

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* 1726

Jonathan Swift published his satire *Gulliver's Travels* anonymously in 1726. (Note that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719.) The four-part novel relates ship captain and surgeon Lemuel Gulliver's voyages to fanciful countries such as Lilliput and Brobdingnag, where he meets both tiny and giant inhabitants.

The work's satirical attacks on English politicians and social practices, as well as its coarse descriptions of bodily functions, provoked much comment and controversy among the reading public. The first publisher of the book feared that it was too critical of English society and edited the text to make it more acceptable, despite Swift's objections.

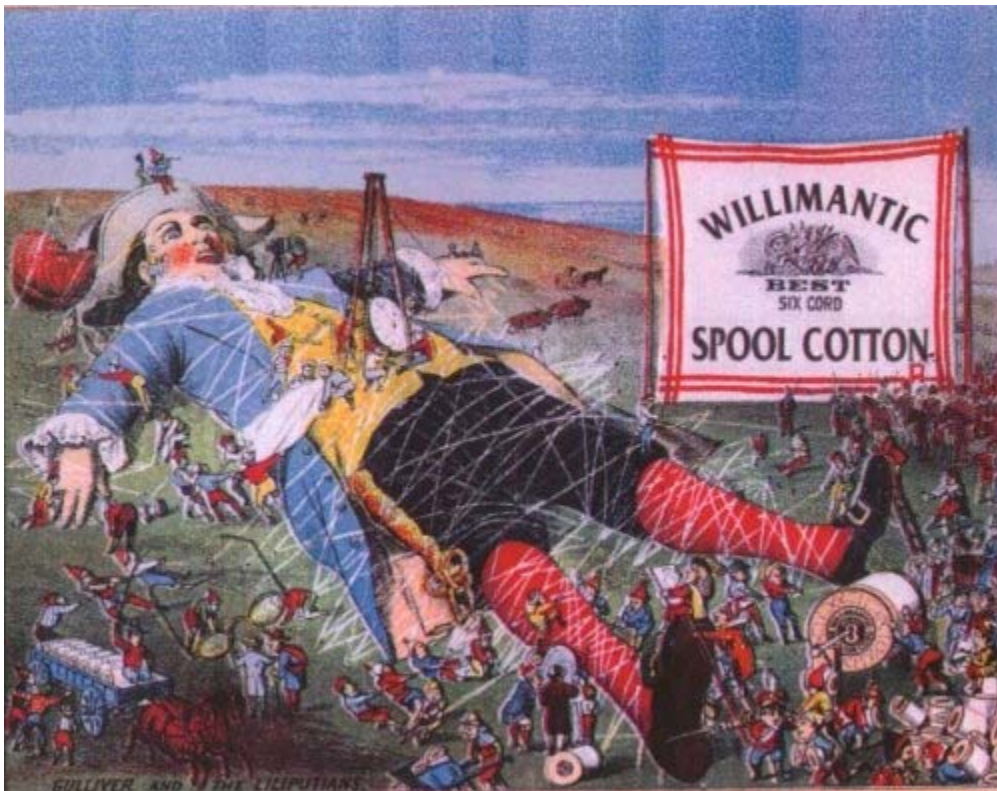
The first printing sold out in a week, and the book has never been out of print since. However, *Gulliver's Travels* was often published in expurgated ("cleaned up") versions, both in England and abroad. In the 19th century, critics thought that Swift's view of human nature is too pessimistic.

Although Swift intended the book for an adult audience, *Gulliver's Travels* imaginative storyline and clear writing helped make the book a children's classic, generally in abridged (shortened) editions. To this day, publishers of school versions, even at the college level, struggle with how much of the book may be printed. *Gulliver's Travels* is perhaps most frequently encountered today in adaptations for film, stage, or television, many of which are aimed toward children and lack large sections of the story and Swift's satirical tone.

In part one, Gulliver is ship-wrecked on the island of Lilliput where human beings are six inches tall. The Lilliputians' preoccupation with wars, their self-importance and vanities are clearly laughable. Gulliver's second voyage takes him to Brobdingnag. **"I cannot but conclude 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."** He meets giants who are practical but do not understand abstractions. In the third voyage Gulliver travels to the flying island of Laputa and the nearby continent and capital of Lagado. The scientists of his time are held up for ridicule: science is shown to be futile unless it is applicable to human betterment. The scientists are pedants obsessed with their own special field and utterly ignorant of the rest of the life. On the island of Glubbudbrib Gulliver encounters a community of sorcerers who can summon the spirits of the dead, allowing him to converse with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Aristotle and others. He meets Struldbrughs, who become senile in their 80's, are immortal and, as a result, are utterly miserable. In the fourth part Gulliver visits the land of Houyhnhnms, where horses are intelligent but human beings are not. The horses are served by degenerate creatures called Yahoos, demonstrating that the human race would destroy itself without religion. Swift wrote the book with a serious purpose - "to mend the world". *Gulliver's Travels* was a topical social satire, in which Swift wanted to show the consequences of

humanity's refusal to be reasonable. It is still widely read all over the world - and open to many interpretations. But while Defoe was an optimist, Swift's bitter pessimism makes Gulliver prefer the company of horses to that of his family. -on his return home.

- **Satire:** Satire is a focused form of humor. In satire, a writer uses humor and wit to expose--and possibly correct--human problems or failings. The most famous piece of satire in English literature is probably Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which pokes fun at all human pretensions, targeting especially politics, religion, science, and sexuality. This satire is a sustained argument for a change in human character and institutions...Satire often involves a shift in perspective that compels readers to examine a situation in a new way...satire is more likely to employ wit than humor, the point of a piece being to open readers' eyes rather than to make them laugh out loud.



The Willimantic Linen Company quickly exploited the book's popularity. This 1884 lithograph depicts the Lilliputians tying down Lemuel Gulliver with Willimantic's "best six cord spool cotton." The artists hired by the Willimantic Linen Company always ingeniously incorporated spools of cotton into the scenes.