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***Gulliver's Travels* as a Satirical Mirror: A Critique of 18th Century Politics, Science, Education and Human Nature**

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Peshawarkamranelahi501@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on how Jonathan Swift, in his Gulliver's Travels, uses satire, humor, exaggeration, and imaginary places to explore the serious problems of his time. It is not only a fun adventure story about a man named Gulliver who travels to strange lands but also a thoughtful and insightful commentary on the society, politics, science, education, and human nature of the eighteenth century. In the story, Gulliver visits four very different societies. First, he arrives in Lilliput, a land where the people are very small in size but have big ideas about power and control. Here, Swift shows how silly and dangerous politics can be, especially when leaders argue over meaningless issues. Next, Gulliver travels to Brobdingnag, a land of giants. These people are kind and honest, but they criticize the way Gulliver's home country is ruled. Swift uses this society to show that a simple and moral way of life may be better than one full of pride and corruption. Later, Gulliver visits Laputa, a floating island filled with scientists and thinkers. Although they are highly intelligent, they are disconnected from real life. They focus on strange and useless inventions while ignoring the needs of ordinary people. Through this, Swift criticizes the blind trust in science without considering its impact on everyday life. Finally, Gulliver finds himself among the Houyhnhnms, a race of wise and calm horses who live in a peaceful and logical society. However, they lack emotion and do not understand love or compassion. They share their land with the Yahoos, creatures who look human but behave like animals. This part of the story shows the darker side of human nature, such as greed, violence, and arrogance. Throughout his travels, Gulliver learns about the flaws in human society. Each society he visits reflects different strengths and weaknesses, which together mirror the problems Swift saw in his own world. These include corrupt government, selfishness, blind belief in progress, and a lack of moral values. By using satire to highlight these issues, Swift not only entertains his readers but also encourages them to think about how people and societies can improve. In this way, Gulliver's Travels is more than just an adventure tale. It is a powerful reflection on human behavior, both in Swift's time and in the world today.

Keywords: *Gulliver's Travels*, Satire, Education, Politics, Science, Human Nature, Society, Enlightenment, Morality, Government, Literature.

Introduction

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* stands as one of the most important works of eighteenth-century literature and is widely regarded as a masterpiece of satire. At first sight, it appears to be a travel adventure, full of strange lands and curious creatures. Beneath this imaginative surface, however, lies a sharp critique of human society, politics, science, and morality. Swift, writing in the age of the Enlightenment, used satire as a tool to expose the weaknesses and contradictions of his world. He aimed not only to entertain his readers with Gulliver's fantastic journeys but also to hold up a mirror in which people might see their own flaws. In this way, *Gulliver's Travels* became more than just a story of voyages; it functioned as a biting commentary on the human condition.

The eighteenth century was a time of great change in Europe. It was marked by the rise of reason, scientific discovery, and new ideas about government and society. Philosophers such as John Locke and scientists like Isaac Newton shaped how people understood the world. At the same time, politics in England remained full of corruption, rivalry, and power struggles between the Whigs and Tories. Imperialism and colonial expansion also grew, raising questions about power, justice, and human rights. Swift, who lived through these events, showed deep criticism of blind faith in reason, corrupt politics, and human pride. He believed that people often misused knowledge and power, and he expressed this belief through satire in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Each of Gulliver's voyages reflects a different aspect of Swift's critique. In Lilliput, Swift mocked the pettiness of political disputes, showing how tiny people fought over meaningless issues, such as the proper way to crack an egg. This episode represented the foolish quarrels between political and religious groups in England. In Brobdingnag, where the giants lived, Gulliver's own smallness highlighted the moral weakness of humanity. The king of Brobdingnag, after hearing about the customs of England, reacted with shock at the corruption, violence, and greed of human beings. In Laputa, Swift criticized the uselessness of abstract science and philosophy when separated from real human needs. The Laputans remained obsessed with theories and experiments, but their society appeared impractical and even ridiculous. Finally, in the land of the Houyhnhnms, Swift contrasted the rational horses with the degraded human-like Yahoos. Here, he explored the extremes of reason and instinct, raising questions about what it truly means to be human.

Through these different societies, Swift demonstrated both the possibilities and the failures of human civilization. No society in the book appeared perfect. The Lilliputians remained petty, the giants lacked full understanding, the Laputans acted impractical, and even the Houyhnhnms, though rational, showed no compassion. In this way, Swift revealed that human beings were deeply flawed and that every society carried weaknesses. His satire did not attack one group alone but criticized the entire human condition.

This research studies *Gulliver's Travels* as a satirical mirror of eighteenth-century life. By examining politics, science, and human nature through Gulliver's encounters with different societies, the study highlights Swift's message and his place in the Enlightenment. Swift did not reject knowledge or progress itself but opposed the misuse of reason, power, and pride. He used satire to press readers to think critically about their world and to recognize their own weaknesses. Even though the book was written almost three hundred years ago, its critique of

human folly and societal failure remains relevant in the present. *Gulliver's Travels* stands not as a simple story of adventure but as a deep moral and political critique of Swift's society and, by extension, of human society in general. By holding up a satirical mirror, Swift challenged readers to reflect on their own world and to question the values of politics, science, and human nature.

Research Questions

- 1) How does Swift use satire in *Gulliver's Travels* to show the problems in politics in the 18th century?
- 2) How do Gulliver's visits to different societies show the misuse of science, reason, education and human behavior?
- 3) How does Swift show human strengths and weaknesses through the people and creatures Gulliver meets?

Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze how Swift uses satire in *Gulliver's Travels* to highlight political problems in the 18th century.
- 2) To examine how Gulliver's visits to different societies reveal the misuse of science, reason, education and human behavior.
- 3) To explore how Swift presents human strengths and weaknesses through the people and creatures Gulliver encounters.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it helps readers understand how Jonathan Swift used *Gulliver's Travels* to criticize society, politics, science, education and human nature. It shows how satire can reveal human weaknesses and encourage moral reflection. The research also connects the ideas in the book to the historical context of the 18th century, helping readers appreciate Swift's purpose and message. Additionally, the study highlights lessons from the novel that remain relevant today, such as the dangers of pride, corruption, and misuse of knowledge. By analyzing the satire in the novel, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of literature as a tool for social and moral critique.

Research Methodology & Literature Review

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, focusing on textual analysis of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The study examines the novel through close reading, paying attention to language, imagery, and narrative structure to identify Swift's use of satire as a tool for social, political, and moral critique. The analysis situates the text within its historical and cultural context, considering eighteenth-century English politics, Enlightenment rationalism, and prevailing ideas about human nature. Key themes, such as political corruption, misuse of science, and moral weakness, are explored through Gulliver's encounters with various societies, including Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the land of the Houyhnhnms. The study also engages with existing scholarly criticism to support interpretations and highlight multiple perspectives on the text. By combining close reading with contextual and critical analysis, the research identifies how Swift's satire reflects the flaws of human society and conveys moral and intellectual lessons relevant both in his time and today. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* has attracted wide scholarly attention since its publication in 1726. Critics have studied the text from multiple perspectives, including satire, politics, science, colonialism, and human nature. The variety of interpretations reflects both the richness of the work and its relevance to different historical and

intellectual debates. This review discusses the major critical approaches to the novel, showing how scholars have understood its satire and its critique of eighteenth-century society.

Early critics often read *Gulliver's Travels* as a children's adventure story. Because of its imaginative voyages and fantastic creatures, it was long regarded as a work of entertainment. However, as time passed, readers began to see its deeper meaning. By the nineteenth century, scholars such as William Makepeace Thackeray described Swift as a "hater of mankind," focusing on the bitterness of his satire. This interpretation presented Swift as a misanthrope who despised human nature rather than a reformer seeking improvement.

Twentieth-century criticism brought new perspectives. Scholars such as George Orwell argued that Swift's satire did not arise from simple hatred of mankind but from a moral purpose. Orwell suggested that Swift targeted human corruption and pride in order to warn against the dangers of unchecked power. Similarly, Ricardo Quintana emphasized that Swift belonged to the moral tradition of classical satire, in which ridicule served as a tool to expose vice and encourage reform. These critics viewed *Gulliver's Travels* not as the work of a misanthrope but as a moral critique.

Another influential line of criticism focused on the political aspects of the novel. Swift wrote during a period of intense political rivalry in England, and his satire reflected this environment. Scholars such as Irvin Ehrenpreis highlighted how Lilliput symbolized English politics, with its petty quarrels and corruption. The conflict between the Big-Endians and Little-Endians represented religious disputes, while the rivalry between Lilliput and Blefuscu mirrored the conflict between England and France. From this perspective, Swift used satire to criticize the narrowness and selfishness of political leaders.

Science and rationalism also received much attention. During the Enlightenment, faith in reason and scientific progress grew rapidly. Critics such as Marjorie Nicolson argued that the Laputans embodied Swift's distrust of abstract science that ignored practical human needs. Their absurd experiments, such as extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, illustrated the dangers of science without purpose. Swift's satire here aligned with his broader suspicion of Enlightenment rationalism. Instead of rejecting science altogether, he highlighted its misuse when detached from human concerns.

The theme of human nature and morality has been central to most interpretations. The contrast between the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos became one of the most discussed sections of the book. Some critics, such as Samuel Holt Monk, argued that the Houyhnhnms represented an ideal of reason, while the Yahoos symbolized the degraded state of humanity. Others, like Claude Rawson, emphasized that Swift did not present the Houyhnhnms as perfect, since their lack of compassion revealed the dangers of excessive rationalism. This debate showed the complexity of Swift's vision of human nature: he criticized human vice while also questioning whether pure reason could ever create a just society.

Postcolonial critics have added another dimension by focusing on themes of empire and colonialism. Edward Said and other scholars argued that Gulliver's encounters with foreign societies reflected European attitudes toward colonized peoples. The way Gulliver often judged others by European standards, and the way he was sometimes treated as inferior, suggested Swift's awareness of imperial arrogance. This interpretation connected the novel to the broader history of colonial expansion in the eighteenth century.

Feminist critics have also engaged with the text, noting Swift's often negative portrayals of women. For example, Felicity A. Nussbaum argued that Gulliver's disgust at female bodies, especially in Brobdingnag, reflected deeper anxieties about gender and sexuality. Such readings highlighted the ways in which satire both reinforced and questioned the gender norms of Swift's time. Taken together, these critical perspectives reveal the richness of *Gulliver's Travels*. Some emphasize satire as moral correction, others focus on politics and history, and still others read the text through modern lenses such as colonialism and gender. What unites these approaches is the recognition that Swift used Gulliver's voyages as a mirror to reflect and analyze the flaws of human society. The diversity of interpretations also shows the enduring power of the text, which continues to speak to readers across different times and contexts.

Discussion

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* uses four imaginary voyages to explore and satirize the flaws of politics, science, and human nature. Each society Gulliver visits reflects not only its own peculiarities but also the realities of eighteenth-century Europe. Through exaggeration, irony, and contrast, Swift exposes corruption, pride, and irrationality, presenting a mirror in which his readers could recognize their own weaknesses.

Lilliput: Satire of Politics and Human Pettiness

The first voyage takes Gulliver to Lilliput, a land of tiny people with enormous ambitions. Although the Lilliputians are physically small, their pride, greed, and political disputes appear absurdly large. Swift uses them to mock the pettiness of English politics. The conflict between the Big-Endians and Little-Endians, supposedly over the proper way to break an egg, mirrors the meaningless disputes between political and religious factions in England. By exaggerating such trivial quarrels, Swift exposes the foolishness of political leaders who prioritize power over the common good.

The Lilliputians also embody corruption and hypocrisy. They demand strict loyalty from Gulliver yet plot against him when he no longer serves their interests. Their methods of choosing officials based on rope-dancing and other ridiculous performances; satirize the arbitrariness of political appointments in Swift's time. The Lilliputians' vanity, combined with their eagerness to punish enemies, reflects the destructive nature of power struggles. Through them, Swift criticizes the lack of wisdom and morality in eighteenth-century politics.

Brobdingnag: A Moral Mirror of Human Weakness

In Brobdingnag, the roles reverse. Gulliver finds himself tiny among a race of giants. This shift in perspective allows Swift to highlight the moral shortcomings of humanity as a whole. To the king of Brobdingnag, Gulliver's detailed account of English history filled with wars, corruption, and greed appears shocking and shameful. The king famously concludes that human beings are "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin."

Through this judgment, Swift holds up a moral mirror. The Brobdingnagian perspective exposes the violence and injustice that Europeans often ignored in their own history. While Gulliver takes pride in describing gunpowder and modern warfare, the king reacts with disgust, emphasizing the barbarity of human inventions. This contrast satirizes the European tendency to glorify conquest and military power.

At the same time, Brobdingnag is not portrayed as a perfect society. Although the giants appear morally superior, they are not entirely free from limitations. Their simplicity and lack of ambition suggest a world of moral clarity but not one of intellectual depth. Swift thus avoids presenting

an ideal utopia. Instead, he uses Brobdingnag to emphasize the moral failures of humanity while still questioning whether any society can fully escape weakness.

Laputa and Lagado: Satire of Science and Rationalism

The third voyage takes Gulliver to Laputa, an island of scientists and philosophers who live literally above the rest of society. The Laputans, obsessed with mathematics and music, symbolize the dangers of abstract knowledge detached from reality. Their impracticality and lack of attention to daily life reflect Swift's criticism of Enlightenment rationalism when carried to extremes.

In the Academy of Lagado, Swift intensifies this satire. The 'projectors' engage in absurd experiments: such as extracting sunbeams from cucumbers or building houses from the roof downward. These useless projects illustrate the folly of pursuing science for its own sake without considering its benefit to humanity. Through such ridicule, Swift questions the value of knowledge that does not serve practical or moral purposes.

At the same time, the Laputans' arrogance mirrors the intellectual pride of Swift's age. Their lack of concern for the suffering of ordinary people shows how abstract thinking can become disconnected from real human needs. This critique does not reject science outright but warns against its misuse. Swift's message remains clear: knowledge without wisdom can be as dangerous as ignorance.

Houyhnhnms and Yahoos: Human Nature at Its Extremes

The final voyage, to the land of the Houyhnhnms, represents Swift's most radical exploration of human nature. Here, the rational and virtuous horses, the Houyhnhnms, contrast sharply with the degraded human-like creatures, the Yahoos. The Houyhnhnms embody reason, order, and simplicity, while the Yahoos symbolize greed, lust, and violence.

At first, Gulliver admires the Houyhnhnms as a model of rational society. Their lives seem free of lies, corruption, and ambition. They practice simplicity, honesty, and cooperation. However, their lack of emotion and compassion also reveals limitations. They cannot understand concepts such as love, friendship, or individuality, and they coldly consider exterminating the Yahoos as a reasonable solution. In this sense, Swift shows that pure reason without humanity can become harsh and inhuman.

The Yahoos, meanwhile, reflect the darkest side of human nature. Their filth, greed, and savagery suggest that beneath civilization, people remain capable of animalistic behavior. Gulliver's growing hatred for the Yahoos and admiration for the Houyhnhnms highlight his alienation from humanity. By the end of the voyage, he finds it difficult to accept human society at all, suggesting the depth of Swift's disillusionment with mankind.

Through this contrast, Swift presents his bleakest vision of human nature. Humanity appears trapped between irrational vice and cold rationalism, with no perfect balance. This conclusion reinforces Swift's central theme: that human beings are flawed, and no society, however ideal it may seem, can escape imperfection.

Satire as a Mirror of the Enlightenment

Taken together, the four voyages form a satirical mirror of eighteenth-century Europe. Lilliput reflects the pettiness of politics, Brobdingnag highlights moral corruption, Laputa mocks the misuse of science, and the Houyhnhnms expose the extremes of human nature. Through each encounter, Swift analyzes the values and practices of his own age while questioning the universal weaknesses of mankind.

The novel also reveals Swift's complex relationship with the Enlightenment. He did not reject reason, science, or progress outright. Instead, he exposed their limits and the dangers of human pride. His satire reminds readers that knowledge without morality, politics without justice, and reason without compassion lead to failure. By exaggerating human flaws in imaginary societies, Swift forces his audience to confront the darker truths of their own world.

The analysis of *Gulliver's Travels* shows how Swift used satire to critique politics, science, and human nature through Gulliver's encounters with different societies. Each voyage reflects both the specific conditions of eighteenth-century England and the universal flaws of humanity. Swift does not offer a perfect model of society but rather a mirror that exposes weakness, corruption, and pride. His work remains powerful because it speaks not only to the world of his own time but also to the continuing struggles of human society.

Findings & Conclusion

The study of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* reveals that the novel functions as a powerful satirical mirror, reflecting the political, scientific, and moral shortcomings of eighteenth-century society. Through Gulliver's encounters with diverse societies, Swift exposes human weakness, corruption, and irrationality. In Lilliput, the focus on trivial political disputes and petty rivalries demonstrates the absurdity of power struggles and the moral blindness of political leaders. The Lilliputians' obsession with status, loyalty, and revenge highlights how pride and ambition often outweigh justice and reason in human affairs. This encounter establishes one of the central insights of the novel: that human folly, even in seemingly small matters, can have far-reaching consequences.

Brobdingnag, in contrast, presents a moral perspective in which human cruelty, greed, and violence are laid bare. The king's judgment of humanity as "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin" underscores the stark ethical critique embedded in the narrative. Gulliver's pride in technological advancement and political achievements contrasts sharply with the moral clarity of the Brobdingnagians, revealing the limitations of human self-congratulation. Swift's satire here demonstrates that human accomplishments, when divorced from ethical reflection, can appear as destructive and morally bankrupt. The Brobdingnagians' simplicity and moral strength serve as a mirror to European society, illustrating the disparity between human ambition and ethical conduct.

The Laputa episode illustrates the dangers of intellectual arrogance and the misuse of scientific knowledge. Swift ridicules the Laputans' obsession with abstract theories and impractical inventions to show that knowledge, when detached from ethical and practical concerns, becomes absurd and harmful. The emphasis on theoretical pursuits over human welfare analyzes the Enlightenment faith in reason as inherently beneficial; revealing that intelligence alone cannot guarantee a just or functional society. This section highlights Swift's nuanced view of science and rationality: they possess great potential but require guidance by morality and practicality to avoid producing harm.

The land of the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos presents the extreme exploration of human nature. The rational, virtuous Houyhnhnms embody reason and order, whereas the Yahoos reflect humanity's basest instincts of greed, violence, and lust. Gulliver's admiration for the Houyhnhnms and disgust at the Yahoos reveal the tension between rationality and morality in human beings. Swift demonstrates that reason without compassion risks coldness and inhumanity, while unchecked instinct leads to chaos and degradation. Through this contrast,

Swift analyzes the extremes of human behavior and emphasizes the complexity of morality, showing that neither society nor individuals can achieve perfection.

Overall, the study finds that Swift's satire operates on multiple levels, using exaggeration, irony, and contrast to analyze the political, moral, and intellectual aspects of human life. Each society in the novel serves as a lens through which readers observe specific flaws, from petty political disputes and corruption to the misuse of science and the extremes of human behavior. Swift offers neither a perfect utopia nor a simple condemnation; instead, he presents a nuanced reflection of human society, encouraging critical self-examination.

In conclusion, *Gulliver's Travels* remains a timeless work because its satire transcends the eighteenth century, highlighting enduring human flaws. Swift's critique of politics, science, and human nature continues to resonate, revealing the persistence of moral weakness, intellectual arrogance, and societal folly. By portraying the failures and limitations of diverse societies, the novel compels readers to reflect on their own behavior and the structures of the communities in which they live. Ultimately, Swift's work functions as a mirror, showing both the potential and the failures of human society, and establishing *Gulliver's Travels* as a work of profound moral, political, and intellectual significance.

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