

HERTOG WINTER 2021 SEMINAR

SWIFT'S *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

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Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift (1726) is an adventure story, political satire, and philosophical treatise. Lemuel Gulliver's voyages may take him to fantastical lands filled with fantastical peoples, but Swift's subject, always, is human nature – what is best for man, and how should he live? Through Gulliver's explorations of very different societies, Swift engages in age-old philosophical arguments – particularly the quarrel between “the ancients and moderns.” But rather than provide a simple resolution of the quarrel, *Gulliver's Travels* sets out the terms, stakes, and significance of that debate.

This seminar will meet online weekly on **Mondays from 6 to 8 PM ET.**

Course Materials:

- Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Robert DeMaria Jr. (Penguin Classics, 2003)
- Course Reader

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. **Papers are due the day before your assigned session by 5 PM ET.** They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Resources:

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Monday, December 28, 2020

6 – 8 PM ET

Session I: Lilliput

Readings:

- Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Advertisement, Letters, and Part One (pp. 4–10, 21–76)

Questions:

1. What sort of man is Gulliver? Does he have a great soul or a great mind to go with the body that defines him in the first voyage? With what sorts of concerns is he preoccupied, and what might these say about his character? **(Respondent: Praboda Perikala)**
2. What is distinctive in the domestic politics of the Lilliputians? What specific customs and practices and institutions does Swift focus on? What effect does Swift hope to induce in his reader by portraying these customs and institutions in the way that he does? **Respondent: Wyatt Hill)**
3. What is distinctive in the Lilliputian approach to foreign affairs? How do they understand international relations, and what ought we to make of the role that Gulliver plays in their dealings with Blefuscu? **Respondent: Andrew Orner)**

Monday, January 4, 2021

6 – 8 PM ET

Session II: Brobdingnag

Readings:

- Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Two (pp. 79–139)

Questions:

1. How does the Gulliver of the second voyage compare to the Gulliver of the first voyage? What might this new Gulliver share with the Lilliputians? What should we make of the several accounts of Gulliver's interactions with animals in this voyage? **(Respondent: Nicolas Abouchedid)**
2. How do the Brobdingnagians compare to the Lilliputians? What is revealed of their minds and souls in their treatment of Gulliver? What specifically are we meant to take away from the story of the Brobdingnagian king's questioning of Gulliver as to whether he is a Whig or a Tory? **(Respondent: Mary Carmen Cid)**
3. The political centerpiece of the second voyage is the discussion of British history between Gulliver and the king. What specifics does Gulliver focus on, and what does this reveal of him? What specifics does the king focus on, and what might this say about the Brobdingnagians and their political vision? **(Respondent: Ella Lubell)**
4. What offer does Gulliver make to the Brobdingnagian king, and why is it refused? What more does this episode reveal of both their characters?

Monday, January 11, 2021

6 – 8 PM ET

Session III: Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, & Luggnagg

Readings:

- Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Three (pp. 143–201)

Questions:

1. The Laputans are devoted to science. But what kind of science? And how does their love of science shape their politics, and specifically their political dealings with the island below? **(Respondent: Livia Mann)**
2. What kind of science is practiced at the Academy of Lagado? How does the science of these “projectors” compare to the science of the Laputans? What elements of this science does Swift hold up for criticism? How does this criticism comport with his portrait of the Academy’s political projectors?
3. Glubbdubdrib’s magic gives Gulliver the opportunity to summon up ghosts ancients and modern. How does Gulliver understand the differences between the ancients and the moderns? Why does he prefer the former to the latter? What specific elements of antiquity does he admire? **(Respondent: Ryan Shinkel)**
4. Why does Swift devote an entire chapter to the Struldbrugs? What exactly is so disturbing about them? Why do you think he uses this episode to conclude the third voyage? **(Respondent: Grace Fabrycky)**

Monday, January 18, 2021

6 – 8 PM ET

Session IV: Land of the Houyhnhnms

Readings:

- Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Part Four (pp. 205–71)

Questions:

1. How does Swift portray the Yahoos? What reaction does Gulliver have when he encounters them? What reaction is Swift trying to elicit from us in describing them as he does? **(Respondent: Kristen Ziccarelli)**
2. What are the distinguishing characteristics of the Houyhnhnms? What about them might be admirable? What about them might be troubling?
3. What place does politics play in Houyhnhnm life? How does this follow from their dedication to reason? What is the one topic they in fact debate in their political

assemblies? What political lesson ought we to draw from their relationship to the Yahoos? **(Respondent: Bix Komita Moussa)**

4. Gulliver is a changed man when he returns to England after his voyage to the Houyhnhnms? In what specific ways has he changed? Has he been improved or corrupted by his time among the Houyhnhnms? **(Respondent: Robert Capodilupo)**

Monday, January 25, 2021

6 – 8 PM ET

Session V: Swift & Satire

Readings:

- Swift, “The Battle of the Books,” “A Modest Proposal,” and “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift”

Questions:

1. What is the cause of the “Battle of the Books” and what is its result? How does Swift’s portrait of the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns here compare to his treatment of these themes in *Gulliver’s Travels*, and especially the third voyage? **(Respondent: Theo Lipsky)**
2. How does the humor of “A Modest Proposal” compare to that of *Gulliver’s Travels*? In particular how does Swift’s description of the Irish and their conditions compare to his treatments of various peoples Gulliver encountered? Is this ultimately a document animated by philanthropy or misanthropy? **(Respondent: Elliott Williams)**
3. What aspects of his own life and character does Swift emphasize in his verse autobiography? What is the effect of framing it as he does with the verse from La Rochefoucauld? How does it help us see why Swift described himself in the epitaph over his grave as one who “served human liberty”? **(Respondent: Shal Marriott)**