satire. It was a deliberate ploy on the part of the satirist to conceal his name. Jonathan Swift loved secrecy, disguise, and mystery. Most of his satirical writings were first published anonymously or pseudonymously. He preferred to write under assumed names: **Isaac Bickerstaff**, **Drapier**, and **Lemuel Gulliver**.

"Sometimes the last thing that an anonymous author wants is to remain unidentified", wrote **John Mullan** in his book *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (2008). Swift meticulously planned its publication to keep its authorship hidden. He got the text transcribed in another man's handwriting and arranged for the sample to be dropped secretly by an intermediary at a publisher's house. The manuscript was accompanied by a letter purporting to be from Lemuel Gulliver's cousin, one "Richard Sympson". The entire book was offered to the publisher for publication in return for £200. Swift had originally written this letter but his friend John Gay had copied it to conceal the identity of his friend. The publisher **Benjamin Motte** accepted the mysterious offer. Shortly afterwards, Pope, Swift's close friend and probably co-conspirator, discussed the book with the mystified publisher and pretended to be equally puzzled. The author, in the meanwhile, had returned quietly to Dublin to resume his duties as a dean (Mullan, 9).

Gulliver's Travels, written in the form of a quasi-travelogue, tells the story of Lemuel Gulliver, an English surgeon who rises to become a ship's captain. Each time Gulliver embarks on a new journey, his ship is wrecked, and he is left stranded on a new island. Although he is the lone survivor of the shipwreck, fortunately, he returns home safely each time. It became immensely popular immediately upon its publication and readers attempted to attribute its authorship to varied figures. Mullan reflects on the popularity of the book and speculation of readers:

His satire had managed to be, as Gay said, 'the conversation of the whole town' – by which he meant the fashionable, the clever and the powerful. It was written to cause a fuss, to be talked about. In its early life, Gulliver's Travels was, above all, a topic of conversation, and some of this conversation was concerned with its authorship. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, writing to her sister in November 1726, guessed, both shrewdly and inaccurately, at the company that had produced this work, which 'all our people of taste run mad about'. It was, she supposed, jointly composed by 'a dignify'd clergyman, an Eminent Physician, and the first poet of the Age' (13).

The clergyman, physician, and the first poet of the age, referred to Swift, *Arbuthnot*, and Pope, respectively. These speculations became a source of pleasure for the author. There could be several reasons behind concealing one's true identity for a satirist in the 18th century England, including self-promotion, mischievousness, and evasion of state censorship. The persecution of authors, printers, and publishers was quite common in England during the 17th and 18th centuries, especially after the Restoration of 1660.

In February 1663, the London printer **John Twyn** was convicted of treason. He awaited execution in Newgate Prison. The printer was to be hanged, drawn and quartered after the execution. He was to die in prolonged agony as a terrifying lesson to onlookers. Twyn was accused of printing an anonymous pamphlet titled *A Treatise of the Execution of Justice*. The pamphlet justified the people's right to rebellion and described the king as accountable to his subjects. The content was judged as seditious.

There was no evidence to suggest that John Twyn was the author. He had only turned it from manuscript to print. Despite knowing that by confessing his crime and revealing the name of the author, he could save his life, Twyn refused to betray the pamphleteer. (Mullan, 138)

In this volatile political context, when the memory of the execution of his father-**Charles I** was still fresh in the mind of the new king, the job of a satirist was fraught with dangers. It was not for nothing, then, that Swift chose to write with different pseudonyms. Mullan contends that Alexander Pope often used anonymity to provoke the readers whereas his friend "Jonathan Swift did sometimes wish to protect himself, if not from the guesses of readers, then at least from prosecution" (168). Book I of *Gulliver's Travels* is an attack on England, on the dominant Whig Party, in particular on the powerful Whig minister Robert Walpole. The use of Gulliver as the purported author of satire would have worked as a safety valve for Swift had he invited the wrath of the powerful sections of English society.

1.5.3 A Modest or a Monstrous Proposal

Another satire where he masks his true identity in defence of Irish interests is *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of poor people in Ireland, from being a Burden to their parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Public*. Although the long title is self-explanatory, Swift is known as the master of irony. There is usually a gap between what he intends to convey and what he literally conveys. The readers of Swift, therefore, cannot afford to remain passive while reading his text. They need to be active participants in the act of reading and read between the lines to detect the irony, to avoid misreading him. It is dangerous, therefore, to make an assertion, a claim about his intention, for whatever a reader or literary critic contends about Swift may easily be rejected by another counter-claim. Nothing on earth could be as immodest as the proposal that Swift calls modest. He suggests a monstrous proposal for the human consumption

of the surplus infant population of Ireland by the Irish and English gentry. The narrator laments the presence of the Irish poor and their children, and then comes up with the outrageous proposal:

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own Thoughts; which I hope will not be liable to the least Objection. I have been assured by a very knowing American of my Acquaintance in London; that a young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; whether Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled; and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a Fricasie, or a Ragoust. (A Modest Proposal, 4)

The author of this appalling proposal could not be initially traced. Claiming to be a well-wisher of the world, the narrator proposes to solve the issues of overpopulation, poverty and food scarcity in Ireland by advising the Irish to eat their babies. In an ironic vein, he not only comes up with the proposal of cannibalism but also confidently maintains that the horrendous idea will be met with the least resistance. The strength of this satire lies in its ability to draw the attention of readers to the evils of English colonialism. The narrator seems to argue that since the colonial masters have already consumed all the resources of Ireland, why don't they eat their babies too? The pamphlet impels us to think of colonialism and cannibalism simultaneously.

1.5.4 Victory for the Irish Patriots and the *Drapier*

Swift's the *Drapier's Letters*, written before *Gulliver's Travels*, had earlier caused the same public and popular outrage at British indifference to Ireland. Published under the pseudonym M B, the letters attack the English Whig government over giving patent to **William Wood**, an Englishman, through corrupt means to mint copper coins for Ireland. Swift and some of the Irish believed that the coins to be minted were going to be of an inferior quality, and that it would have had a devastating impact on the already fragile economy of Ireland, where hunger was common and famine frequent. Here, Swift, disguised as a Drapier, becomes the voice of resistance to the oppression by the English community in Ireland. He argues that the people of Ireland are born free, as free as the people of England (Oakleaf, 174). As an outcome of public uproar, Wood had to surrender his patent. It was a victory for the Irish patriots and the Drapier who had spoken for them. Despite his ambivalence to the Irish people and their cause, he began to be seen as an Irish patriot, who took up the cause of the Irish against the English misrule, gradually.

Writing satires has always been a perilous profession. It was a risky affair to expose the corruption of the powerful Whigs but Swift never shied away from giving a voice to the oppressed and the marginalised. Years later, in 1739, he did his own assessment in a self-reflective poem titled "*Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*". He wrote:

*Fair liberty was all his cry;
For her he stood prepared to die;
For her he boldly stood alone;
For her he oft exposed his own*

In Swift, on the one hand, we see an Englishman who condemns the Irish language and talks about its abolishment and replacement by English. And, on the other, we see an Anglo-Irish patriot who excoriates the English colonial administration for its economic and political wrongs done against Ireland. These contradictions and inconsistencies pose a challenge to his readers and literary historians.

Nevertheless, in his later years, he seems to be fascinated with the idea of liberty. He claims to have exposed “his own”, that is, Englishmen for the sake of liberty. As a neo-classicist, he chose the genre of satire to denounce his opponents and expose the corruption of the English. Since Swift always remained on the margins of society as a Tory, an Anglo-Irish, and as a Dean of an Irish church, his satires are characterised by resentment towards society. “Savage indignation” lies at the heart of his prose satires where he highlights the essential depravity of human beings. We examined Swift as a satirist and also said that many thought he was a misanthrope, but what or who is a misanthrope? Simply put a misanthrope is someone who in a sense hates/ detests humans/ mankind. But before using terms such as this, we need to know what it means and what it entails. If we are to call Swift a misanthrope, we would be suggesting that he hated humans whereas, that is not really true. He merely disliked/ detested/ hated the manner in which corrupt people were destroying society for their own gains. Let us discuss whether Swift can be called a misanthrope or a philanthropist next.

1.6 A MISANTHROPE OR A PHILANTHROPIST

Swift has been considered a mad misanthrope for his universal denunciation of mankind for years. Nevertheless, it would be unjust to judge a satirist so harshly, who devoted his life to expose the faults and hypocrisies of his times. It is a debatable question, however, whether he was a misanthrope or philanthropist. He could predict what his friends and foes would say about his death. He toyed with this idea and wrote “*Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*”, where the poet, like an objective observer, tries to foresee what others would say about him. Towards the concluding section of the poem he writes:

*He knew an hundred pleasant stories,
With all the turns of Whigs and Tories;
Was cheerful to his dying day,
And friends would let him have his way.
He gave the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad,
And showed by one satiric touch,
No nation wanted it so much.*

The poet celebrates himself as a storyteller. But this celebration is accompanied by the painful realisation that both the Whigs and the Tories would be cheerful to hear the news of his death, for no nation loves satires and satirists. The poem, published in 1739, also highlights Swift’s philanthropic gesture towards that segment of society, which everyone despises and no one cares about. But he cares for the downtrodden, even for the fools and the madmen, and plans to give away the little wealth he has accumulated for their welfare.

Towards the end of his life, Swift was struck by senile disorders. In 1742, he was declared of unsound mind and memory – symptoms, perhaps of dementia. At the age of seventy-seven in 1745, Jonathan Swift died and was buried in St. Patrick’s Cathedral next to Stella, his erstwhile student, lifelong friend, and rumoured wife.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Thus, this unit has discussed at length Jonathan Swift’s eventful life and his major works. We have seen the historical circumstances in which Swift’s parents migrated from England to Ireland and became a part of the Anglo-Protestant community there. Although he always aspired to be the Bishop of a church in England, the

publication of *A Tale of a Tub*, ruined his prospects forever. Eventually, he decided to accept the offer of becoming a Dean in Ireland. The unit also shows how his views on Ireland were characterised by ambivalence. He stood up against the exploitation of Ireland by the English colonial administration and became a hero to the Irish. But he denounced Irish as the language of barbarians. Despite his English lineage, in the Irish cultural imagination, Jonathan Swift is celebrated as a patriot. He chose the medium of satire to articulate his grievances. The unit has explored the relationship between publication and secrecy in the production of satires. His biting satires are closer to those of the Latin satirist Juvenal. We have discussed terms like Whig and Tory, neoclassicism and satire. Although for a long time, Swift was called a mad misanthrope his poems suggest that he was a philanthropist, who chose to expose the hypocrisies of his age.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine Jonathan Swift's ambivalent attitude towards Ireland. As an Anglo-Irish, how did he respond to English colonialism in Ireland?
2. Define the term neoclassicism with reference to the similarities between Swift and the Roman satirist Juvenal.
3. What were the fundamental differences between Whigs and Tories? Critically comment with reference to Swift's proximity to the Tories.
4. Was Jonathan Swift a mad misanthrope or a philanthropist?

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UNIT 2 *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*: PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 What is Enlightenment?
 - 2.2.1 Descartes, Kant, and Locke
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- 2.4 Swift and the Royal Society of London
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 - 2.5.3 Swift and Yeats
- 2.6 A Traditional Intellectual or an Organic Intellectual: Edward Said on Swift
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

I believe Gulliver's Travels has meant more to me than any other book ever written. I can't remember when I first read it, I must have been eight years old at the most, and it's lived with me ever since so that I suppose a year has never passed without my re-reading at least part of it.

George Orwell, "Jonathan Swift, an Imaginary Interview by George Orwell"

Gulliver's Travels (1726) is a neoclassical text that has attained the status of a classic over the years. This unit seeks to examine the philosophical and political context in which Swift had produced this monumental satire. While doing so, it also focuses on the different ways in which this book has been interpreted over centuries. A close analysis of its form helps us understand Swift's objective behind producing this prophetic text. We begin this unit with a discussion on the concept of the Enlightenment. Then, we analyse how Swift wrote against the dominant grain of the age and challenged some of the prominent values associated with the Enlightenment and modernity. Swift's polemical satire questions the binary opposition between men and animals, for he elevates the status of animals to the level of men, whereas his men are downgraded to animals. It also analyses in great detail the reception of Swift's magnum opus by subsequent authors and thinkers, including Mahatma Gandhi, George Orwell, W B Yeats, and Edward Said. A close examination of the reception of *Gulliver's Travels* is instrumental to study the reasons behind its popularity in contemporary times.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Gulliver's Travels is an extraordinarily modern text, which has been interpreted in multiple ways. The book has mesmerised readers for ages as a satire, child fable, novel, travelogue, parody of travelogue, proto-science fiction, and also as a brilliant spoof of science fiction. Several neoclassical poets and authors were known for innovating and experimenting with new forms in literature. Although it may be an upheaval task to classify it under a single genre, it is inarguably a satire against entire mankind. **Samuel H Monk** in his seminal essay "*The Pride of Lemuel Gulliver*" maintains that it is a satire on four aspects of man: the physical, the political, the intellectual and the moral. "I hate and detest that animal called man", wrote Swift in a letter to Alexander Pope on September 29, 1725. However, his hatred was not directed against individuals. He loved them whereas, he hated communities, nations, and species. His satire was an attempt, as he writes further in the same letter, to prove the falsity of the definition of man as animal rationale.

Man was an animal, indeed, in the worldview of the Anglo-Irish priest, who had witnessed the rapacious nature of the colonial rule in Ireland and the rampant corruption of the Whig government in England. As a result, he attributes human qualities to horses in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, whereas beastly, attributes are accorded to man, who he recasts as despicable creatures called Yahoos. Instead, Swift defines man as *racioniscapax*, which means that man has the capacity to act as a rational creature occasionally. His biting satire, as he writes further, was based upon this foundation of misanthropy. Since man shares both the rationality of angels and the sensuality of animals, he did not completely trust the species of man. The general hatred emanates from indignation against a race that "refuses to acknowledge the need for harmony, proportion, and a balance between its rational capacity and its animal instincts". The belief that human nature is corrupt stems from Swift's Anglican conservatism. His representation of humankind suggests not only the moral depravity inherent in life after the "Biblical Fall" but also the "continuing indulgence in the consequences of the Fall unchecked by reasoned self-discipline, an altruistic morality or divine grace" (Sanders,285). While attacking the universal depravity of human beings, he questions and challenges the foundation of the Enlightenment. Having mentioned the Enlightenment, let's look into what the Enlightenment is all about.

2.2 WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

The Enlightenment refers to an intellectual and cultural movement that developed in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its adherents found "universal and uniform human reason adequate to solve the crucial problems and to establish the essential norms in life, together with the belief that the application of such reason was rapidly dissipating the darkness of superstition, prejudice and barbarity." Reason was widely perceived as a panacea for universal peace, happiness and freedom of humanity from authority and unexamined tradition (Abrams, 106).

2.2.1 Descartes, Kant, and Locke

In England, **Francis Bacon**, **John Locke**, and **Thomas Hobbes** were the major philosophers of the Enlightenment, who influenced their contemporary authors. "Have courage to use your own reason", writes **Immanuel Kant**, "was the motto of the Enlightenment". In a critically celebrated essay entitled "What is Enlightenment" (1784), Kant associates the Enlightenment with the freedom

to make public use of reason. Similarly, celebrating the overwhelming power of reason and thinking, the French thinker Rene Descartes (1596-1650) said, “*Cogito, ergo sum*”, that is, “I think, therefore I am”. The empiricist philosopher Locke argued in his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) that “since it is the understanding that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them; it is certainly a subject, even for its nobleness, worth our labour to inquire into” (22). This theoretical proposition regarding human being’s ability to think and doubt separated him/her from animals and became an instrumental element of Western philosophy. Let us look into what may be called the abuse of science and reason next.

2.2.2 Abuse of Science and Reason

Contrary to the popular and the intellectual belief of his times, Swift was more interested in the abuse of science and reason done by none other than the custodians of reason. As a Tory sympathiser, he had witnessed the moral and political decadence of the Whig administration. In eighteenth century England, science and reason were widely and grossly misused in the brutal subjugation of the colonised and the powerless. The yardsticks used by the English government while administering justice to their subjects in England were utterly different from the punitive measures initiated against the inhabitants of the remotely located colony. Swift’s satire captures the biggest paradox of modernity, for reason and science became tools to subvert the principles of justice, equality and democracy. And therefore, as a critic of the Enlightenment thought, he challenged the notion that man was a rational creature and superior to other animals. The manner in which Swift’s satire works is something that is very remarkable and we see bits of it in the next section.

2.2.3 A Horse is no Man

“*A Man is no horse*” wrote Samuel Butler in his mock-heroic narrative poem entitled *Hudibras* (1684). In Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift strategically subverts the accepted wisdom that man is more rational than horses. In his world, horses are rational animals and superior to civilised humans whereas, the Yahoos - fictional representations of men, are barbarians. He seems to turn Butler’s remark upside down and conclude that a horse is no man. In the late seventeenth century, philosophers were preoccupied with the question of how to distinguish men from beasts; or what constitutes the essence of men? This problem is central to *Gulliver's Travels*, where the satirist compels the readers to ask a pertinent question: who is closer to the ideals of human – Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Yahoos, Houyhnhnms, or Gulliver? The line between an animal and a human is not neatly demarcated in Swift’s narrative. When the story starts, Gulliver is a proud Englishman but as the narrative progresses his excessive pride begins to deflate and puncture. His Eurocentric perspective of the world is torn apart and towards the end of story he begins to despise not only Englishmen but the entire species of mankind, including his family members. Unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, travels and adventures bring him neither wealth nor wisdom. On the contrary, he loses everything, including the attachment he had for his country and family. Consequently, Gulliver finds solace nowhere else but amid the horses. Since Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is also a part of this course and also may be read as an adventure story and because the writers were contemporaries, a comparison between them would be but obvious.

2.3 *ROBINSON CRUSOE AND GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

A comparison between the two texts entails a look at the form. The neoclassical poets and satirists experimented with literary forms and genres. Commonplace ideas might be tolerated by them, but the form or manner of expression must not be commonplace. In *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) Alexander Pope captured this sentiment:

*True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;*

He expected the poet's "true wit" to guarantee that when an author wrote on "what oft was thought" he did it in such a way that readers found it "ne'er so well expressed".

2.3.1 The Question of Form

The authors had the liberty to deal with a banal theme but the way of writing down accepted wisdom had to be original. The source of novelty, therefore, was not the content but the form. Swift, too, experiments with the genre of novel, travel narrative, and science-fiction in *Gulliver's Travels*. Although it is often read as a proto novel, it does not fulfil the criteria of a novel laid out by Swift's younger contemporary Johnson. Samuel Johnson defined novel in his celebrated *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as a "small tale, generally of love". Swift's satire deals with a wide range of issues but love is certainly not among them. The popularity of the genre of the novel in the eighteenth century stemmed from its ability to successfully persuade the readers that they were witnessing reality, true accounts of life. However hard Swift tried to conceal his identity as an author and make it appear as a work based upon true experience, he couldn't convince contemporary readers regarding the authenticity of the incidents described in the book. Although some might have believed his story, a priest immediately after its publication denounced it as a bunch of lies. He threw the book indignantly into the fire. Surprisingly, the priest rejected the element of fictionality in a work of fiction. This raises the question of whether *Gulliver's Travels* is a travel narrative or simply fiction, and we shall address that next.

2.3.2 A Travel Narrative or a Fiction Pretending to be a Travelogue

The story of *Gulliver* created confusion among the readers because *Gulliver's Travels* is not a real travel narrative but a fiction pretending to be a travelogue. It is a parody of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In his book *The English Novel: an Introduction*, Terry Eagleton calls it "a savage spoof of the kind of travel-writing represented by Robinson Crusoe". Eighteenth-century travel-writing is considered in some ways a "progressive form, eager to investigate, exploit new technologies, acquire fresh knowledge and experience, and seize new opportunities for wealth. It centres on enterprise, optimism and self-sufficiency – all Whig-like, middle-class, commercialist values". *Gulliver's Travels*, on the contrary, is an "anti-progressive" work. Here, Gulliver, the amnesiac protagonist learns little, since he seems to start out on each of his travels as a blank slate. He barely learns from his experiences and undergoes all sorts of humiliation. The book does not have one seamless narrative like Defoe's novels, but it appears as a series of disconnected narratives. Robinson Crusoe is a capitalist hero who

becomes richer after his travels but in a parody of the travel book's optimism, Gulliver loses everything, including his sanity (34). Let us now look at Swift and how he was located in London society of the times in the next section.

2.4 SWIFT AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

Swift parodies not only the genre of the novel and the travelogue but also the scientists of his times. *Gulliver's Travels* may be read as a work of proto-science fiction as well as a satire on experimental philosophy that was being promoted by the Royal Society of London. Underlining Swift's approach to the scientific experiments, Rebekah Higgitt writes in *The Guardian*:

In many ways the whole of Gulliver's Travels is a satire on the scientific approach of the Royal Society. It is presented as a travel narrative, reporting on extraordinary sights and experiences in foreign lands in a calm, detached and, whenever possible, quantitative fashion. The Royal Society had often encouraged travellers to make such records and reported on information collected in circumstances that ranged across formal experiment, mathematical proof, astronomical observation, field work, library work, happenstance and even hearsay.

Swift was concerned with the moral dimensions of science and philosophy. If scientific and philosophical experiments do not address the day-to-day concerns of the masses, they are utterly futile. His trenchant critique of scientific pursuits sans morality, of colonialism, political absolutism, authoritarianism, and of modern civilisation made him popular across the globe. In later years, Mahatma Gandhi could empathise with Swift's critique of modern civilisation and colonialism whereas George Orwell appreciated the Irish author's denunciation of totalitarian regimes, mainly in Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*. The next section looks at how some of the major thinkers and writers all over the world have approached Swift and his politics and philosophy.

2.5 RECEPTION OF SWIFT

The reception of Jonathan Swift's masterpiece across the globe has been as intriguing as the book itself. Authoritarian regimes dreaded and disliked his satire whereas anti-colonial thinkers and liberals celebrated it from their perspectives.

2.5.1 Swift and Gandhi

For instance, immediately after its publication in Portugal, *Gulliver's Travels* was adjudged a subversive text by the authorities. The ruling dispensation of Portugal had established a system of statutory censorship under which all printed materials required license of both the State and the Church, and Swift seemed far from being innocuous to either. In 1770, Swift was included in a list of authors that the state sought to ban, along with **Fontenelle**, **Spinoza**, **Locke**, Descartes, **Rousseau**, **Voltaire** and other Enlightenment literati (Hermann, 91). In India, Gandhi understood the subversive potential of Swift's biting satire.

While reading Swift in India, one may wonder why an Indian student should bother at all about what an Irish priest had to say in an eighteenth-century topical satire. A good starting point to resolve this quandary could be to examine Gandhi's views on Swift. Gandhi's eclectic philosophy and egalitarian worldview were forged by several thinkers and writers. Although scholars and social scientists have analysed such thinkers in great detail, one such author was Swift, whose

influence on Gandhi is yet to be investigated thoroughly, (Kumar L., "Gandhi and Gulliver's Travels: an Indian Saint and an Irish Priest" the Indian Express).

Mahatma Gandhi in a letter dated May 18, 1911, advised his nephew and disciple, Maganlal Gandhi, to read Jonathan Swift's masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels* again and again:

Gulliver's Travels contains so effective a condemnation, in an ironic vein, of modern civilization that the book deserves to be read again and again. It is a very well-known book in the English language. Children can read it with enjoyment, so simple it is; and the wise ones get dizzy trying to comprehend its hidden significance. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver tumbled as low as he had risen high in Lilliput. Even in Lilliput, he has represented the tiny people as possessing powers which were superior to his own, that is to say, to those of normal people. (77-78)

One may wonder why Gandhi, then a civil rights activist residing in South Africa, would recommend a satire to his twenty-eight-year-old close associate **Maganlal**. In Gandhi's letters, the effusive praise for Swift is a refrain, for in *Gulliver's Travels* he found an "effective condemnation" of modern civilisation and colonial modernity. Though Gandhi's worldview was forged by several authors like **Ruskin, Thoreau, Tolstoy, Marx**, and others, Swift was the only one, who like Gandhi, directly suffered and stood up to British colonialism. His fascination with Swift's quasi-travelogue allows us to revisit and unearth not only the similarities between the Indian saint and the Irish priest but also its relevance in contemporary times.

It is self-evident that modern civilisation is characterised by industrialisation, imperialism, rationalism, individualism, and the promotion of scientific culture. Jonathan Swift's views on colonialism, modernity, authoritarianism, science and governance appear to have immensely influenced Gandhi during his formative years in South Africa (1893-1914).

Swift and Gandhi both were incisive critics of colonialism; both perceived the achievements of modernity and the Enlightenment sceptically; both of them acknowledged the role of religion in shaping their viewpoints. They thought of rationalism as a false and destructive doctrine. They also shared the double burden of being both victims as well as beneficiaries of colonial modernity. Initially, during his stay in England as a law student, a young Gandhi lived like an Englishman, wore a suit, kept a silver-headed cane and took lessons in dancing and violin. When he reached South Africa as a young barrister in 1893, he thought of himself "as a Briton first and an Indian Second," writes *Arthur Herman* in his book *Gandhi and Churchill* (2008). But soon the cultural pride that Gandhi drew on his English education and way of life began to fade away after undergoing racial discrimination, when he was thrown off the first - class compartment of a train at Pietermaritzburg.

Though as a white man, Swift did not have to undergo any kind of racial discrimination yet, Ireland was brutally subjugated by England in every possible way. Swift, initially, was proud of his identity as an Englishman and constantly sought favour from the British establishment. During his stay in Ireland, he didn't take up the cause of the local Irish population but he spoke for the white settlers, a community he himself was a part of. To please the British Queen, he even wrote a pamphlet *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), an allegory on various branches of Christianity. To his utmost surprise, the satirical representation of the English Church infuriated Queen Anne so much that all his chances of promotion within

the English Church ended forever. What Pietermaritzburg did to Gandhi, *A Tale of a Tub* did to Swift, making him painfully aware of his colonised identity.

This publishing debacle has been humorously fictionalised in *Gulliver's Travels*, where Swift briefly recasts himself as Gulliver and the British Queen as the Queen of the imaginary island Lilliput. On the one hand, Swift's pamphlet scandalised the queen, and on the other, his fictional creation Gulliver had to face the wrath of the queen of Lilliput for extinguishing the palace fire by urinating on it. There are several parallels between Swift's gradual disenchantment with his English lineage and Gandhi's disillusionment with a borrowed English identity.

Swift satirises the colonisation of Ireland in Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, with reference to a flying island called Laputa. The island, a fictional representation of England, symbolises a totalitarian state, which is totally divorced from its subjects, and chooses to govern its subjects scientifically, and not morally. Governance without morality invariably leads to an authoritarian state. The self-absorbed Laputan King and his entourage may be disconnected from the real world but they are quick enough to crush any rebellion by ensuring the universal destruction of the dissenting subjects. Swift's critique of a totalitarian regime and a politically absolutist state not only fascinated those who directly had to undergo the experiences of colonialism but also George Orwell. It was not for nothing that in "*Politics vs Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels*" (1946), Orwell praises Swift for satirising political authoritarianism.

Swift examines the dire consequences of divorcing science and governance from morality and the immediate concerns of the masses. The scientists of the island are so absorbed in their unproductive pursuits like extracting sunshine out of cucumber, or reducing human excrement to its original food that they cannot even address their practical needs of speaking and listening. They hire a domestic servant who tells them when to listen or to speak. Their bizarre and illogical experiments lead to large swathes of barren land and impoverished masses.

Swift, as a satirist and master of irony, takes his critique of abstract science to an extreme, and enables the readers to easily comprehend the absurd ways of a totalitarian state. It was this impoverished and shallow morality of modern civilisation and colonial state that Gandhi denounced in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) as fundamentally rotten. Gandhi calls modern civilisation "Satanic", "a Black Age," for it primarily focuses on securing bodily comforts but fails miserably even in doing so. He unambiguously and plainly rejects the imperialist, exploitative, materialistic, individualistic and violent side of the machine-driven age as directionless and purposeless. Though the idea that an abstract science and philosophy in an absolutist state may lead to unspeakable violence originated in eighteenth century Europe, it became a harsh reality for Indians during the heyday of colonialism. This Swiftian narrative became a recurring metaphor in Gandhi's oeuvre.

Swift and Gandhi were poles apart. Swift believed in the essential depravity of mankind whereas Gandhi believed in the essential goodness of humankind. Swift's work was characterised by indignation whereas Gandhi's writings were informed by love and non-violence. Unlike Gandhi, Swift was a writer and a priest, not an activist. He hardly did anything to challenge British colonialism except writing political satires. The Irish author turned against the empire only when his chances to become the Bishop of an English church ended forever. Although he despised turncoats, the denial of promotion turned him into a malcontent. Nevertheless, Swift was celebrated later on as an Irish patriot, as someone who opposed the mighty British Empire through his biting prose satires. It is not surprising that W

B Yeats (1865-1939), an Irish poet, not only translated Swift's self-written epitaph from Latin into English but also celebrated him as a champion of Irish nationalism. Although Swift and Gandhi operated on two different plains altogether, it was the anti-colonial stance of the Irish author and his ability to foreground the evil side of modernity that influenced Gandhi. This aspect of Swift will continue to mesmerise readers in India and others parts of the world, where the atrocities committed by the Empire during the heyday of colonialism are still fresh in public memory. Let us now look at Swift and Orwell next.

2.5.2 Swift and Orwell

George Orwell admired both Gandhi and Swift. Yet, he was equally critical of both of them. Gandhi's appreciation for Swift's critique of modern civilisation is something that Orwell may not have liked. Although it is not clear whether Orwell was familiar with Gandhi's reading of Swift, he rejects Gandhi's emphasis on home-spun cloth and vegetarianism as a medievalist programme for a starving country in his essay "*Reflections on Gandhi*". As a British official, Orwell conveniently forgets that the wrong policies of his government were responsible for the hunger and starvation of millions of Indians. The same policies caused famine and rampant poverty in Ireland, which was brutally plundered by an absolutist regime of England. Swift had observed this loot closely.

"Swift's greatest contribution to political thought" writes George Orwell, "in the narrower sense of the words, is his attack, especially in Book III, on what would now be called totalitarianism" (*Politics vs Literature*, 213). In Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, there is a Professor at the School of Political Projectors, who claims before Gulliver that one could discover people's secret thoughts by examining their excrements. He shows his visitor "a large Paper of Instructions for discovering Plots and Conspiracies against the Government". The Professor instructs all the statesmen to keep an eye on the diet and timing of eating of all suspected persons. To detect the conspiracies, he observes people's faeces:

Because Men are never so serious, thoughtful, and intent, as when they are at stool; which he found by frequent Experiment: for in such Conjectures, when he used merely as a Trial to consider which was the best Way of murdering the King, his Ordure would have a Tincture of Green; but quite different when he thought only of raising an Insurrection or burning the Metropolis. (Swift, 178)

This is an allegorical representation of the complicity between science and the modern state in controlling and subjugating the subject. Orwell examines this passage in his essay "*Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels*", closely and argues that Swift could foresee the spy-haunted police state, with its endless treason trials. Further, Orwell finds in Houyhnhnms the highest stage of totalitarian organisation, the stage when conformity has become so general that there is no need for a police force. Houyhnhnms had no word for "opinion" in their language as there was no room for disagreement among them. The only question they were required to discuss was how to treat Yahoos. Such episodes must have inspired Orwell to produce his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which deals with the theme of state surveillance and propaganda of a totalitarian state.

Apart from his satires, Swift's sermons (only a few of which have survived) provide us with his views on the pillars of 18th century society: monarchy, government, and party. His sermons capture the justified fears he had in the potential destruction of the Constitution, the dangers of anarchy, and the rise of

absolutism. He shared the sentiments of the political theorist John Locke, whose second *Treatise on Civil Government* (1690), emphasises the principles of civil liberty and human rights underlying the Revolution of 1688. Locke and Swift both promote and authenticate the principles that justified the actions taken against Charles I and **James II**, since these kings had acted arbitrarily and violated the laws of the land (Degategno, 267). During his younger days, as a Whig, Swift supported Locke's views on revolution but later he became a Tory sympathiser and attacked liberals and conservatives alike, especially the ongoing conflict between Whigs and Tories. Consequently, Orwell calls him a rebel, an iconoclast, a Tory anarchist, who despised authority while disbelieving in liberty. Inconsistency is a hallmark of both Gulliver as well as Swift. However, for Orwell, who had read it first as an eight-year-old boy, *Gulliver's Travels* was a book he was never tired of reading. Both Gandhi and Swift, then, enjoyed reading this classic again and again owing to its contemporaneity. Yet another important literary giant needs to be examined and that giant was W B Yeats, the Irish poet. Let's do that next.

2.5.3 Swift and Yeats

W B Yeats was conscious of his Irish literary heritage, comprising the works of philosopher **George Berkley**, **Oliver Goldsmith**, **Edmund Burke**, and Jonathan Swift "with his love of perfect nature, of the Houyhnhnms, his disbelief in Newton's system and every sort of machine". They all had a lasting influence on him (Yeats, 402). The presence of such predecessors helped Yeats create a strong Irish identity, which became instrumental for Irish nationalism. He shared Swift's indignation against the colonial administration. "No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression", writes W B Yeats. He may not have given expression to overwhelming anger in his poetry as strongly as Swift did yet, he reflects on what he calls "Irish hatred and solitude, the hatred of human life that made Swift write *Gulliver* and the epitaph upon his tomb" (519). Yeats places Swift at the heart of Irish literary canon and calls his epitaph written in Latin more immortal than his pamphlets, perhaps more powerful than even his great allegory. He believed that "now and then in history some man will speak a few simple sentences which never die, because his life gives them energy and meaning." Swift's self-reflective comment in his epitaph that "He has gone where fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no more" was a classic example of such a sentence for Yeats. The epitaph, Yeats wrote, made him question his sanity (308). Swift, then, appealed to Yeats for mainly three reasons: for his critique of British colonialism, his Epitaph, and above all, for his defence of Anglo-Protestant belief. Yeats, too, was committed to the cultural ascendancy of the politics of Anglo-Irish Protestants in the beginning of the twentieth century. This fascination led him to write a one-act play about Swift titled *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, for his Irish predecessor becomes a haunting presence for him both on-stage in his plays and off-stage in his life. The next section will look at the relationship between a more contemporary writer and Swift – Edward Said.

2.6 A TRADITIONAL INTELLECTUAL OR AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: EDWARD SAID ON SWIFT

Edward Said, another modern thinker, who read Swift owing to his appeal in modern times associates Swift with "Tory anarchy", though Swift never called himself a Tory despite sympathising with them. At certain stages in their careers,

Said writes, Defoe and Johnson were pamphleteers and public figures but neither of them was visibly affiliated with a political party as Swift was with the Tory government between 1711 and 1713 (83). Since the Irish author had no avenue to achieve social mobility outside the church except through either state patronage or polemical writing for a particular party, a neutral political stance was not an alternative for him. Said calls Swift both a traditional intellectual as well as an organic intellectual:

From a class standpoint, then, Swift was a traditional intellectual—a cleric—but what makes him unique is that unlike almost any other major writer in the whole of English literature (except possibly for Steele) he was also an extraordinarily important organic intellectual because of his closeness to real political power. (83)

But despite this apparent proximity to political power, Swift did not manage to get a promotion within the English Church. The respectable post of Dean within the Irish Church was the only alternative that he had. As a Palestine born American, Edward Said himself enjoyed a position of privilege from which he spoke for the less privileged. His position at Columbia University perhaps provides an analogy to Swift's office as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral (Oakleaf, 7). Thus, Swift has continued to fascinate modern readers, for they read him from their perspective and find an analogy and solution to the problems that they face in contemporary times. Postcolonial thinkers, animal rights activists, children, scientists, novelists, malcontents, intellectuals victimised by the state, and readers from the erstwhile colonies empathise with Swift even today.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

Thus, this unit has analysed at length Swift's views on philosophy, science, and politics. It has discussed the Enlightenment and situated Swift in the context of some of the intellectual debates of his age. We have seen how Swift challenged the fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment, especially people's excessive faith in reason and science, as they turned out to be inadequate in providing a solution to the problems faced by them. For Swift, rationality is not inherent in human beings but they are capable of acting in a rational manner occasionally. But when they fail to do so, they are worse than animals. He questions the binary between man and animal, which was at the heart of the Enlightenment. We have seen why Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels* and how one may read it as a parody of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The unit discussed at length the ways in which modern thinkers and authors, including Gandhi, Orwell, Yeats, and Said have tried to understand Swift's political views and his critique of the scientists of his times. Swift is as popular today as he was in his times. His universal appeal stems from the fact that the subsequent generation of authors and political thinkers find in him a voice that addresses their own experience of colonial atrocities and totalitarian regimes directly.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. What is Enlightenment? How does Swift question certain values associated with the Enlightenment and modernity?
2. Does Swift help us question the binary between a man and an animal? Critically examine?
3. How does Orwell find in Swift a critique of totalitarian regimes?
4. Swift's views on science, politics, philosophy and travel writing have inspired thinkers across the globe. Critically discuss.

UNIT 3 *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*: BOOKS I – III: CHARACTERS, SUMMARY, THEMES, AND ANALYSIS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Analysis of Important Characters
- 3.3 *Gulliver's Travels*: Book I and Book II
 - 3.3.1 Summary and Analysis
 - 3.3.2 "Little Odious Vermin"
 - 3.3.3 "Big Men and Little Men"
 - 3.3.4 "Whose Dog are You?"
- 3.4 *Gulliver's Travels*, Book III: Summary
- 3.5 Themes and Analysis
 - 3.5.1 Science for Science's Sake
 - 3.5.2 Laputa: An Absolutist State
 - 3.5.3 "Prostitute Writers": Swift on Modern History
 - 3.5.4 Gulliver's Disillusionment with Immortality
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to examine critically the major themes of *Gulliver's Travels*, especially of Book III. It begins with a brief analysis of the main characters of all four books. The description of prominent characters is followed by a discussion on Book I and Book II of the satire. A recurring trope in these two books is the relation between size and virtue, for the physical constitutes the moral. The unit refers to Samuel Johnson's remark on the idea of size in Swift and his distaste for and disapproval of this polemical satire. Having discussed the first half of the book, we move on to a detailed summary of Book III in which Gulliver goes to a flying island called Laputa. The last section of the unit deals with the important themes and motifs of Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, namely the misuse of science and rationality, colonialism, history writing, Swift's misogyny, Gulliver's disenchantment with the notion of immortality, and the continuity between the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome and the neoclassical age. In conclusion, the unit will show us how prophetic and relevant Swift's ideas have turned out to be for contemporary readers.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gulliver's Travels tells the tale of Gulliver's transformation from a proud Englishman to a misanthrope. The entire book is divided into four books: Gulliver's voyage to Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the Houyhnhnms. Since it lacks a proper plot, the book appears to be a series of four disconnected narratives. However, one may find some recurring themes, motifs, and metaphors. Books I and II can be read together as a topical as well as a universal satire on the

corrupt Whig administration and depravity of man. On the other hand, we may read Books III and IV together as Swift's incisive critique of English colonialism, authoritarianism, and the abuse of science and reason. They help us understand Swift's views on the Royal Society of London and England's treatment of its colony - Ireland. Although Gulliver's narrative is characterised by inconsistencies, Swift's anti-colonial tirade is a recurring trope in all four books. Swift explores the dire consequences of separating morality from science in Book III. Scientists and philosophers of Laputa are so absorbed in their research that they cannot take care of their immediate needs. He seems to caution readers against excessive scientific experiments and innovations. Let us begin the analysis of the important characters next.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Don Pedro De Mendez – is the generous Portuguese captain who brings Gulliver back to England after he is compelled to leave the land of the Houyhnhnms who consider him a Yahoo. He is generous and offers Gulliver his clothes. But surprisingly Gulliver thinks of him as a Yahoo, for he begins to empathise only with horses.

Emperor of Lilliput – The emperor of Lilliput is twenty-eight years old. Like his subjects, he is six inches tall and has reigned for seven years. He is vengeful, spiteful, and hungry for more power. He wants to defeat the neighbouring kingdom of Blefuscu and seeks Gulliver's assistance in expanding his territory. But when Gulliver refuses to help him in defeating the neighbouring empire, he turns against Gulliver and accuses him of treason. An impeachment is brought against him. The emperor is against capital punishment hence it is decided that Gulliver will be blinded and starved to death. But he escapes before the execution. The conflict between Lilliput and Blefuscu is an allegorical representation of the old rivalry between England and France.

Flimnap – He is the treasurer of Lilliput, who turns against Gulliver because the state has to spend an enormous amount of money on feeding the "Man-Mountain". He believes the absurd idea that Gulliver is having an affair with his wife and they meet in a private place. It never occurs to him, that his wife is only six inches tall whereas Gulliver is six feet. The accusation appears even more absurd when Gulliver defends himself without referring to the disproportion of size between them. He is a fictional representation of the Whig Prime Minister Robert Walpole.

Glumdalclitch – In Book II, she is the nine-year-old daughter of a farmer, who discovers Gulliver in Brobdingnag. She is forty feet tall but takes care of tiny Gulliver gently. She makes him several sets of tiny clothes. When the queen buys Gulliver, she continues to look after him. While her father reduces Gulliver to a public spectacle and makes a profit out of him, she treats him as a toy.

Gulliver – Lemuel Gulliver is the gullible narrator and protagonist of the story. He is both a character as well as Swift's mouthpiece. Trained as a surgeon, he decides to undertake four voyages one after another. When he begins his first voyage, he is a proud Englishman but after meeting Houyhnhnms and Yahoos in Book IV, he develops antipathy towards mankind. He constantly draws a parallel between England and the new islands that he discovers and considers England initially superior to the places he visits. He is an amnesiac narrator who hardly learns from his experiences. Upon his return to England, he begins to despise humans and finds comfort amidst horses. Gulliver's desire to undertake new adventures despite facing humiliation and sexual abuse is indicative of the eighteenth-century preoccupation with travels and exploration of new territories.

Houyhnhnms – They are horse-like creatures in Book IV of the book. Disputes, dubious propositions, controversies, falsehood, and such other vices are utterly unknown in the Utopian world in which these rational creatures live. Their vocabulary is very limited. They have no word for lying and cheating, for such vices do not exist there. Governed by reason, they live a virtuous life and look down upon Gulliver as a Yahoo.

King of Brobdingnag – Brobdingnagians are sixty-foot tall creatures. Gulliver appears an insect or a tiny creature before them. Their king is a morally upright person who is shocked when Gulliver, a tiny creature, proposes to teach him how to make gunpowder and use it against his enemies. He rejects Gulliver's offer, for he is reluctant to defeat his neighbouring princes and destroy them. He is very different from the king of Lilliput. Since the solicitous king is a man of principles, he is closer to the ideals of man. He is superior to Gulliver both physically and morally.

Munodi – Lord Munodi is from an extremely important family in Balnibarbi, in Laputa. He is the most sensible and rational creature in the kingdom who believes in applied science. But he is denounced as the most ignorant and stupid person of the province for his emphasis on practical side of knowledge. He is the host of Gulliver and shows him several places in Book III. He falls from grace due to his practical approach to agriculture in Lagado where unproductive and unfruitful agricultural methods are encouraged. Gulliver does not find one ear of corn or blade of grass in the entire city but when he comes to Munodi's estate, he finds vineyards, corn-grounds, and meadows. But his countrymen ridicule and despise him for managing his affairs well.

Yahoos – Allegorical representations of men in the state of nature. In Book IV, they are despicable creatures resembling men. They eat raw meat and fornicate. Houyhnhnms have tamed them but are not able to civilise them completely. They are naked, filthy, and live like beasts. A female Yahoo is the epitome of ugliness. Yahoos repel Gulliver with their voracious sexual appetite, especially when a Yahoo girl pounces on him while he is bathing naked. But, to his utter dismay, Houyhnhnms consider him a Yahoo. Although they are surprised to see a civilised Yahoo, they cannot keep Gulliver on their island forever and ask him to leave.

Reldresal – The Secretary of Private Affairs in Lilliput, Reldresal, befriends Gulliver and explains to Gulliver the history of the political conflict between the two major factions in the realm: the High-Heels and the Low-Heels. The clash between these two parties is a fictional representation of the political factionalism between the Whigs and the Tories. When an impeachment is brought against Gulliver, Reldresal argues for a less severe punishment than death – gouging out his eyes instead.

Skyresh Bolgolam – Unlike Reldresal, Bolgolam, the high admiral of Lilliput, shows hostility towards Gulliver from the very beginning. He is filled with envy when Gulliver captures the fleet of Blefescu. He is in favour of awarding capital punishment to the "Man-Mountain" for his alleged crime.

Struldbruggs – Are a group of people who are immortal but they do not remain young forever. Eternity turns out to be a curse for them. According to the law of the Luggnagg, they become legally dead at eighty. Their marriage also stands dissolved at that age and they can no longer hold property. Since language changes over a period of time, they have difficulties communicating with the younger generation. In short, immortality is not celebrated by them. Let us now look at Books I and II of Gulliver's Travels next.

3.3 *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS: BOOKS I AND II*

Gulliver's Travels claims to tell the story of a surgeon, Lemuel Gulliver's four voyages to several remote nations of the world. The author uses fictional maps, letters, and a detailed biographical account of the narrator along with a description of England to prove the authenticity of this work as a travelogue.

3.3.1 Summary and Analysis

Book I deals with Gulliver's journey to Lilliput, an island where people are six inches tall whereas in Book II he accidentally reaches an island inhabited by people who are sixty feet tall, so he appears a tiny dwarf. After the shipwreck in Book I, while he is asleep on the shore, thousands of Lilliputians tie him to the ground. They shoot tiny arrows at him. Later on, he is fed well and taken to an ancient temple. People call him "the Great Mountain Man". Gulliver gradually learns their language and gets to know about their laws, customs, educational system and the political and religious factions. On the one hand, there are two political parties: the high heels and the low heels. And on the other, there are two religious groups: the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians. The latter is a satirical representation of the religious conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. Gulliver helps the emperor defeat the neighbouring empire of Blefescu by capturing their fleet of ships but he refuses to annihilate them. He also douses the fire that erupted in the queen's palace by urinating on it but this incident infuriates the queen. An impeachment is brought against him. He is to be blinded and slowly starved to death but he escapes before the execution takes place. An English ship rescues him and brings him home where he shows off the tiny sheep and other cattle that he has brought in his pocket from Lilliput.

3.3.2 "Little Odious Vermin"

Book I gives us a glimpse of the diminutive form of man whereas Book II shows us the magnified version of man. Within two months of his return, Gulliver sets off on another journey and is left alone on the island of Brobdingnag, where he is discovered by a farmer. What Gulliver is to Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians are to Gulliver. Size becomes a matter of perspective here. The notion of objective truth is questioned. What we see is determined by how we see it.

In Book II, Gulliver is made to undergo a series of humiliations, one after the other. The farmer makes money out of his performances in the market where he becomes tired and ill from the strain of performing again and again. A dwarf drops him into a large bowl of cream. A monkey thinks of Gulliver as a baby and force-feeds him. He is attacked by flies, rats, and wasps. He is sold like a commodity and sexually abused. Readers may observe that there is barely any difference between Gulliver using the cattle of Lilliput for spectacle and a profit-making exercise in England and the farmer abusing him in a similar fashion. He is treated by the farmer as an animal. Later when the queen buys him, she is surprised to see wit and common sense in such a diminutive animal.

Despite being subjected to numerous indignities, he continues to remain proud of his English identity and wishes to have the tongue of great orators like Demosthenes or Cicero so that he may praise his country eloquently. He has a Eurocentric perspective of the world from the outset. He offers the king his services in teaching his men how to make gunpowder. The king is appalled to see that a tiny creature has such destructive ideas. Although Gulliver attempts to create a favourable impression of his country on the king, he fails miserably when the king of Brobdingnag tells him in Book II, "My little Friend Grildrig;

you have made a most admirable Panegyric upon your Country. You have clearly proved that Ignorance, Idleness, and Vice are the proper Ingredients for qualifying a Legislator.” There is a huge gap between what Gulliver intends to convey and what he ends up conveying to the king. This gap constitutes Swiftian irony. The king’s invective against Gulliver’s countrymen continues as he condemns them as “the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth” (120-21). Thus, Gulliver and his countrymen are perceived by the king as a race of vermin, as insects, which crawl and creep upon the earth. The dignity of man is attacked, for the size of six inches and sixty feet becomes an indicator of man’s virtue. The king of Brobdingnag is superior to his counterpart in Lilliput both physically and morally.

3.3.3 “Big Men and Little Men”

James Boswell, the acclaimed biographer of Samuel Johnson, in his biography entitled *The Life of Johnson* (1791) has discussed Dr Johnson’s distaste for *Gulliver’s Travels*. “When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest”, said Johnson scornfully. Swift’s masterpiece, then, in Johnson’s viewpoint, could be reduced to the principles of diminution and magnification. Size, is, undoubtedly, an important metaphor in the book. The physical and the moral are interconnected in the worldview of Swift. Lilliputians are inferior to Gulliver both physically and morally whereas Brobdingnagians are superior to both in every respect. But Johnson failed to observe that there is more to Gulliver’s Travels than “big men and little men”.

Johnson’s list of rejected novels was quite long. He was equally dismissive of Lawrence Sterne’s experimental novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759) about which he prophesied, “Nothing odd will do long”. Johnson was indisputably an eminent literary critic but he was no prophet. *Tristram Shandy* and *Gulliver’s Travels* both were neither as simple nor as odd as he thought. They continue to remain the most influential and widely admired books of the eighteenth century. What is more important than the concept of size, the theory of perspectivism, and rebuttal of the notion of objective truth in Book I and Book II, is Swift’s critique of party politics and religious factionalism.

3.3.4 “Whose Dog are You?”

Satirists, novelists, and poets in the eighteenth century England had no other option except supporting the Whigs or the Tories, the Catholics or the Protestants. They invariably needed a powerful patron to escape censorship and state persecution. Without having the support of a mighty group one always remained vulnerable. Pope, Swift, Dryden, Defoe and several others faced this dilemma and decided to extend their covert or overt support to some group or the other. What mattered in Swift’s England was whom you belonged to. The little couplet Alexander Pope mockingly wrote to put on one of the queen’s little pugs, could have applied in earnest in the world that Swift and Pope inhabited:

*I am his Highness’ dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?*

(Cited in Stephen Greenblatt’s The Swerve, Chapter I. Though Greenblatt uses this couplet to capture the predicament of the inhabitants of the fifteenth century Europe regarding their political affiliation, it was equally applicable to Swift’s world).

The predicament that the authors of eighteenth century England faced between choosing Whig or Tory, between supporting the parliament or the monarchy has

been the concern of the intellectuals since antiquity. It has not lost its relevance even in modern times. In Book I, though Gulliver overtly supports the emperor of Lilliput, several courtiers suspect that his sympathies lie with their opponents. The admiral who wants capital punishment for Gulliver believes that in his heart “he is a Big-Endian” and treason begins in the heart. Pope’s remark that “Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory” captured the quandary of every writer of his age. Swift was both its victim as well as the beneficiary. As a Tory sympathiser, he did not shy away from satirising those in power. George Orwell calls Book I a satire on human greatness. It’s a satire both on human greatness as well as a pretence of greatness of the Whig Prime Minister Robert Walpole whose decadent court is allegorically represented by the Lilliputian court where various ludicrous exercises are undertaken. On the other hand, the king of Brobdingnag is an efficient ruler, for he has understood that the art of governance is based upon moral principles and not on scientific principles. Hence, he does not reduce politics to science. In Book III, Laputans commit the folly of governing their subjects by scientific and not by moral principles. Consequently, they represent an autocratic state and perpetrate all sorts of violence against their subjects. A discussion on Book III of *Gulliver's Travels* follows next.

3.4 GULLIVER’S TRAVELS, BOOK III: SUMMARY

Upon his return from the second voyage, Gulliver barely spends ten days at home when his friend Captain William Robinson pays him a visit and persuades him to embark on another voyage. Gulliver craves to see the world and therefore, despite his past misfortunes his passion for travelling remains unabated. Their ship is attacked by pirates after surviving a fierce storm. The pirates set Gulliver adrift in a canoe with a modest amount of food. Soon, he reaches the island of Balnibarbi near Japan, a province of the flying island called Laputa, ruled by a king and dominated by philosophers. They are mainly interested in science and music. These philosophers are more concerned with theoretical principles than their application to day-to-day life. They are so engrossed in scientific and philosophical pursuits that they can neither speak nor listen to others without some external help. They have hired a servant called Flapper whose job is to strike the mouth of his master gently when he is to speak and the right ear of the person when he is supposed to listen. Adultery committed by women is quite common on the island, for the husband is invariably absorbed in philosophical speculations. Meanwhile, the wives and daughters lament their confinement to the island. Once they leave the flying island and go to the towns located below, it becomes difficult to persuade them to return.

When the island reaches the capital city of Lagado, it stops over towns and villages at the behest of the king to receive petitions of the subjects. If a town ever engages in rebellion and refuses to pay the tribute, the king has two methods of subjugating them. One is by making the island hover over the town for a long time to deprive its inhabitants of the benefit of the sunshine and the rain. And the other is to pelt heavy stones at them against which they have no defense except for creeping into caves.

Gulliver leaves Laputa and visits Lord Munodi, a former governor of Lagado. Munodi is treated as an outcast and condemned as stupid and ignorant for applying scientific theories to practice. Gulliver visits the town and observes that the houses there are built strangely and they need immediate repair. The people walk fast with their eyes fixed. They are in rags and look wild. The labourers work with several tools but they fail to grow either corn or grass. However,

Munodi manages his estate well but he is ridiculed by people who discourage any fruitful activity. Following this, Gulliver is taken to the Grand Academy of Lagado, where Gulliver meets a scientist who has been working upon a project to extract sunbeam out of cucumber for eight years. He is hopeful that in the next eight years, he would be able to supply the Governor's garden with sunshine at a reasonable rate. Another researcher attempts to propagate a breed of naked sheep. While scientists are occupied with research the whole country is in ruins and people are forced to live without food or clothes.

There is a scientist who intends to replace words by objects and gradually abolish all the words. Since words are only names for things, he proposes to carry things that will signify words. Consequently, people will need to carry a bundle of things upon their back. This particular episode is a spoof on the Royal Society of London, which was a scientific academy founded in 1660. Its members included the astronomer **Edmund Halley** and the scientist **Isaac Newton**. Thomas Sprat in his book *The History of the Royal Society of London* (1667) rejects all the amplifications and digressions in language and proposes to return to the primitive purity and shortness, "when men delivered so many things almost in an equal number of words". Several language reformers have used the slogan "So many words, so many things" while advocating the use of bare prose. Swift as a Tory conservative satirises this innovation in language by foregrounding its eccentricity in the Academy of Lagado. He compels the readers to imagine a dystopian universe in which words will be replaced by things. Although the Royal Society promoted scientific preciseness in language and did not stand for the abolition of words altogether, Swift, nevertheless, ridicules this proposition.

Gulliver leaves Lagado shortly afterwards and undertakes a short voyage to Glubbudrib, the island of sorcerers. Several kinds of black magic are performed here. The magicians can even call eminent personalities back from the dead. Gulliver gets to see Homer, Aristotle, **Alexander the Great**, **Caesar**, **Brutus**, and **Pompey** and is mesmerised at this sight. He continues to call and examine several luminaries from the dead and concludes that historical accounts of great men's lives are often inaccurate:

I was chiefly disgusted with modern History. For having strictly examined all the Persons of greatest Name in the Courts of Princes for an Hundred Years past, I found how the World had been misled by prostitute Writers, to ascribe the greatest Exploits in War to Cowards, the wisest Counsel to Fools, Sincerity to Flatterers, Roman Virtue to Betrayers of their Country, Piety to Atheists, Chastity to Sodomites, Truth to Informers.

(186)

In this episode, Gulliver the narrator seems to represent the authorial voice. As a neoclassicist, Swift shows respect for the ancient figures but is appalled at the distortion of history by modern historians, who he excoriates as "prostitute writers". Gulliver denounces modern history as a bunch of lies. His next destination is Luggnagg, where he looks forward to meeting Struldbruggs, the immortal creatures. He talks about the benefits of living eternally, for the immortals have the wisdom of the former ages. He assumes that they must be the wealthiest and wisest men of the kingdom. But soon he realises that though they live forever, they too grow old. When they turn eighty, they develop the follies and infirmities of other old men and become vain, talkative, and peevish. They are declared legally dead at the age of eighty and their heirs immediately seize their property. They are despised and hated by all sorts of people. Gulliver is forced to revise his opinion of eternal life and is utterly disillusioned with the

notion of immortality. He eventually wishes to return to his family and arrives in England via Japan and Holland. We shall now look at the various themes that the novel touches upon or deals with in section 3.5

3.5 THEMES AND ANALYSIS

Book III has two major themes: politics and the abuse of reason. These two ideas are strung together by the metaphor of science. It is a satire against the intellectual pride of man and on scientific pursuits in the academy of Lagadosubvert - the fundamental purpose of science and philosophy. Since the days of Socrates, philosophy has responded to a very concrete question – how to live happily?

3.5.1 Science for Science's Sake

This old Socratic question emphasises the applicability of theoretical knowledge to the problems faced by people. But it appears that the scientists and philosophers of Laputa and Lagado believe in science for science's sake. They have reduced science to a set of theoretical principles with no practical value. Consequently, after sixteen years of research, one scientist expects to get sunbeam out of cucumber, which is already abundant in nature. Swift's critique of the Royal Society and his contemporary scientists may help us understand the present condition of research in our country. Although in recent times, the emphasis is being laid on skill-based learning, the colonial education system that we have inherited has largely remained theory-based. The Laputans adorn their garments with the images of fiddles, flutes, guitars, and other musical instruments but when it comes to the application of their knowledge of music, they fail miserably. When they play on these instruments, the music lacks both rhythm and harmony. Instead, it produces a cacophony of deafening sound. Swift creates a dystopian universe in which unproductive and unfruitful works are encouraged and productive work is despised and looked down upon. He believes that human morality should take precedence over scientific pursuits.

The philosophers of the flying island are so lost in the abstract principles of mathematics, music, and astronomy that they neglect all their practical needs. They cannot even speak or hear without being reminded by their servants. These philosophers treat their wives gently but invariably neglect them. They continue to remain unconcerned even when women commit adultery and live with someone who beats them up regularly. Swift's description of the women of Laputa is an example of his misogyny:

This may perhaps pass with the Reader rather for a European or English story, than for one of a country so remote. But he may please to consider, that the caprices of womankind are not limited by any climate or nation; and that they are much more uniform than can be easily imagined. (152)

Both Pope and Swift are accused of misogyny, as they tend to generalise and stereotype women. Swift's mouthpiece Gulliver denounces the behavior of women without paying attention to their social isolation on an island dominated by male scientists and philosophers who cannot spare time for their spouses.

3.5.2 Laputa: An Absolutist State

The Flying Island is a metaphor for science and colonialism. It also stands for the concentration of power in the hands of a few who are disconnected from the masses and are driven by theory and experiments. The king never comes down and hears the petitions of the subjects. He merely flies over the town. It reflects England's treatment of Ireland. There are parallels between the brutal

repression of towns and villages by the Laputan king and the English colonial rule in Ireland and elsewhere. The king never finds a solution to the problems of the starving population but is keen to crush all sorts of rebellion without any delay. Similarly, the English barely did anything to provide food and employment to millions who perished during famines in Ireland, India, and other colonies. But they used coercive methods very swiftly to suppress even the most legitimate demands of its subjects. The Laputans represent the colonial state, absolutist state. They are indifferent to the demands of people. The empire has all the signs of an authoritarian regime, which demands the complete subservience of its people.

3.5.3 “Prostitute Writers”: Swift on Modern History

There are two more subthemes in Book III: one is the continuity between the classical and the neoclassical world and the other is Gulliver's fascination with immortality. Since neoclassical poets and satirists accepted the superiority of their classical masters and sought inspiration from them, Swift recreates the entire ancient Greco-Roman history. Eminent commanders, philosophers, warriors, and kings from ancient Rome are brought back from the dead. This episode helps Swift build a bridge between the ancient world and eighteenth-century England. It also gives him an entry point to challenge and counter the ways in which history and anecdotes are written. In his scathing attack on history and historians, he rejects the former as a bunch of concocted tales and the latter as “Prostitute Writers”. Swift makes a prophetic claim by countering the official version of historians. He anticipates the concern of postmodern and subaltern historians of the twentieth century who challenge the claims of objectivity in history. Postmodernism questions the line between fact and fiction in history. These days history is being read as literature and literature as history. What Swift may have done in jest is being pursued as a serious academic exercise nowadays. Our reading of the text may have let us understand that Swift was an interesting author and satirist. The next section will shed light on immortality.

3.5.4 Gulliver's Disillusionment with Immortality

A great author makes the readers interrogate conventional wisdom. Swift makes us question certain accepted notions regarding history writing, the Enlightenment, science, rationality, governance, politics, the binary between man and animal, and between reason and passion. The pursuit of immortality is one such belief. The desire to become immortal is as ancient as human civilisation. But immortality without youth and health can be a curse, as the myth of *Sibyl of Cumae* of ancient Greece and the story of *Ashwatthama* from the *Mahabharata* testify. It turned out to be a curse for Struldbruggs, who presents the “most mortifying sight” Gulliver has ever beheld and women are “more horrible than the men” (199). The perpetual existence of man without youth causes eternal suffering. As a result, towards the end of his journey in Book III, the naïve narrator of the book is eventually disenchanted with *athanasia*. *Gulliver's Travels* in some ways tells us the story of Gulliver's gradual disenchantment and transformation into a recluse, a process that culminates in Book IV.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Thus, this unit begins by discussing the important characters of *Gulliver's Travels*. Following this, we have briefly summarised and critically analysed Book I and Book II, where size becomes an indicator of virtue. We have seen that the first two books satirise human nature in general and the corrupt Whig administration in particular. Then, the unit has analysed Book III at length. After providing

a detailed summary of Gulliver's voyage to the flying island Laputa, we have critically examined the major themes of this section: the abuse of science and reason, colonialism, violence perpetrated by an absolutist state, the bridge between the classical world and the neoclassical world, writing history, and Gulliver's fascination and subsequent disillusionment with the notion of the perpetual existence of man. We have also studied how Swift's portrayal of a repressive regime and critique of colonialism turned out to be prophetic. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries various totalitarian regimes and the colonial state mercilessly suppressed all forms of dissent. His views on writing history have turned out to be equally prophetic, for subaltern historians and postmodernists have refused to acknowledge history as an objective account of important events. Similarly, the feminists have dissected history into "his" and "story" and argued that women have not been given due representation in male-dominated narratives! As a visionary, Swift questioned the methodology of history writing and pointed out the prejudices of historians more than two hundred and fifty years before this discourse was theorised in academic institutions.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Gulliver's Travels, Book III is a satire against the abuse of science and reason. Critically discuss.
2. The island of Laputa represents an absolutist state which brutally suppresses all sorts of dissent. Critically examine this statement with reference to Swift's views on colonialism.
3. Do you agree that immortality without youth can be an eternal curse? Give your views in the light of Gulliver's meeting with Struldbruggs.
4. Discuss Swift's views on history writing with reference to Book III of Gulliver's Travels. Does Swift as a visionary anticipate some of the preoccupations of modern-day historians who equate history with fiction?

UNIT 4 *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS: BOOK IV:* SUMMARY, THEMES, AND ANALYSIS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Gulliver's Travels*, Book IV: Summary
- 4.3 Themes and Analysis
 - 4.3.1 Critique of Reason
 - 4.3.2 Extermination of the *Yahoos* and the *Jews*
 - 4.3.3 Gulliver – a *Yahoo* or a *Houyhnhnm*?
 - 4.3.4 The Homecoming and Swift on Colonialism
- 4.4 Colonialism and Bonds of Hospitality
- 4.5 “What’s in a name?”
- 4.6 Misogyny in *Gulliver's Travels*
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Questions
- 4.9 Suggested Readings & References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit deals with the summary and major themes of *Gulliver's Travels*, Book IV. First, it provides us with a detailed account of Gulliver's voyage to the land of the Houyhnhnms. Since the Houyhnhnms are apparently the epitome of rationality and perfection, they are shocked to know that a difference of opinion has led to several catastrophic wars in England, where millions have perished. Having summarised the important episodes of Gulliver's voyage, the unit critically examines the main issues that the text raises, including Swift's critique of rationality, colonialism, Gulliver's homecoming and subsequent disillusionment with mankind in general, and George Orwell's reading of Book IV. It also focuses on Gulliver's transformation from a proud Englishman into someone who hates even an iota of pride. Although he shuns the company of humans who he considers Yahoos, Gulliver can still empathise with the inhabitants of the new islands he has left behind. He refuses to assist in their colonisation. The unit analyses Swift's anti-imperial stance at length. It also examines why Swift uses unfamiliar and strange names in *Gulliver's Travels*. In the last section, we briefly discuss Swift's misogyny, especially with reference to the description of female Yahoos.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The ideal world that Jonathan Swift supposedly creates in *Gulliver's Travels*, Book IV is modelled on Plato's Republic and Sir Thomas Moore's Utopia. The horses, known as the Houyhnhnms, are the embodiment of reason and virtue. They seem to be so impeccable that Gulliver wants to follow in their footsteps. He wishes to talk, walk, eat, and behave like horses. But a closer examination of Swift's satire tells another story. The Augustan peace that the Houyhnhnms have achieved is an outcome of the brutal subjugation of the Yahoos. George Orwell finds signs

of totalitarianism, racism, and imperialism in their so called ideal world. He suggests that Yahoos occupy the same place in their community as the Jews in Nazi Germany, for the Houyhnhnms debate the question of the extermination of Yahoos. Despite these shortcomings, the Houyhnhnms are physically, morally, and intellectually superior to men. Swift questions the binary between man and animal by foregrounding the gap between what human beings ought to be and what they have become. He does not consider rationality to be the exclusive domain of humans. However, towards the end of the book, despite his hatred for mankind, Gulliver proves to be morally superior to both the Lilliputians and several other Englishmen. He refuses to assist the English government in colonising the inhabitants of the new islands that he has supposedly discovered. Since he does not violate the bonds of hospitality, his moral ascendancy is conspicuous. Colonialism does violate this sacrosanct bond between the guest and the host. Swift uses Gulliver as his mouthpiece to launch his anti-colonial tirade against the English. Books III and IV, therefore, should be interpreted together as Swift's incisive critique of English colonialism in Ireland and his indictment of human species, for the entire human race is denounced as Yahoos. Man is the object of satire in *Gulliver's Travels*. Let us summarise Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* next.

4.2 *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, BOOK IV: SUMMARY*

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Book IV, Swift continues with the strategy of using both fiction and facts. The map and names of the new places that Gulliver supposedly discovers are fictional whereas names of English cities, days, and dates mentioned are real. Readers, like Gulliver, oscillate between the world of fantasy and that of the reality of the British landscape. After spending five months at home with his wife and children, Gulliver sets out on his final journey on September 7, 1710. He accepts the position of captain of the *Adventure*, a merchant ship. When several members of his crew die on the voyage, he is forced to replace them with new sailors. Unfortunately, they turn out to be pirates who soon seize the ship and lock Gulliver in his cabin. After many weeks of imprisonment on the ship, they leave him on an unknown island where Gulliver counters the Yahoos.

They are the degraded version of men, with thick hair and strong claws on their hands and feet. Gulliver remarks that “upon the whole, I never beheld in all my Travels so disagreeable an Animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an Antipathy” (209). His heart is filled with contempt and aversion at the sight of these ugly beasts. When a Yahoo approaches Gulliver out of curiosity or mischief, he hits him with the flat side of his sword. He does not want to take the risk of stabbing a Yahoo and provoking the other members of his community. They attack Gulliver by discharging their excrements on him. Meanwhile, when a horse approaches them, they all run away. This horse inspects Gulliver with curiosity and is soon joined by another horse. They seem to whinny a conversation and repeat the words – Yahoo and Houyhnhnm. He soon realises that these horses, called Houyhnhnms, are rational creatures and they can communicate. Gulliver finds their behaviour so orderly and judicious that he concludes that they must be magicians. He follows one of the horses, a grey steed, to its dwelling, made of timber with a straw roof where he meets several other Houyhnhnms. He observes many Yahoos eating roots and the flesh of cow, dogs, and asses. They were owned by the horses and tied to beams. The master horse instructs one of his servants to bring the beast and Gulliver together to compare their faces. As a result, they repeat the word Yahoo, for Gulliver is a Yahoo for them. Dumbfounded, Gulliver remarks, “My Horror and Astonishment are not to be described, when I observed,

in this abominable Animal, a perfect human Figure; the Face of it indeed was flat and broad, the Nose depressed, the Lips large, and the Mouth wide” (214).

Bewildered, he tries to convince the Houyhnhnms that he is not a Yahoo. Both Gulliver and the horses are equally astounded. The former is surprised to see rationality and civility in horses whereas the Houyhnhnms are amazed to discover “teachableness”, cleanliness, and the marks of a rational creature in a Yahoo.

Gulliver quickly learns their language, which he finds strange, but somewhat similar to High Dutch. He soon gets to know that the inhabitants of the island have not the least idea of books or literature so he shows them how to write. They explain to him that though Houyhnhnm means horse, it is derived from a word meaning "perfection of nature". They have no word for lying in their utopian society. They call it “the thing which is not”. When Gulliver recounts the tales of Europe to them, they wonder whether he is telling them “the thing which is not”. Similarly, in their ideal world, words like power, government, war, law, and punishment do not exist. They find it unbelievable that there could be a country beyond the sea where Yahoos could sail a ship. When Gulliver explains the reversal of role of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos in his country, the master horse is shocked. Though he calls Gulliver a perfect yahoo, he is filled with indignation when he learns about the atrocities committed against his race by the “Yahoos” in England.

While referring to the political manoeuvring in England, Gulliver describes the prolonged wars fought for religious and political reasons. At the behest of his master, he calculates that about a million Yahoos were killed in these wars. The horse stands aghast at this disclosure and wants to know what causes war between countries. Gulliver remarks that ambition of princes and difference of opinion are the major reasons behind war. Sometimes, corrupt ministers start wars to divert the attention of subjects from their evil administration. No war is as fierce and gory as the ones fought over difference of opinion. Gulliver continues: “Difference in Opinions hath cost many Millions of Lives: For instance, whether Flesh be Bread, or Bread be Flesh: Whether the Juice of a certain Berry be Blood or Wine: Whether Whistling be a Vice or a Virtue (229).” In Book I of *Gulliver's Travels*, disagreement over a minor issue leads to a war between the Lilliputs and the Blefuscu. These two empires fight over whether the egg should be broken upon the larger end or the smaller end. Such humorous treatment of the disproportion between the trivial reasons that cause war and its catastrophic outcome must have reminded Swift's contemporary readers of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1715). In the second line of his mock-heroic poem, Pope says, “What mighty contests rise from trivial things”. Both Pope and Swift use the mock-heroic form in their poem and satire respectively to poke fun at war. It is a truth universally acknowledged and tested that “mighty contests” have invariably been caused by “trivial things”. Swift and Pope, then, provide a moral commentary on the human nature and nature of war. Readers are invited to draw a parallel between England and the alternative worlds that Gulliver discovers. One may also observe similarities between Book I and this episode of Book IV, as they both are satirical representations of English Civil War fought, to some extent, over a difference of opinion.

Unlike England and Lilliput, on the island of Houyhnhnms, the word opinion is not known. It becomes an upheaval task, therefore, for Gulliver to explain to them the meaning of words such as controversy, dispute, and opinion or how a point becomes disputable. They never have had difference of opinion. Friendship and benevolence are the two principal virtues among them. The only debate that ever

happens in their country is about whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth. The Yahoos often stealthily suck the teats of the Houyhnhnm cows, kill and devour their cats, and trample their oats and grass. As an outcome, they are either hunted or captured as slaves.

Having spent three years with the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver gradually comes to believe that Europeans are Yahoos. He eventually realises that “I could no longer deny that I was a real Yahoo, in every limb and feature” (249). When the king of Brobdingnag denounces the Europeans as “Little Odious Vermin”, Gulliver is upset. He tries to conceal his resentment while his “noble and most beloved Country was so injuriously treated”. But Book IV emphasises his transformation from a proud Englishman into a disillusioned man who accepts that his countrymen are as depraved, uncivilised, and beastly as Yahoos. As an outcome, Gulliver does not show any resentment when the horses call him a Yahoo. Rather, he gradually begins to share the worldview of the Houyhnhnms.

The acceptance of Europeans as Yahoos is an outcome of Gulliver’s admiration for Houyhnhnms, who have no concept of evil. They are decent and civil to each other. They always help those in need and love all members of their race equally. Since they have several stoic traits, they have no place for courtship, love, and joy in their thoughts also. The young ones are taught the values of moderation, exercise, and cleanliness. Gulliver is so enchanted with them that he attempts to adopt their language and mannerism. He wants to stay with them forever but his enthusiasm is short-lived.

One day, the Houyhnhnms decide that a Yahoo, however intelligent and rational, should not live with them. He is given two months to build a canoe and leave. Gulliver does not want to return to Europe and decides to live on an island. He would rather live with the barbarians on some remotely located place than the English Yahoos. He finds an island where he is struck by an arrow shot by the natives. Consequently, he escapes. Despite his injury, he is reluctant to go back to his country which he admired and loved at the outset of this journey. He is eventually rescued by a ship where the captain Don Pedro de Mendez treats him hospitably but Gulliver considers him a Yahoo and wants to escape. He is forced to travel back to England. When he meets his wife and children, he is filled with disgust and contempt for them. He cannot stomach the thought of living among the Yahoos. He whinnies like a horse and lives in the stable among two young horses. Human pride is so offensive to him that he asserts that those who harbour this vice should never appear before him. Let us look at the themes dealt with in Book IV next.

4.3 THEMES AND ANALYSIS

The central theme of Book IV is Swift’s trenchant critique of association of rationality with humans which was at the heart of the Enlightenment. The absolute rationality of the Houyhnhnms is modelled on **Plato’s Republic** and **Moore’s Utopia**.

4.3.1 Critique of Reason

Swift challenges the traditional idea that humans, unlike other beasts, are rational animals. Book IV is based upon the principle of reversal of the classical definitions of animal and human in the age of the Enlightenment. The expression rational horse may have appeared to be an oxymoron to some in the eighteenth-century but Swift foregrounds the fact that pure rationality is not within human reach. It may also be a way of subverting the ideas about progress that was spread by the

Enlightenment, by showing human beings losing the “divine faculty” of reason and regressing to a Hobbesian state of nature. (Bloom, 147). Hobbes’s assertion in *Leviathan* (1651) that human life is “nasty, short, and brutish” may have inspired Swift to create a world infested with the Yahoos. Unlike the Yahoos, the Houyhnhnms are the embodiment of reason, virtue, civility, peace, moderation, and cleanliness. They are not driven by instincts. But are the Houyhnhnms as ideal and rational as they come across in the text at first glance? Could it be that the Augustan peace they have achieved is an outcome of the brutal subjugation and slavery of the Yahoos? George Orwell sees the extermination of the Yahoos similar to the extermination of the Jews in the Holocaust. Let’s look at that next.

4.3.2 Extermination of the *Yahoos* and the *Jews*

Orwell and other modern readers of Swift often associate Houyhnhnm land with totalitarianism, racism, and imperialism. Upon closer examination of the text, one finds that their society is divided along class lines into the gentry and the servants. George Orwell remarks, “The Houyhnhnms are organised upon a sort of caste system which is racial in character, the horses which do the menial work being of different colours from their masters and not interbreeding with them” (215). They manage, indeed, without an aristocracy or monarch. However, they have a “Representative Council of the Whole Nation”, where the only debate that ever happened was whether the Yahoos should be exterminated. The word extermination must have rung a bell in the mind of Orwell and other readers of Swift in the 1940s. A prescient reader of Swift, Orwell, argues that the Yahoos occupy rather the same place in their community as the Jews in Nazi Germany. However, this suggestion of Orwell has been rejected by **Claude Rawson** in his insightful *Introduction to Oxford World's Classics on Gulliver's Travels*. While referring to the debate on extermination, Rawson writes:

This language has led some interpreters to argue that Swift portrayed the Houyhnhnms as genocidal murderers, thus inviting us to read the book as disapproving of them. To this one might answer first that the Yahoos are beasts in the eyes of the Houyhnhnms, so that exterminating them would be no different from exterminating some farmyard pest in the human world. That the Yahoos nevertheless seem human to the reader adds a black humorous touch, no doubt calculated to offend us, but without erasing the main point that in the story they are an alien and unhygienic species. Secondly, the extermination is never carried out. (xxxix)

Rawson refuses to attribute Nazi characteristics to the Houyhnhnms. However, he agrees that Yahoo labour is useful to the Houyhnhnm economy and it prefigures the Nazi example with uncanny precision. As the brutal suppression of thousands of slaves during the heyday of the Roman Empire became the foundation of Pax Romana, that is, Roman Peace, the ruthless subjugation of the Yahoos becomes the basis of the Augustan peace of the Houyhnhnms. One may extend this analogy a little further and suggest that colonialism and the violent suppression of the colonised were at the heart of the peace and prosperity of England.

4.3.3 Gulliver – a *Yahoo* or a *Houyhnhnm*?

Readers of Swift are often tempted to look at Houyhnhnms as Swift’s ideal for man. The Yahoos, on the other hand, can be read as the representation of what men have become. However, neither the Yahoos nor the Houyhnhnms can portray human beings. Swift isolates the two elements that are combined in the duality of man. The Yahoos are purely sensual whereas the Houyhnhnms are purely rational. In the Great Chain of Being, man shares both the intelligence of angels as well as

the sensuality of animals. As a satirist, Swift foregrounds the gap between how men ought to be and what they have become. Human beings, writes Eagleton, “are not just a third term between Yahoo and Houyhnhnm”. They are closer to the Yahoos but ‘Yahoo’ is also a “Houyhnhnm-like way of seeing humans” (38). Initially, when Gulliver encounters the Yahoos, he develops antipathy towards them. But for the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver is a Yahoo precisely because he is a man. Thus, the object of satire in Swift is not Gulliver alone, not even Englishmen, but the entire human race. Swift, therefore, surpasses his classical predecessor Juvenal for whom the object of satire was Rome. In the Anglo-Irish author, we see a strong indictment of the human species.

Towards the end of the story Gulliver becomes delusional and ends up believing that humans are Yahoos and that he himself is a Houyhnhnm. Gulliver’s response can be studied in two ways: his transformation into a misanthrope and an act of self-discovery. He discovers his individual nature as well as human nature. As an outcome, his inflated pride is punctured. He does not believe in the superiority of Europeans any more. The English were so proud of their identity in the eighteenth-century that somebody commented on a lighter note that God must be an Englishman. Human nature became a subject of enquiry from the sixteenth century onwards when a shift took place from a theocentric universe to an anthropocentric universe. Alexander Pope wrote in his “*An Essay on Man* (1733) that the proper study of mankind is man. Human nature has been the subject of scrutiny since antiquity. In ancient Greece, the Delphic maxim “know thyself” was the guiding principle for philosophers. Similarly, in ancient India the Upanishads emphasised atmanam vidhi – know thyself! Let us now look at Swift’s take on colonialism next.

4.3.4 The Homecoming and Swift on Colonialism

The renaissance and neoclassical poets revisited this subject with a renewed vigour. Self-discovery requires certain level of detachment and self-reflectivity. When Gulliver embarks on his first voyage, he is so obsessed with England that he cannot reflect on depravity of the English. But upon discovering the degraded essence of man towards the end of Book IV, he loses the equilibrium of mind, for he invariably travels in extremes. Surprisingly, he finds human beings, including himself, worse than a Yahoo, “When I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my Face in Horror and detestation of myself; and could better endure the Sight of a common Yahoo, than of my own Person” (260). It is an anti-Narcissistic moment for Gulliver. He has an impressionable mind and therefore he begins to look at himself from the perspective of the Houyhnhnms. He continues to share this perspective upon his return to England, where the sight of his wife and children fills him with hatred, disgust, and contempt. The overseas adventures bring him neither military conquest nor riches but terror, vulnerability, repeated captivities, and above all, alteration of self. However, despite all his failures, Gulliver retains or rather regains humanity. To denounce the entire species of human beings as Yahoos and to retain humanity at the same time may sound a contradictory proposition but they are not. This can be illustrated with a close examination of Gulliver’s anti-imperialist outbursts towards the end of the book. As a loyal subject, he has to report the discovery of the new lands to the British government but he is opposed to the idea of destroying these islands:

The Lilliputians I think, are hardly worth the Charge of a Fleet and Army to reduce them; and I question whether it might be prudent or safe to attempt

the Brobdingnagians: Or, whether an English Army would be much at their Ease with the Flying Island over their Heads. The Houyhnhnms, indeed, appear not to be so well prepared for war, a Science to which they are perfect Strangers, and especially against missive Weapons. However, supposing myself to be a Minister of State, I could never give my Advice for invading them. Their Prudence, Unanimity, Unacquaintedness with Fear, and their Love of their Country would amply supply all Defects in the military Art. Imagine twenty Thousand of them breaking into the Midst of an European Army, confounding the Ranks, overturning the Carriages, battering the Warriors Faces into Mummy, by terrible Yerks from their hinder Hoofs.

(274)

Gulliver claims to be against war and colonisation. He does not want the inhabitants of the new islands to be conquered, enslaved, and murdered by England. He appears to speak on behalf of Swift, for as a Tory sympathiser, Swift rejected war. Whenever a war broke out in England, the landed aristocracy who supported the Tories had to bear the burden of increased taxes. On the other hand, the rising business class who sympathised with the Whigs, made profit. Edward Said was especially impressed by Swift's refusal to glamorise war as a Tory. Thus, the experiences that Gulliver had during these voyages may not have brought him wealth or laurels, like Robinson Crusoe, but he becomes a better human being. His biggest achievement is that he can retain humanity even by dissociating himself from humans. Let us try and understand the notion of hospitality per se and as it exists in the text in the next section.

4.4 COLONIALISM AND BONDS OF HOSPITALITY

Despite all his faults and abhorrence of human beings, Gulliver's ability to empathise with the inhabitants of the new islands he claims to have discovered, makes him a hero. No matter what, he wants to protect them from British colonialism. Gulliver, in the end, turns out to be morally superior to both Englishmen and several other characters he encounters during his voyages. His moral pre-eminence stems from his ability to respect the bond between a host and a guest. Lilliputians do not respect the bonds of hospitality. They conspire against their guest who protects them from the neighbouring enemy and, therefore, they are morally depraved. In Book I, while they were walking all over Gulliver's body, he was tempted to seize forty-fifty of them and dash them against the ground. But Gulliver resists this temptation, as he feels bound by the "Laws of Hospitality to a People who had treated me with so much Expence and Magnificence" (20). Unlike the Lilliputians, the Houyhnhnms treat their guests hospitably. They value friendship and benevolence. They treat a stranger from the remotest part of the island as affectionately as they will treat their nearest neighbour. Thus, both Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms, present us with the model of a good guest and a good host respectively. Gulliver continues playing the role of a good host and does not betray anyone after he leaves the islands. The safety of the inhabitants of these islands is his prime concern. He breaks the law of his country but not the trust of his friends. Hospitality was a recurring trope both in the classical texts of Greco-Roman culture and in Gulliver's Travels. In the Homeric world, like the world of ancient India, it was a sacred bond. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are full of references to the warm welcome extended to guests, including strangers by the host. The violation of this bond was a taboo. Paris desecrated it and as a result the entire city of Troy had to pay the price.

4.5 “WHAT’S IN A NAME?”

Readers of *Gulliver's Travels* may often wonder why Swift uses the name Houyhnhnm for horses. Or what could be the possible reason behind using such bizarre tongue twisters like Brobdingnagians, Struldbruggs, Luggnaggians, and Laputans. Why was he trying to flummox his readers with such names? There could be two possible answers to this question. One, Swift wanted to validate and authenticate his work of fiction as a travelogue. Since Gulliver claims to discover new islands where no other European has ever been to, it was important to invent names which sounded unfamiliar to English readers. Had Swift used European names, readers would have immediately rejected Gulliver's proposition that he went to hitherto unexplored territories. Swift wanted the book to be the talk of the town and the unfamiliar names added a new dimension to its popularity.

And the other reason which is somewhat related to the first is the defamiliarising impact these names must have had on the readers. Swift recasts familiar names, especially horses, in a way that readers find them new. Literature can present familiar things in an unfamiliar way. The Russian formalist, *Viktor Shklovsky*, wrote in 1917, that literature has the ability to make us see the world anew – to make that which has become familiar to us, because we have been exposed to it, strange again. Russian formalists called this function of literature defamiliarisation (Ctd. in Bertons, 33). Though the name Houyhnhnm may have been taken from the whinnying sound that horses make it does add a freshness to the story. Swift and Laurence Sterne both anticipated some of the concerns of Russian formalists and used strange names in their fiction to present the banal world to readers in a novel way. Samuel Johnson was critical of both owing to their innovations some of which he found odd. He calls *Gulliver's Travels*, Book IV, a source of disgust. There are several episodes in Swift's satire, which may evoke nausea and disgust. One such incident is the depiction of female Yahoo pouncing on Gulliver for sex. Was Swift a misogynist? That's what we shall look at next.

4.6 MISOGYNY IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

Samuel Johnson had ambivalent feelings towards Swift. On the one hand, in his book *Lives of the English Poets*, he calls *Gulliver's Travels*, “a production so new and strange, that it filled the reader with a mingled emotion of merriment and amazement”. As a younger contemporary of Swift, Johnson had witnessed its popularity. He knew that the book was received with such avidity that the price of the first edition was raised before the second was brought out. It was equally enjoyed by the “high and the low, the learned and illiterate”. No rules of judgement and criticism were applied to a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity, Johnson writes further. But he was particularly displeased with Books III and IV. Book III, which deals with Gulliver's voyage to the flying island, and those parts became a source of “least pleasure” for Johnson whereas Book IV became a “source of disgust” (334).

The description of the Yahoos, especially the female ones, has upset many readers. When an eleven-year-old female Yahoo, inflamed by desire, jumps into the water where Gulliver is bathing naked, and he is frightened. A horse, eventually, comes to his rescue. Swift describes the female body not as an object of beauty and desire but disgust both in Book II and Book IV. A female Yahoo has the most offensive smell, Gulliver observes. The sores and cancers on the breasts of Brobdingnagian women disturb him. He finds their breasts monstrous and horrifying. The sight of the naked body of sixty feet women does not bring

any other emotion than “those of horror and disgust”. Since beauty is subjected to size here, one may conclude that European women must have appeared the same to the Lilliputians. Critics often tend to read the denunciation of the female body as an example of Swift’s misogyny, which was common in the eighteenth-century. “Most Women have no Characters at all”, wrote Alexander Pope in his poem “*To a Lady: Of the Characters of Women*” (1743). Despite the accusations of misogyny and evoking disgust, *Gulliver’s Travels* has continued to remain as popular as it was in Johnson’s times. The universal appeal of Swift’s satire stems from the fact that readers all over the world tend to empathise with it. Swift will continue to mesmerise novelists, scientists, postcolonial thinkers, animal rights activists, children, and the survivors of the Holocaust and the totalitarian regimes in the upcoming years.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit begins with a critical summary of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Book IV. We examined the important episodes and themes from the text. The unit has mainly emphasised Swift’s critique of rationality, his reversal of the classical definitions of animal and human, and above all, his anti-imperial stance. It has examined Orwell’s reading of the relation between the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms. It also studies the reasons behind the use of unfamiliar and bizarre names in *Gulliver’s Travels*. We have analysed the trope of hospitality at length and showed that those who respect this bond are morally superior to the ones who violate it. Towards the concluding section, the unit has discussed Swift’s misogyny briefly. We have also studied Johnson’s claim that Book IV evokes disgust. Though the four voyages that Gulliver undertakes seems disconnected from one another, there are thematic continuities among them. For instance, colonialism, hospitality, war, governance, and misogyny are recurring tropes throughout the book. These subjects will always remain of contemporary relevance and modern readers will find in Swift a solution to their problems. Swift continues to entertain and vex us.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. Write a critical summary of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Book IV.
2. Swift questions the notion of rationality as the exclusive domain of man. Critically examine with reference to Gulliver’s voyage to the Houyhnhnms?
3. Do you agree that the Houyhnhnms are an embodiment of perfection and rationality? Examine with reference to their relationship with the Yahoos?
4. Critically analyse Book IV as the critique of English colonialism.

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