

Jonathan Swift

(1667-1745)

Briefly on the man

- Born in Dublin – Anglo-Irish origins
- 1688: *Glorious Revolution* – exile to England
- Personal assistant of Sir William Temple – scholar and Whig statesman
- 1694 he took orders (Anglican priest)

- 1714: vs Whig government (indifferent to Irish Anglican Church); return to Ireland
- Political involvement through writing pro Irish resistance vs English rule (e.g. *The Drapier's Letters*, 1724) – a series of pamphlets against English economic and financial monopoly

A controversial person

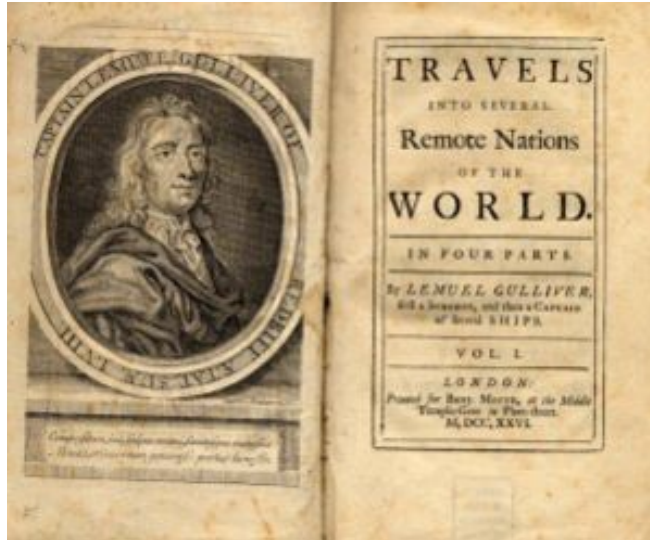
- Concerned for the Irish yet “hater of man” ... and quite conservative
- Man: “*animal rationis capax*”
- Belief in reason yet vs abuse of the same – vs simplistic view of man’s innate goodness // man is flawed
- Need of a common-sense view of life
- Irony as *forma mentis* and literary technique

Briefly on the writer

- Major English prose satirist (e.g. *Tale of a Tub*, 1704)
- Use of pseudonyms (Lemuel Gulliver, M. B. Drapier) or anonymous publishing
- *Horatian* and *Juvenalian* satire
 - now indulgent, tolerant, and witty, holding up to gentle ridicule the follies of human beings
 - now attacking vice and error with contempt and indignation

- Style: “proper words in proper places”
- Clear and simple diction
- Vs Augustan ornaments
- Simple syntax
- Economy of language

Gulliver's Travels (1726)



Structure: 4 Books

- 1) Lilliput – Court of Lilliput // court of George
 - Lilliputians vs their neighbours the Blefuscutans // feuding between England and France, or between Catholics and Protestants
 - Allegory of man's pettiness and greed

2) Brobdingnag – the giant people

- Turned into the King's pet
- Occasion to discuss English and European systems of government
- Allegory of his pride

3) Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, Luggnagg and Japan

- Absent-minded astronomers, philosophers and scientists
- Lagado Academy: satire on the Royal Society and its experiments
- Absurdity and evils of reason when wrongly used

4) The Country of the Houyhnhnms

- vs Yahoos // vile species of animals – grotesque images of men
- Allegory of pure reason united with common sense (perfection)

Epilogue

- Utterly pessimistic: he cannot stand his wife and children's smell; he goes to live in the stable – hyperbole
- *reductio ad absurdum* of contemporary reality
- Desperate parable of man's progress and ambitions
- Accuse of misanthropy

What type of novel?

- Hybrid of romance and novel (realistic novel)
 - Fantastic story but minute realism of the description
 - Ironic complicity between author and reader
 - Suspension of disbelief // Credibility // illusion of reality
- Adventure novel and travelogue

- Utopian / dystopian novel
 - Utopian structure: journey-stay-return
 - Negative utopia: protagonist undergoing a process of gradual disillusionment and disappointment
 - Vs ides of man's perfectibility
 - Man and nature constantly subject to oximoronic forces – positivity vs negativity, enthusiasm vs disillusionment – in an endless dialectic

- Satire
 - Book III: satire on 17th- and 18th-century philosophical movements of rational thought
 - To Pope: intention to “vex the world rather than to divert it”
 - Attack on intellectuals’ and scientists’ tendency to theorize everything (abstract thought) instead of applying their knowledge to practical needs

What sort of character?

- Autodiegetic narrator speaking in a matter-of-fact style
- Not a *persona*: an instrument as much as an object of satire
- Vehicle to convey an attack on hypocrisy, ridiculousness, superficiality and absurdity
- Not a hero: an average man, prototype of the lower middle-class, a surgeon and simple observer of other cultures

- Increasing distance author-narrator
 - Gulliver is a “misfit”, aloof from any society he visits, a constant foreigner unable to adapt to the new circumstances
 - He becomes more and more misanthropic till his inability to accept human faults and weaknesses
 - Eventually alienated from everything and everyone, a lonely man, estranged from the ordinary world as he was alien to the imaginary worlds he visited

Possible moral messages

Understand how to balance things
Keep the right distance from anything
Learn the rights proportions in
anything
Be humble and never too ambitious
Learn how to accept your and others'
faults
Hubris can lead to self-destruction
?????