

8. JONATHAN SWIFT

(Dublin, 30th November 1667 – 19th October 1745)



Anglo-Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer (first for the Whigs, then for the Tories), poet and cleric who became Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. He is probably the foremost prose satirist in the English language with his huge success *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

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- **1667:** born in Dublin, he alternated his childhood years and his youth between England and Ireland where he graduated.
- **1688:** back in England, he accepted a position as secretary to **Sir William Temple**, a scholar and an important retired Whig statesman.
- **1690:** he became a victim to Ménière's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that affected his balance with fits of vertigo and progressive hearing loss.
- **1694:** ordained as an **Anglican minister**, he was sent to Kilroot but in **1695** he returned to work for Sir William (till the latter's death four years later) and completed his works *The Battle of the Books* (1697) and *A Tale of a Tub*, written for the *universal improvement of mankind* (1704).

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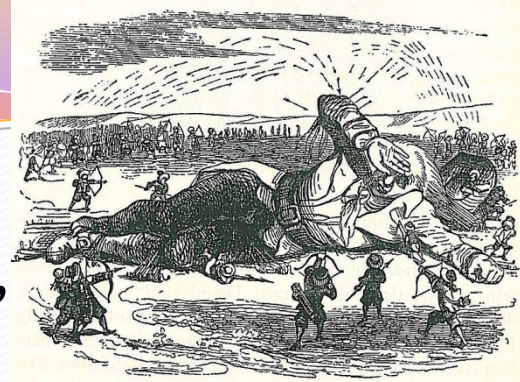


- **1699:** back in England, he accepted a position in the church, living near **Esther Johnson**, his beloved *Stella*.
- **1710:** politically active again, he wrote sharp-tongued political satire, as the editor of the Tory weekly “Examiner”.
- **1713:** made Dean of St. Patrick’s he returned to Ireland but the Whig return to power quenched his expectations of a career – he started writing in support of Irish causes soon becoming a national hero.
- **1726:** the manuscript of *Gulliver’s Travels* was published anonymously in London and it was an immediate HIT!!
- **1738 – 1744:** he was tormented by his sickness, suffering great pain and showing signs of madness till he died in **1745**.

Gulliver's Travels (1726)

- *Gulliver's Travels* is a novel that is both a satire on human nature and a parody of the travellers' tales.
- A transparently anti-Whig satire with copious references to people and episodes of the time, its major themes are nevertheless out of time, as for example:
 - treachery and dishonesty inside the government;
 - petty differences between religions;
 - corruption and corruptibility of human nature.
- Published only 7 years after Defoe's wildly successful *Robinson Crusoe* (as a systematic rebuttal of it!), its protagonist appears to be an amazingly modern “**round character**”: from a cheery optimist to a pompous misanthrope.

Gulliver's Travels



- **Book I:** Gulliver is shipwrecked on **Lilliput**, where he awakes to find that he has been captured by very small people while in **Book II** he is abandoned on **Brobdingnag** a land of giants, which he leaves inside a cage snatched up by an eagle.

- In **Book III** pirates leave him adrift at sea to discover the flying island of **Laputa** as well as others inhabited by scientists, philosophers, ghosts of historical figures while in **Book IV** a mutinous crew abandons him on an island ruled by the **Houyhnhnms**, civilised, wise horses served by the Yahoos, dirty, despicable human-like creatures.



Gulliver's Travels: designations.

- With its **3 printings** in 1726 + **1 new printing** in early 1727 and its **French, Dutch, German translations** in 1727, the novel has been the recipient of several designations:
 - a **Menippean satire** characterized by attacks on mental attitudes rather than on specific individuals;
 - a **children's story**, especially in the first two books where each part is the reverse of the preceding part... Gulliver included!
 - a **forerunner of the modern novel** in terms of storytelling and construction based on contrasts, shifts and progressions;
 - a novel of **quest for self and social knowledge**;
 - even a **proto-Science Fiction**, in its *dystopian vision* of human society.

A dystopian novel

• 17 th c. writers → **UTOPIA** → travellers find

IMAGINARY SOCIETIES → natural uncorrupted **vs** EUROPEAN WORLD → civilised corrupted

• Jonathan Swift → **DYSTOPIA** → Gulliver finds

IMAGINARY SOCIETIES → civilised corrupted = EUROPEAN SOCIETY → civilised corrupted

Swift vs Gulliver

- The bulk of Swift's fortune (**twelve thousand pounds**) was left to found a **hospital for the mentally ill**, originally known as *St. Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles*, which opened in **1757**, and which still exists today as a psychiatric hospital.
- Swift wrote **his** own **epitaph** in Latin which the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) translated as:

*“Swift has sailed into his rest.
Savage indignation there
cannot lacerate his breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
world-besotted traveller.
He served human **liberty**.”*