

English General

Semester 2Nd

In *Gulliver's Travels* what is the significance of Lemuel Gulliver's name?

In Part 1, Chapter 1 readers learn that while Lemuel derives from a Hebrew word that means "devoted to God," Gulliver (an actual English surname) derives from an Old French word meaning "glutton." The name Gulliver also evokes the word *gullible*. Gulliver himself does not express a particularly religious point of view, but his generally good fortune in his voyages and his status as the sole survivor of the wreck of the *Antelope* indicate he may have found some form of favor with a higher power. Gulliver's surname comes to bear much more clearly during his time in Lilliput. Because the Lilliputians are very small, as are their livestock and other foodstuffs, they must produce enormous amounts of food in order to keep Gulliver alive, which becomes a contentious issue in later chapters of Part 1 as Gulliver's human appetite threatens to bankrupt the Lilliputian government. Gulliver also tends to believe the best about the Lilliputians, and other civilizations he encounters, even when the evidence indicates otherwise. His sunny disposition even in the face of terrible circumstances—bound and attacked by tiny people, among other things—could be interpreted as gullibility.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 1, what is unusual about Gulliver's reaction to meeting the Lilliputians?

After a harrowing escape from a shipwreck that kills all the other men on board, Gulliver awakens on land, bound by ropes and stung by the arrows and spears of a minuscule race of people. A natural reaction to this circumstance might be terror, shock, or rage. Gulliver expresses none of these feelings. He seems to find the existence of six-inch-tall people a perfectly normal occurrence, and he finds the injuries they inflict upon him more of a nuisance than anything else. Despite the unreality of his circumstances, Gulliver thinks logically and clearly through these first moments. He could break free of his bonds and wreak havoc on the Lilliputians, but he knows they outnumber him and recognizes he has weak points—his eyes, for instance—that their tiny weapons could use to incapacitate him. Instead, Gulliver's curiosity and practicality wins the day, and he recognizes that placating these tiny violent people represents his best chance for his continued survival.

What is significant about the emperor of Lilliput's appearance and manner as described in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 2?

The emperor is taller than the other Lilliputians by a significant margin, which gives him an air of authority and power based on his physical presence. His features are described as "strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip," so the emperor's power as a man is established. The reference to the Austrian lip associates him with the Habsburgs, one of the most powerful royal families of Europe from the 15th through the 20th centuries, originating in Austria. The emperor's clothing is simple, but he wears a crown "adorned with jewels, and a plume on the crest." His movements are described as graceful and his manner "majestic." He is, in short, an ideal of what a monarch should look like. Tall, handsome, with enough display of wealth to establish his superiority but not so much as to appear ostentatious. He may be presented in this manner to contrast with the king of England at the time, George I, whose Protestantism and German heritage as a descendant of the Prussian royal house of Hanover made him a target of some political controversy. While the emperor may appear ideal on first meeting, however, later chapters reveal his flaws and abuse of power

What does the Lilliputians' decision to keep Gulliver alive in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 2 reveal about them?

In later chapters, it becomes clear that the emperor has plans to use Gulliver as part of his country's defense against the rival nation of Blefuscu, even to the point of asking Gulliver to help him conquer and annex the defeated country. It is possible, even from their initial meeting, that the emperor sees Gulliver's potential as a weapon, which indicates a certain militaristic sensibility on his part because the initial reasoning the Lilliputians provide show themselves to be immensely practical. Because of Gulliver's size, the Lilliputians cannot determine an efficient way to kill him, even though they fear Gulliver may break loose and wreak destruction on their country. At the same time, they fear if they do successfully kill him, a decomposing corpse of such prodigious bulk could start a plague. They also show the impractical streak that causes so many human failings. They fear the cost of feeding such a large man may cause a famine, but since Gulliver has made a good first impression on the emperor, the emperor chooses to issue decrees for Gulliver's feeding, clothing, and maintenance. It appears that the Lilliputians are effective economists, weighing the costs of terminating the giant stranger against benefits of keeping him and the benefits of demonstrating their own courage. In Gulliver's interactions with the Lilliputians during the first months of his tenure on the island, it becomes clear that they are motivated by curiosity about this giant stranger as much as by their practical concerns. Gulliver makes a good impression on everyone he meets; he is polite and accommodating to their requests. He welcomes frequent visitors to his home. Curiosity is a powerful motivating force in human nature, and the Lilliputians, while small, are still human. These interactions also show a fundamental goodness in the Lilliputians' nature and an adherence to the cultural mandate of hospitality toward strangers that has formed a social cornerstone since ancient times.

What do the emperor of Lilliput's forms of entertainment in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 3 reveal about him?

The emperor of Lilliput shows Gulliver two customary forms of entertainment that are used to award government jobs and promotions. The first is a kind of rope dancing in which jobs are awarded to the individual who jumps highest on the rope during the competition. In addition, the emperor asks his underlings to either jump over or crawl under a stick and awards silks to those who jump the highest or crawl the longest. Both of these activities indicate that the emperor values most the willingness of others to do his bidding, despite any danger or discomfort they experience. There is an element of humiliation in the association between a worker trying to keep his job or advance in his position and the boss's entertainment. A few days later, the emperor asks Gulliver to be part of his entertainment, ordering Gulliver to stand "like a Colossus" with legs apart while the army marches beneath him. It is an odd display, but one that reflects the emperor's power over both his armies and over Gulliver. Although the emperor orders his men to "observe the strictest decency," many of them do look up at Gulliver as they pass between his legs. Gulliver confesses his tattered trousers do not provide full coverage, and while he is amused by what the men may have seen as they pass under him, there is an indication that the emperor is ultimately less concerned with Gulliver's decency than with putting on a grand show.

What does the conflict about egg-cracking in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 4 reveal about the nature of political conflict and war?

Hints in the text point to the egg-cracking conflict mirroring the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in England that began with Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church, just as the emperor of Lilliput's great-grandfather decided to break with the tradition of cracking eggs at the large end. By framing this conflict in the comparatively trivial matter of eggs, the novel makes a larger point about divisive political matters. They are often based on small differences of interpretation. All the Lilliputians agree to eat eggs. None of them are rejecting the egg as a food staple. The disagreement rests on a comparatively small matter. Many of the world's conflicts, especially where religion is involved, involve parties who agree on a larger fundamental issue but, like the Lilliputians, are too shortsighted to recognize that their differences are ultimately based on minutia. As a result, lives are destroyed because leaders are unable to let these smaller differences go.

What does Gulliver's loss of favor with the emperor of Lilliput reveal about the emperor and empress in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 5?

Gulliver's downfall with the emperor happens soon after after his triumphant capture of Blefuscu's navy. Having lost said navy, Blefuscu sends ambassadors to the Lilliputian court to

negotiate a peace treaty, and Gulliver treats these ambassadors with warmth and respect. The emperor does not like how friendly Gulliver is with these ambassadors, nor does he like Gulliver's request to visit Blefuscu to pay his respects to their monarch. The emperor has invested time and resources, both emotional and material, in Gulliver, so he thinks those resources have not been appreciated. When the emperor wants to finish off Blefuscu once and for all by conquering its government and subjugating its people, Gulliver refuses to use his might against the rival country in such a way. The emperor, like most monarchs, does not hear refusals very often, and this show of power from Gulliver is especially galling because Gulliver's physical power over the emperor and his people is an inescapable truth, even if Gulliver never exerts that power. The final straw for Gulliver is his method of putting out a fire in the palace. While he had few other options, the empress is incensed that Gulliver urinated on her quarters—even though by doing so he saved the entire palace from being lost to the flames. With both the emperor and empress standing against him, Gulliver's favor at court is lost and his days in Lilliput are numbered. The emperor obviously wants to keep his wife happy, and her reaction to the soiling of her quarters shows her fixation on aesthetics and appearances over the practicalities. Her ego is so outsized and her thinking so shallow that she sees Gulliver's attempt to save her home as a personal slight rather than the act of desperation it was.

How is the Lilliputian educational system, presented in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapter 6 a criticism of economic class distinctions?

Most Lilliputian children are turned over to educational institutions for their upbringing. In upper class schools, the lessons focus primarily on abstract concepts; the children of the wealthy learn "honour, justice, courage, modesty, clemency, religion, and love of their country." By contrast, schools for middle class children teach trades and send the children out for apprenticeships around the age of seven. All families pay for these services, but lower class families must provide both their tuition payment, which is based on what they can afford, as well as a "portion for the child," which the school holds in trust. These payments happen up front because Lilliputians "think nothing can be more unjust, than for people, in subservience to their own appetites, to bring children into the world, and leave the burthen of supporting them on the public." At the same time, wealthier families can pay for their children using credit: "As to persons of quality, they give security to appropriate a certain sum for each child, suitable to their condition; and these funds are always managed with good husbandry and the most exact justice." Children of the lowest classes, farmers mainly, are kept at home, "their business being only to till and cultivate the earth." The system set up in this case is not dissimilar to the system of English education at the time, or educational systems in many parts of the world today. Wealthier students may study more esoteric subjects while middle-income students are encouraged to enter trades. Even today, as during the time *Gulliver's Travels* was published, credit is more readily available to the rich, and lower-income individuals are chastised and criticized for having children they may or may not be able to afford. Having children in the lower classes is judged, on a moral level, as a lack of self-control.

Despite his so-called heinous crimes, why are the Lilliputians willing to let Gulliver escape without a fight in *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 1, Chapters 6, 7, and 8?

Gulliver consumes a vast amount of the kingdom's resources. He is allotted the daily food intake of 1724 Lilliputians, and this food requires cooks and servants to prepare and deliver the food to Gulliver. He has additional servants to clean up after him and make his clothing. Clothing Gulliver requires vast amounts of material, not only because Gulliver's person is large but because Lilliputian fabric is too thin for him to wear in a single layer. Everything must be quilted in multiple layers, then sewn into giant garments, so it is labor intensive as well. Gulliver pays for none of these expenses; they are covered by the government. Gulliver performs some services for the Lilliputians in return, but his refusal to help the emperor conquer Blefuscu and his destruction of the empress's quarters (however well-intentioned) mean the Lilliputians are not getting enough back from Gulliver to make the cost of his maintenance worth their while. They indict Gulliver for treason, forcing him to flee to Blefuscu, but they are remarkably unconcerned about his whereabouts considering the charges against him. They do order Blefuscu to return him once they realize Gulliver is in hiding there, threatening war over the matter. Once Blefuscu informs the emperor of Gulliver's intention to take the boat he has found and leave the area entirely, the emperor is "very glad of [Gulliver's] resolution." Even bringing Gulliver back to Lilliput to face his accusations and punishment will be a logistical nightmare for the Lilliputians; they have already discussed the challenges of disposing of his dead body at length. If Gulliver simply disappears, they won't even have to address this issue. The problem with Gulliver was less about his actions and more about his costs versus his benefits to Lilliput.

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