
Survey of World Literature II

ENG 204

Belhaven University

Hall # 2

Literature of the Enlightenment: *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*

Introduction to Hall

- This Hall explores two of Jonathan Swift's masterpieces, *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*. Swift, too, is a satirist. He focuses on deficient human reason. Horses rule the day in one, and cannibalism is suggested as a solution to poverty in the other.
-

Topics to be Covered

- Swift's satire
 - Ireland's circumstances during Swift's life
 - Ironies of human reason
 - Analysis and discussion of both *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*
-

Hall Objectives

- Examine Enlightenment ideas in Swift's writings.
 - Analyze satire and irony in literature.
 - Evaluate the biblical view of man's sinful nature through literature.
-

Biblical Foundations

Mark 7:21-22

For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

Swift's Writing

- Uses satire to point out human inadequacies and irrational behavior
 - Well-educated clergy and Irishman
 - Involved in politics
 - Passionate about oppressed Irish
-

Factors Affecting Swift's Ireland

- The Protestant Reformation (1536-1654)
 - England supported Protestantism whereas Ireland was Catholic
 - England wanted to conquer Ireland (Irish Free State not established until 1922)
 - Catholics had subordinate position in their own country
 - Harsh weather contributed to hardship and produced famine
-

Overview of *Gulliver's Travels*

- Travel book form
 - Lemuel Gulliver, ship's surgeon, as narrator
 - Gulliver travels into four imaginary lands
 - Each of four books provides social and political commentary
-

Chapter 1 Overview

- Gulliver accepts a new assignment to be a ship's captain
 - Pirates come aboard and he is forced ashore in a strange land
 - He observes and meets Houyhnhnms and Yahoos
-

Chapter 1 Key Quotations

- Gulliver's initial perception of the Yahoos: "I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy."
 - Gulliver's initial perception of the Houyhnhnms: "I was amazed to see such actions and behavior in brute beasts...they must be the wisest people upon the earth."
-

Chapter 1 Key Points

- Gulliver's disgust with Yahoos (but these most resemble his own human form)
 - Gulliver in awe of Houyhnhnms (but these are horses!)
 - Swift will portray humans as animals and animals as humans...are they really that much different?
-

Chapter 4 Overview

- Gulliver tells master, a Houyhnhnm, how similar creatures are regarded back in his own country
- Master finds fault with Gulliver's human form

Chapter 4 Key Quotations

- Master to Gulliver about Gulliver's own body:
“He said I differed indeed from other Yahoos, being much more cleanly, and not altogether so deformed; but...That my nails were of no use either to my fore or hinder feet”
-

Chapter 4 Key Points

Master compares the Yahoos to Gulliver:

- Nails
- Unstable walking
- Vulnerable to weather

Humans are inadequate because they are...well, human.

Chapter 7 Overview

- Gulliver wants to live among the Houyhnhnms and never wants to return to humans
 - His master recounts several inadequacies of human and Yahoo behavior
-

Chapter 7 Key Quotations

- Master tells Gulliver: “If you throw among five Yahoos as much food as would be sufficient for fifty, they will...fall together by the ears, each single one impatient to have all to itself.”
 - Master also notes that the “favorite is hated by the whole herd; and therefore to protect himself, keeps always near the person of his leader.”
-

Chapter 7 Key Points

The master's observations about Yahoos:

- Hatred for each other
- Jealousies among them
- Gluttony

Humans are petty, competitive, envious, and generally vile creatures.

Chapter 8 Overview

- Now that he has been there three years, Gulliver shares many of his own observations about the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos

Chapter 8 Key Quotations

- Gulliver discovers that “the Yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals, their capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry burdens.”
 - In contrast, the “Houyhnhnms are endowed by Nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature.”
-

Chapter 8 Key Points

- Gulliver's observation of the Houyhnhnms:
Virtuous and rational
- Gulliver's observation of the Yahoos:
Stupid and stubborn

Humans see each other as somewhat foolish, yet don't see this in themselves.

Chapter 11 Overview

- Forced to leave the country, Gulliver sets sail in a canoe
 - Gulliver is rescued by a ship and befriended by the Captain, Don Pedro
 - Gulliver returns home disgusted and unhappy
-

Chapter 11 Key Quotations

- Gulliver “was ready to faint at the very smell of him [Don Pedro] and his men.”
 - Gulliver on seeing his wife and children: “I must confess, the sight of them filled me only with hatred, disgust, and contempt.”
 - Gulliver remarks, “My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours every day.”
-

Chapter 11 Key Points

- Gulliver's inability to separate Yahoos from even his own family
 - Gulliver's kinship with horses; they are the only ones who truly understand him.
 - Swift is obviously pointing out that humans are sometimes so intolerable that even other humans can't bear them.
-

Reason in *Gulliver's Travels*

- Rational, **reasonable** behavior of horses
 - Master's belief that **reason** would always win over brute strength
 - Master can't imagine a Yahoo (human) with **reason**
 - Master attributes human government to defective **reason**
-

Swift's Points about Human Reason

- Yahoos are a base version of humans (Humans – reason = Yahoos)
 - Human limitations of reason
 - Discrepancy between beliefs and behaviors
 - Human hypocrisy shows lack of reason
-

Swift's *A Modest Proposal*

- Swift's all-inclusive attack on human cruelty
 - Suggestion of cannibalism as a way to cure hunger
 - Rational, organized presentation of ideas
 - Presentation certainly isn't "modest"
-

Satire and Irony in *A Modest Proposal*

- This is dark satire. No one wants to think about turning to cannibalism, especially eating babies, to solve hunger and poverty.
 - It's also ironic. Irony in literature is an unexpected twist of events. Certainly, no one would expect such a rational argument to suggest such a horrific “solution.”
-

The Proposal's Organization

- Begins by stating problem
 - Cites steps of his plan
 - Maintains a clear, rational tone
 - Builds rapport with reader
 - Answers opposition
 - Lists advantages using transitions
 - Ends by emphasizing that he is open to other proposals and isn't a self-promoter
-

Key Quotations from *Modest Proposal*

- “a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food”
 - “the constant breeders...will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year”
 - “Men would become as fond of the wives during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their mares in foal”
-

The Proposal's “Advantages”

- Poor can make money
 - Money gained will improve economy
 - Dish will provide fine eating
 - Encourage and improve marriage
-

Christian Worldview about Reason

- Reason is a gift from God
 - It separates humans from animals
 - It **should** be used for good, but is not always
 - We do not necessarily use reason although we have it
-

What's next?

- Complete your detailed reading
- Answer the discussion questions
- Complete the writing assignments
- Take the Hall Quiz

References

The Norton Anthology of Western Literature, Ninth Edition, Volume 2, Puchner Ed. et al

This concludes Hall 2