



## **Authenticity in absurdity in swift's gulliver's travels: Fabricated presentation of truth and reality on theoretical basis**

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### **Abstract**

Jonathan Swift has genuinely made an attempt to expose some reliable issues related to social, political and moral aspects of European people and of humankind in general in Gulliver's Travels. Actually, for the rectification of the contemporary crooked nations Swifts Gulliver's Travels is somehow very positive. This study has made an attempt to demonstrate how Swift has transformed the inauthentic into authentic, unbelievable into believable, indecent into decent, unfair into fair and impossible into possible in this exceptional piece of fiction. In this regard, this article has undertaken some relevant theories to match the morals of this novel with life and political culture of contemporary world like, historicism, historiographic met fiction, ethnography, theory of realism in foreign policy, post-colonial perspective etc. Methodologically this writing is in maximum cases based on secondary data and in some points it is focusing the solicitous investigation of the researcher. Finally, some constructive findings are presented too at the end of this paper for exposing some hidden facts yet to be discovered.

**Keywords:** satire, misanthropy, historicism, metafiction, travelogue, ethnography, theory of realism, post-colonial perspective, absurdity, authenticity, immoral, rational, irrational

### **1. Introduction**

Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift is a successful satiric travelogue of 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature. In this fictitious novel Swift presents four highly imaginative lands with various weird characters and cultures. Swift here is a true misanthrope or an acute cynic having no faith in human nature. His disappointment is well focused in his description of four voyages. He is extremely frustrated by what men do as opposed to what they ought to do. Though based on absolutely artificial stories of four voyages on sea, Swift remains skilled in his presentation to convince the readers by giving them refreshing entertainment as well as to present truth and reality in a fabricated manner. In doing so Jonathan Swift is truly relevant to the contemporary world. This paper is intended to focus on some pertinent modern theories like, historiographic metafiction, use of historicism, combination of travelogue and ethnography, application of affiliative study, theory of realism in foreign policy, postcolonial perspective. These speculations have been taken into consideration in the discussion part. In literature review it has been tried to identify the research gap. Furthermore some key findings have been discussed in the findings session.

### **2. Discussion**

Gulliver's Travels is a travelogue that had been justified as a comic novel rather than a cynical one. In most of the cases the scholars and the critics found it amusing that is providing humour and ludicrous presentation of some weird subjects in some weird areas of the planet. They also found it as a comic writing full of misanthropic attitude against the whole human race. No doubt, it is a satire or a moral satire which is primarily aiming at amusing the readers, but its genuine purpose is to correlate the subjects as well as the

events with the pragmatic world.

#### **2.1 Historiographic Metafiction**

Metafiction is a form of literature that reminds the reader to be aware that they are reading or viewing a fictional work drawing attention to their status as artifacts <sup>[1]</sup>. Metafiction is frequently used as a form of parody or a tool to undermine literary conventions and explore the relationship between literature and reality, life, and art <sup>[2]</sup>. In voyage one, the use of historiographic metafiction is very significant to watch. Lilliputian land here stands for England and the Blefuscudians stands for France-two enemy countries of that time. There is a lot of allegorical usage of characters, directly taken from English political events of 1714-18, like; the Emperor of Lilliput resembles very tiny sized George I. The feuds between Big-Endians and Small-Endians represent the prevailing conflicts between Catholic and Protestant believers of Christianity in England. The High-Heel part and the Low-Heel parties exposed the Tory party and the Whig party consecutively. They are only the six-inch inhabitants and Gulliver is somehow flattered by their threats of punishment forgetting that they have no real physical power over him. It reminds us of the duplicity of the Whig Party with Swift who was the representative of the Irish church tried to get Queen Anne and the Whigs to grant some financial aid to the Irish church but they refused though he thought them his friend and helped them while he worked for Sir William Temple. Swift then turned to the Tories for political allegiance. The method, for example, which Gulliver must use to swear his allegiance to the Lilliputian emperor, parallels the absurd difficulty that the Whigs created concerning the credentials of the Tory ambassadors who signed the Treaty of Utrecht <sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2.2 Use of Historicism

Historicism is the idea of attributing meaningful significance to space and time, such as historical period, geographical place, and local culture. Historicism tends to be hermeneutic because it values cautious, rigorous, and contextualized interpretation of information; or relativist, because it rejects notions of universal, fundamental and immutable interpretations<sup>[4]</sup>. In voyage three, as an object of criticism, Swift took the subject of historicism to highlight 18th century intellectualism reflected on new experimentation and theorization. The Laputans-people of the floating island embodied here those enlightened people of 18 the century who were busy with some absurd scientific researches for long having no relation to human life. Even down below in Balnibarbarbi, where the local academy is more inclined to theoretical knowledge that had been proven disastrous, resulting in the ruin of agriculture and architecture and the impoverishment of the population. In the fourth and the last voyage- in the land of Houyhnhnms, we find Jonathan Swift being little exceptional in satirisation. The inhabitants of this land don't have any resemblance with the real world but they are presented to put the spotlight on some stern criticism. In this land the horses are represented as ideal of rational existence commanding over the creatures like Yahoos (human like). They represent an ideal community having no existence of lie in their life. Being a nation consists of some horse like creatures, they have been presented as the epitome of honesty. Most funny as well as cruel aspect of this voyage is that animals are ruling humans and supersede them in every manner.

## 2.3 Combination of travelogue and ethnography

Majorly in Gulliver's Travels we gaze a juxtaposition of travelogue and ethnographic discussion. A Travelogue is a person's account of a journey to another country or place. On the other hand, Ethnography is the systematic study of people and cultures. It is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study. The word can thus be said to have a double meaning, which partly depends on whether it is used as a count noun or uncountable<sup>[5]</sup>. The resulting field study or a case report reflects the knowledge and the system of meanings in the lives of a cultural group<sup>[6, 7, 8]</sup>. As a method of data collection, ethnography entails examining the behaviour of the participants in a certain specific social situation and also understanding their interpretation of such behaviour<sup>[9]</sup>. The typical ethnography is a holistic study<sup>[10, 11]</sup> and so includes a brief history, and an analysis of the terrain, the climate, and the habitat. Traditionally, ethnography was focused on the western gaze towards the far 'exotic' east, but now researchers are undertaking ethnography in their own social environment. According to Dewan (2018)<sup>[9]</sup>, even if we are the other, the 'another' or the 'native', we are still 'another' because there are many facade of ourselves that connect us to people and other facades that highlight our differences<sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2.4 Application of Affiliative Study

Affiliative Conflict Theory (ACT) is a social psychological approach which postulates that "people have competing needs or desires for intimacy and autonomy". In any relationship, people will negotiate and try to balance out their own behavioral acts of (approach and avoidance) to

maintain a comfortable level of intimacy<sup>[12]</sup>. Affiliative conflict theory (ACT), also referred to as equilibrium theory or model. Visual behavior research studies deal with influence, and with attributions made by observers. This reflects psychological research on nonverbal cues<sup>[13]</sup>. The reflection of Affiliative theory has been located in some explicit ideas in Gulliver's Travels. Two political parties being differentiated by the height of their heels points out how little substantive difference there was between Whig and Tory parties. These sort of political rivalries sometimes cross all the limits at this twenty first century too that shape the life of common people not by their own choice but by the wishes of the politically influential leaders. The clashes among different religious beliefs through petty quarrel between the Big-Endians and the Small-Endians is also well exposed.

## 2.5 Theory of Realism in Foreign Policy

Realism is one of the dominant schools of thought in international relations theory, theoretically formalising the Realpolitik statesmanship of early modern Europe. Realists can be divided into three classes based on their view of the essential causes of interstate conflict. Jonathan Haslam characterizes realism as "a spectrum of ideas"<sup>[14]</sup>. Its theories revolve around four central propositions: states are the central actors in international politics, rather than leaders or international organizations; the international political system is anarchic, as there is no supranational authority to enforce rules; states act in their rational self-interest within the international system; and states desire power to ensure self-preservation<sup>[15]</sup>. Priorities of realists have been described as Machiavellian, single-mindedly seeking the power of one's own nation over others<sup>[16]</sup>. In the land of Brobdingnagian giants Swift desires to show England's political and legal institutions and how they work as well as some of the personal habits of the ruling class. He tries to draw out some information regarding every stratum of English society and political power that is infested with rampant corruption. As the Brobdingnagian King concludes saying that "the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth"<sup>[17]</sup>.

## 2.6 Postcolonial Perspective

Post colonialism or postcolonial studies is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Postcolonialism encompasses a wide variety of approaches, and theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. On a simple level, it may seek through anthropological study to build a better understanding of colonial life from the point of view of the colonized people, based on the assumption that the colonial rulers are unreliable narrators. In the land of Houyhnhnms and Yahoos we can observe sub-disciplines of postcolonial studies examine the effects of colonial rule on the practice of feminism, anarchism, literature and Christian thought. In this voyage Swift is much more acute in presenting absurdities of human nature as well as in criticism than the previous voyages. He also targets to present the savage horses having high moral values like human being and the human like noble Yahoos as savage creatures having filthy and nasty temperament. Some critics found this sort of

presentation being so harsh in nature but some others believed it to be the outburst of Swift's misanthropic attitude. Here we find some convincing observations on imperialism where European nations claim to be civilized through brutality and oppression.

### 3. Literature Review

Ginette Emprin in his article "Appearance and Reality in Gulliver's Travels" mentioned a fact Swift himself in a letter to Pope said about an Irish Bishop who said that, "the book was full of improbable lies, and for his part, he hardly believed a word of it" <sup>[18]</sup>. In the same article Empire has clarified one thing that is any perceptive reader can distinguish between the appearance and reality in Gulliver's Travels. In his article "Gulliver, Travel, and Empire" (December, 2012) Claude Rawson analyzes Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels as a central document of European intellectual history <sup>[19]</sup>. Posing as a "parody" of travel books, Rawson's article is both a series of voyages and an ethnically widening arc of moral exploration as Swift's Book Four at once expresses an ambivalent perception of the Irish under English rule and extends to what Swift calls "all Savage Nations" and ultimately takes in what Swift described in a letter as "that Animal called Man." Birgitt Flohr in his essay remarked that "Swift was a rationalist with no faith in reason" <sup>[20]</sup>. Swift indeed, a rationalist with no faith in reason. He wants to be an animal rationale, no matter what it costs: his family-bonds, his self-esteem, his sanity. Gulliver cannot accept that there might be animals capable of reason only. David Nokes observes, "the most fundamental and enduring quality of his satires is their challenge to our own reasoning powers. The liberty which he served is a liberty of the mind to pierce through false images, the stereotypes of propaganda, utopian dreams and political clichés" <sup>[21]</sup>. Greg Lynall in his article "In Retrospect: Gulliver's Travels" claimed that the fantastical elements of this four-part story remain popular with children. And as a satirical masterpiece, it is also one of the most remarkable encounters between science and the literary imagination ever penned. Swift not only reflected deeply on the natural philosophy of his day, but also created prescient visions of its future <sup>[22]</sup>. The English daily newspaper The Guardian has published an article in 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 entitled "Gulliver's Travels in Science and Satire-Jonathan Swift's satires of science and criticisms of Isaac Newton are full of 18th-century politics, yet offer some lessons that remain valid today" <sup>[23]</sup>. Gulliver's Travels is called proto-science fiction. In many ways the whole of Gulliver's Travels is a satire on the scientific approach of the Royal Society. The most significant section of the book from the history of scientific point of view is Gulliver's visit to the floating island, Laputa, where the inhabitants are enamoured of mathematics, measuring, quantifying, experimenting and astronomical predictions. Swift was satirizing the omnipresent concept of Newtonian philosophy in polite society of 1720s London. In all these above literatures, all the distinguished critics and writers presented their own views and opinions that are very relevant to this present topic though having some gaps. The literatures discussed here are prone to show the absurdities, satiric impact, comic elements, allegorical items found in the novel Gulliver's Travels but none is concerned about the authenticity of all these issues in real life of all time whether in classical, neo-classical or modern period.. This article is

intended to focus this issue mainly and has taken this as a research gap.

### 4. Findings

To work with Gulliver's Travels is somehow little risky as a lot of study have already been done on this travelogue prior to this article. The four books of the Gulliver's Travels are presented in a parallel way so that voyages I and II focus on criticism of various aspects of contemporary English society, and man within this society, while voyages III and IV are more preoccupied with human nature itself. In displaying this entire phenomenon, Jonathan Swift has made use of his satiric weapon in a very harmonic phase. In maximum cases the critics have put light on the satiric and cynical aspects of this travelogue. The major privilege to work with this classical writing is to find out the relevance of its themes that with the modern concepts. There the European people have been focused, the follies and vices of man in general are disclosed, the absurdities, the peculiarities of man are identified profoundly. In this present writing Gulliver's Travels have been delved from a different angle and some diverse issues have come out through the light of some relevant theories. Swift's purpose in Gulliver's Travels is to attack on politics, religion, and other elements of society, to stir his readers to view themselves as he viewed humankind who were not fulfilling their potential to be truly great but were simply pretentious to show their fake greatness. Though this novel is successful in its goal brilliantly but still people are not inclined to rely on it fully as this novel is based on the actions of some absurd lands and nations. In this regard this paper is a further initiative to reach this gap and to try to settle this down in a descent manner.

### 5. Conclusion

We can bring up the fact that, in Gulliver's Travels, Swift under the veil of Gulliver is a human hater, a misanthropist, a pessimist, an acute critic, a perfectionist, a dreamer, a fault finder who is in search of a Utopian land to see a world full of perfectness. Here, this paper has tried to equalize these fundamental features of this classical writing with the contemporary world and society by mentioning some pertinent sociological, political and realistic theories. In juxtaposing these theories with 'Gulliver's travels' this research paper has discovered the basic resemblance with the people and culture of classicism and modernism. Some said that, Swift was highly disturbed with the negativity of the contemporary society that he took shelter of some imaginative men and objects to replace them in reality. Broadly speaking, in this travelogue, Swift resembles Francis Bacon who is worldwide famous for his Unitarian knowledge. Undoubtedly, it could be assumed that, though mostly attacking in manner towards human race, Swift is successful in his attempt to stir up the practical world to start thinking newly.

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