

## **Symbols and Motifs in Gulliver's Travels**

All the four voyages in “Gulliver’s Travels” acquire their satirical connotations by the adroit use of various symbols and motifs. Some of them are limited to the voyage in which they occur, while others are recurrent in all the books. The voyage to Lilliput has been called the most “poetic” of all the four books. As much it is the most symbolic, too. Some of the major symbols here are- 1) England- England represents the bare setting of the entire book, without which the lands described in the voyages would be no more than fairy tales, without a yardstick to judge their cultures and character. The adventures gain meaning only in relation to his home country, and each of the lands visited is either superior or inferior to England. As such they become utopian or dystopian only by association. All the political connotations and satirical meanings evolve by their parallels with English politics in the eighteenth century or with certain historical events before this, namely, the Renaissance or King Henry VIII. All the tensions between Lilliput and Blefuscu relate the mostly Anglo-French relations with the other countries of Europe, such as Spain or Austria. All the internal quarrels relate in one way or other to the Whig-Tory rivalry during Swift’s time, and his own reactions to them. Every major character like the King, Flimnap or Reldresal parallel historical personalities like King George I, or Prime Minister Robert Walpole or Viscount Townshend, or to Bolingbroke. It is as if England is the microcosm of all human society, the faults of which are exposed through that country.

Body parts: The body parts of Gulliver and all the inhabitants he comes into contact with are used by Swift in the incidents he describes to attain his satirical effects – a method that Swift used in several of his earlier satires. In Lilliput Gulliver’s own body parts provide much of the fun of the story too. Two incidents illustrate this.. The first follows the displays of games and dexterity organized for the benefit of the “Man-Mountain” . The Emperor made Gulliver stand like a Colossus, with his feet wide apart making a kind of archway under which a part of his army, including cavalry and footman would march in a martial display. It was a majestic show except for the fact that Gulliver’s breeches were in an extremely poor condition, and all those who passed under his legs got a full view of his private parts which afforded some “Opportunities for Laughter and Admiration.” It is surely an expression of Swift’s contemptuous opinion of the grand martial displays that Kings are so proud of.

The second instance is the manner in which Gulliver is asked to swear to the “Articles and Conditions” upon which he would be granted his freedom. The absurd and complicated method of holding his right Foot in his left Hand to place the middle Finger of his right Hand on the Crown of my Head and his Thumb on the Tip of his right Ear by which Gulliver must swear to the articles exemplifies the ridiculous methods used by rulers to ensure loyalty to their policies, and also another aspect of Whig politics, which he attacked so thoroughly in the Voyage to Lilliput, The Whigs attacked the Tory- initiated Treaty of Utrecht maintaining the peace treaty was invalid because the royal warranty was not properly countersigned. At the Lilliputian Court Gulliver finds it difficult to countersign his agreement in this manner and so his sworn loyalty is technically in question.

Moreover, it is the exact description of the physiognomy of the Emperor of Lilliput that enables us to identify him as the English King George I- “His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip, and arched Nose, his complexion olive, his countenance erect, his Body and Limbs well- proportioned, all his Motions graceful, and his Deportment majestic.”

Excrement: Swift uses human excrement to intensify his satire. When Gulliver feels the call of nature so strong on him he eases himself by making water. . . plentifully then and there. The amount discharged causes a lot of astonishment among the Lilliputs who back away to a safe distance “to avoid the Torrent” during the release of the uneasy load. The huge mass would be carried each morning by two servants in a wheelbarrow. This shows how the huge Man -Mountain may be bound and tormented but even in this condition the Lilliputs are forced to clean up his mess, showing effectively who the real master is. Gulliver’s urination to put out the fire in the Queen’s palace is a punishable offence. It expresses Swift’s own contempt for royal decorum considered more important to them than even life.