

ANALYTICAL APPROACHES TO THE TEXT  
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY QUIZ  
SPRING 2015

*Gulliver's Travels* (1726, 1735)  
by Jonathan Swift

I said, my Birth was of honest Parents, in an Island called *England*, which was remote from this Country, as many Days Journey as the strongest of his Honour's Servants could travel in the Annual Course of the Sun. That I was bred a Surgeon, whose Trade it is to cure Wounds and Hurts in the Body, got by Accident or Violence. That my Country was governed by a Female Man, whom we called a *Queen*. That I left it to get Riches, whereby I might maintain my self and Family when I should return. That in my last Voyage, I was Commander of the Ship and had about fifty *Yahoos* under me, many of which died at Sea, and I was forced to supply them by others picked out from several Nations. That our Ship was twice in Danger of being sunk; the first Time by a great Storm, and the second, by striking against a Rock. Here my Master interposed, by asking me, How I could persuade Strangers out of different Countries to venture with me, after the Losses I had sustained, and the Hazards I had run. I said, they were Fellows of desperate Fortunes, forced to fly from the Places of their Birth, on Account of their Poverty or their Crimes. Some were undone by Law-suits; others spent all they had in Drinking, Whoring and Gaming; others fled for Treason; many for Murder, Theft, Poysoning, Robbery, Perjury, Forgery, Coining false Money; for committing Rapes or Sodomy; for flying from their Colours, or deserting to the Enemy; and most of them had broken Prison. None of these durst return to their native Countries for fear of being hanged, or of starving in a Jail; and therefore were under a Necessity of seeking a Livelihood in other Places.

During this Discourse, my Master was pleased often to interrupt me. I had made Use of many Circumlocutions in describing to him the Nature of the several Crimes, for which most of our Crew had been forced to fly their Country. This Labour took up several Days Conversation before he was able to comprehend me. He was wholly at a Loss to know what could be the Use or Necessity of practising those Vices. To clear up which I endeavored to give him some Ideas of the Desire of Power and Riches; of the terrible Effects of Lust, Intemperance, Malice, and Envy. All this I was forced to define and describe by putting of Cases, and making Suppositions. After which, like one whose Imagination was struck with something never seen or heard of before, he would lift up his Eyes with Amazement and Indignation. Power, Government, War, Law, Punishment, and a Thousand other Things had no Terms, wherein that Language could express them; which made the Difficulty almost insuperable to give my Master any Conception of what I meant: But being of an excellent Understanding, much improved by Contemplation and Converse, he at last arrived at a competent Knowledge of what human Nature in our Parts of the World is capable to perform; and desired I would give him some particular Account of that Land, which we call *Europe*, especially, of my own Country.

## QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the genre Jonathan Swift uses in his *Gulliver's Travels*! Compare and contrast Swift's work to the new literary genre that appeared in the eighteenth century.
2. What major themes does "A Voyage to the Country of the Houynnhms" examine in addition to the other voyages of Gulliver's in the previous three parts of *Gulliver's Travels*?
3. In the excerpt above, how does Gulliver describe his own country and the civilization he represents? You may discuss here irony, parody, and satire.
4. How does Swift achieve his satirical effect in comparing the two worlds? Why does it take so long for Gulliver to explain to his master what life is like in England and Europe? What does his master seem to fail to comprehend?
5. In his "*Gulliver's Travels* and the Contracts of Fiction," Michael Seidel argues the following:

But what if Swift's satiric travel narrative is directed not simply at the experience of modern political, social, and intellectual life in England and Europe, but at the narrative bona fides of those middling fictional subjects who emerged during the early decades of the eighteenth century in England precisely to endorse the modern, progressivist, commercial vision of the world that Swift's satire bemoans? The novel is the literary form positing the fitness of a low-life, pseudoprofessional, or merchant-class narrator – Moll Flanders, Robinson Crusoe, Colonel Jack, Captain Singleton – to record the contingencies and changing valences of modern life. As such, it was a likely and predictable Swiftian target.

(*The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti, 72)

What does Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* most likely aim at attacking according to Seidle? What form of writing does it seem to parody? What type of social class does it appear to be criticizing, and what political position then does this criticism reveal?