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# Swift changes

Hannah Burris
*Indiana State University*

Hannah Burris

Dr. Derrick

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## A Preface

Jonathan Swift was born into a time that would naturally beget innovative and memorable writing; in other words, he was shaped by a time of change and upheaval. Eighteenth century England was consumed by tightly interwoven political and religious turmoil. Also, in the midst of Britain's conflict was Ireland – irrefutably tied to England's political moves since the Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century (Crook 27). As a result of Cromwell's conquest of Ireland, Swift would grow up in an Ireland, originally Catholic, controlled by England, its politics, and its religious status wavering between Puritanism, Protestantism, and Catholicism (Crook 28). In the years preceding Swift's birth and during his youth, the rapid political changes in Britain and Ireland created the volatile environment in which Swift lived and wrote his famous satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. In addition, the Enlightenment ideology that permeated Britain at the time of *Gulliver's Travels'* publication created a receptive audience of all literate classes and ages.

A backdrop for the confusion of eighteenth century Britain is necessary to illustrate the instability that was created, and to this end a brief summary of precedents follows.

In 1660, after the death of the Puritan Lord Protector Cromwell, Charles II was restored to the throne. He brought to power with him the Anglican Established Church, and he helped found the Royal Society, which would investigate the natural world (Knowles xi). Charles II

was naturally a Royalist, aligned politically with the Tories, people who supported the union of church and state and the power of the king ("Tory"). In 1662, the Act of Uniformity made "nonconformists" like John Bunyan illegal (Knowles xi) and essentially tried to stamp out the Puritan religion ("Charles II"). By 1673, Parliament had passed the Test Acts, which barred from social and military offices all people who could not take communion according to the Church of England ("Test Act"). The political and religious changes, closely tied to each other, were rapid and did not allow people to hesitate in their decisions about public matters.

Jonathan Swift's heritage, an integral part of his world view, was rooted in these changing times. One of Swift's grandfathers was persecuted by the Puritans, and the other was persecuted by the Laudians (Ehrenpreis 3), a political group that opposed Presbyterians and tried to mandate use of the English Book of Prayer ("Charles I"). Already, political and religious opposition affected the family. In 1660, the same year as the Restoration, Swift's British father, moved to Ireland (Crook 26), as many Englishmen did after Oliver Cromwell opened Ireland for settlement. Jonathan Swift, Sr. held anti-Whig political views (Ehrenpreis 3), or in other words he opposed the supremacy of the Parliament ("Whig"), and his ideology would in part be inherited by his son (Ehrenpreis 3). In 1664, Swift's father married Abigail Erick (Knowles xi), a first generation Irishwoman (Crook 26). Through this Anglo-Irish genealogy, Swift became tied to the Dryden family and the Davenant family, both influential in their times (Ehrenpreis 3).

## The Life of Jonathan Swift

After Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin on November 30, 1667, he was first taken to England when he was one year old (Crook 26), starting the pattern of Swift's moves from Ireland to England and back. From 1673 to 1681, Swift attended the Anglican Kilkenny School. In 1683, he attended the Protestant Trinity College, where he was not an overachiever but an

extrovert (Crook 29). Two years later, immediately before his death in 1685, King Charles II announced that, despite his earlier stated beliefs, he was a Catholic; his named successor, James, was Catholic as well. These developments swung the government of England from Protestant to Catholic in a matter of months ("James").

The next year, in 1686, Swift graduated from Trinity College in Dublin, but only by a special degree – his marks were not legitimately high enough to pass, but he was allowed to graduate nonetheless (Crook 30). Swift decided hereafter to study several hours a day to better educate himself (Traugott 1). By 1688, James was removed from the throne by William of Orange, James' Dutch Protestant son-in-law who was supported in England specifically because of his religious views ("James"). Thus, England swung back from Catholicism to Protestantism. In 1689, Swift moved to England hoping to "avoid the civil war" that ensued when James II, who was trying to take the throne of England from Orange, invaded Ireland (Crook 30). Already religious and political strife was driving Swift from one country to another.

While he was in England, Swift work for Sir William Temple, who made his living as a diplomat between Ireland and England. Swift was employed as a secretary for Sir Temple and also as a tutor for Esther "Stella" Johnson, a young woman in Sir Temple's care (Crook 30). One of Swift's first assignments was to present to King William III a case to "make parliament triennial;" however, Swift's arguments for legislature sessions every three years were rejected out of hand, marking the first of many political failures to come (Traugott 2). In the same year, 1689, Swift also contracted Meniere's disease (Crook 31), a disorder of the fluid in the inner ear. The result of this incurable disease is vertigo, loss of hearing, nausea, vomiting, and "tinntus" or hearing sounds within the ear. The onset of the symptoms is unannounced, and may worsen over time ("Meniere's Disease"). Indeed, the dizzying symptoms of Swift's disorder would plague

him for the rest of his life. He briefly returned to Ireland, but decided to move back to England a short time later (Crook 31).

Before he died in 1699, Temple had procured a promise from King William that Swift would have the first prebend position available at Westminster Abbey or Canterbury (Traugott 2-3). A prebend is "an honorary canon" who was given a "the portion of the revenues of a cathedral or collegiate church" ("prebend"). However, King William "forgot" that he had made such a promise (Traugott 2-3). Sometime later, Swift thought that he might become a poet. In the 1700s, this occupation was only a part-time avocation, requiring additional employment for subsistence (Johnson Lives 3). To test his poetic talents, he penned classical Pindaric Odes dedicated to Sir Temple, to the King, and to group that called itself the Athenian Society (in reality, a handful of men who answered people's letters in published pamphlets). After reading some of his work, his cousin, John Dryden, told him that he would not ever become a poet. This interlude resulted in bad feelings, but there is no indication that Swift tried poetry again, pursuing prose thereafter for his many later publications (Traugott 2).

Queen Anne, another Protestant monarch rose to power in 1702, marking a new political era (Knowles xii). In 1704, Swift was granted a Doctorate of Divinity from Trinity College (Crook 70). That same year, he published *Tale of a Tub,* a work which he never admitted or denied having penned, but for which he was censured later by the conservative Queen Anne, who denied him a higher position in the church (Traugott 3). In 1706, William King, the Archbishop of Dublin, hired Jonathan Swift to propose to England that the Irish clergyman, like the English clergy, be exempt from paying fees ("First Fruits" fees). His arguments were a rare success (Crook 40). In 1707, Swift was associated with the Whig party, where he came into contact with journalists Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele (Crook 42); and in 1708

published four essays (*the Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man, Bickerstaff, Argument against abolishing Christianity,* and *Sacramental Test)* which expounded his religious beliefs *(*Traugott 3). By 1710, however, he was known to be a Tory, and in this political circle he met literary men like Alexander Pope, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot (Crook 42). Swift still spoke to Steele, though, who wrote for the *Tatler* (Traugott 4), a Tory associated publication ("Steele"); however, he also contributed thirty-three submissions for the *Examiner* (Traugott 4), a Whig publication in direct dissent with the *Tatler* and another of Steele's publications, the *Guardian* ("Steele").

Queen Anne died in 1714; King George I succeeded her (Knowles xiii). George became the king of England after Anne was persuaded on her deathbed to swing the country in favor of the Whigs, who were also Protestants (the rightful heir to the throne was the son of James II, but he was Catholic). George's personal motivation for taking the throne was to use its power to protect his native German province, Hanover. George I could not speak English, and he was ignorant of England's institutions and customs; as a result, he chose to let other men, like Prime Minister Robert Walpole, run the country while he passed his time in Germany ("George I"). George's indifference to England, although not actively damaging, certainly did not promote the health of the country he ruled only in name.

In 1724, just two short years before the appearance of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift found his first true literary success in the *Drapier's Letters*, a composition opposing the minting of copper coins and the "debasing" of the metals in the coins of Ireland (Traugott 7). His truthful and plainspoken *Letters* earned him popularity with the people, but made him a fugitive from the Irish Grand Jury, who wished to prosecute him for voicing opinions against the government. It is only because of his careful secrecy that his printers were unable to identify him; in fact, the only

man who knew the *Letters*' author was Swift's butler, who proved to be loyal (Traugott 8). Gulliver's *Travels* was published in 1726, and brought Swift additional fame. Unfortunately, Swift's good luck would not last for long.

Swift's wife, Stella, died at age 44 on January 28, 1728; after her death, Swift declined rapidly in health (Traugott 9). His fragile mental condition, thought to be exaggerated by the Meniere's disease, worsened steadily until, in 1741, he was appointed legal guardians to care for him. When Swift finally died in Ireland in October of 1744, he was 78 years old, and his debased mental condition had reduced him to a public and literary laughingstock (Traugott 10).

## The Genesis and Development of *Gulliver's Travels*

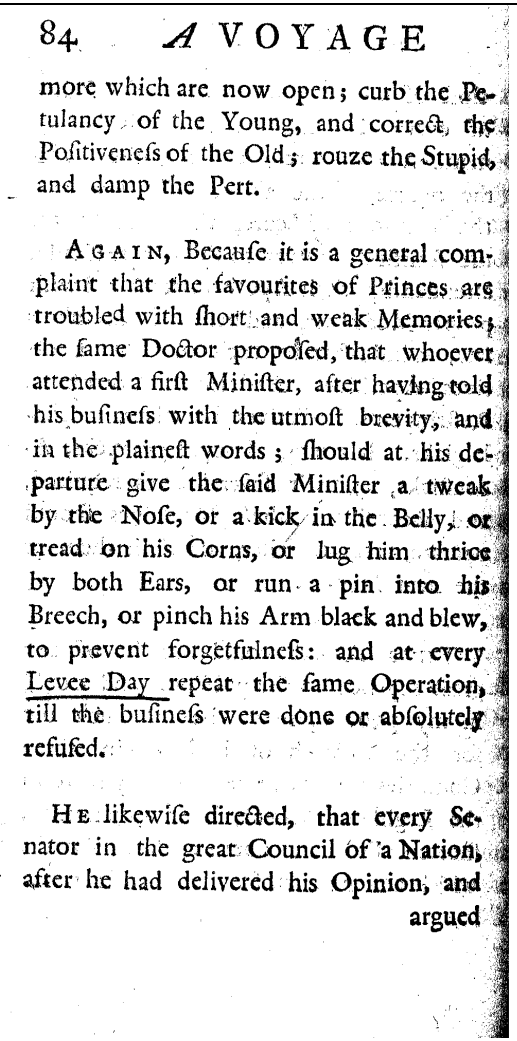
Jonathan Swift's most popular book, *Gulliver's Travels*, was rooted in high emotions and took a prodigious amount of work to tame and construct into a satire. Some scholars claim that Swift was drafting the manuscript as early as 1721, seven years before its publication, and that he was influenced by the travelogues that he read around that same time (Crook 47). The culmination of the work was forced by Swift's personal feeling of impotence in the community (Crook 46). Crook claimed that Swift felt "the need to make a significant statement in the context of the seemingly never-ending regime of the Lord Treasurer, Sir Robert Walpole . . ." (46-47). Swift's success with the *Drapier's Letters* surely encouraged him to publish further works, as well.

Of course, Jonathan Swift had seen the power struggles of England personally. He first became a prebend in Kilroot, Ireland in 1695. In 1699, after the death of Sir Temple, Swift took a position as a personal chaplain for the Earl of Berkeley. One short year later, he became the vicar for Laracor and a prebend at St. Patrick's in Dublin. His position as a man of the church gave him ample opportunity to watch the entwined political and religious struggle of the nation.

Swift's friendships with political leaders like Harley and Bolingbroke also may have given him unusual insight into the politics of the time (Knowles xii). His Anglo-Irish heritage gave him a personal interest in the welfare of both nations. All of the events surrounding his life and the position in which he found himself must have contributed to his disgust with the factions of the nation and his ability to write a witty and insightful satire of England.

When he was ready to take it to the press, Swift invented a long and twisted series of contacts. He had his friend, John Gay, write the cover letter that would accompany the manuscript, and Swift claimed that the author was his cousin, Lemuel Gulliver. He then asked Richard Sympson to contact the publisher, Benjamin Motte, on August 8, 1726. Perhaps Swift's earlier experience with the *Drapier's Letters* encouraged him to engage in such secrecy. Yet, at the same time, Swift was known to love jokes, and since the title page of his work featured his portrait, it is possible that he was unafraid of the consequences of his work. By October 28 of that year, the first editions were in print (Fischer 3). Within the week, the first printing was sold out (Fischer 4). On November 16, Alexander Pope wrote a letter to Swift in which he claims that *Gulliver's Travels* was broad enough in its satire on pretension, scientific folly, etc. to not anger anyone person in particular (Fischer 3). There is still debate today whether or not Swift owes his generality to his publisher, Motte. Some claim that Swift was joking, once more, when he accused Motte of editing his text, and others claim that Motte only did so to protect Swift from committing political and social suicide (Fischer 4-5).

Gulliver's Travels, Part III Chapter VI "A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrib, and Japan" From Special Collections 1727 edition.



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more which are now open; curb the Petulancy of the Young, and correct the Poſitiveneſs of the Old; rouze the Stupid, and damp the Pert.

AGAIN, Becauſe it is a general complaint that the favourites of Princes are troubled with ſhort and weak Memories; the ſame Doctor propoſed, that whoever attended a firſt Miniſter, after having told his buſineſs with the utmoſt brevity, and in the plaineſt words; ſhould at his departure give the ſaid Miniſter a tweak by the Noſe, or a kick in the Belly, or tread on his Corns, or lug him thrice by both Ears, or run a pin into his Breech, or pinch his Arm black and blew, to prevent forgetfulneſs: and at every Levee Day repeat the ſame Operation, till the buſineſs were done or abſolutely refuſed.

HE likewiſe directed, that every Senator in the great Council of a Nation, after he had delivered his Opinion, and argued

| Modern Paraphrase |
| --- |
| Once more, since there exists an overall grumbling about the Princes' favored men being afflicted with brief and lax/unhealthy memories; this very physician suggested that anyone who go before a first minister, after presenting his issues/complaints as succinctly as possible, and in simple language; ought to when he leaves serve the aforementioned minister with a squeeze on the nose, or a kick in the stomach, or by stepping on the corns on his foot or pulling his ears three times or pricking him with a pin through his pants, or by pinching his arm until it bruised to ensure his memory: and then each Levee Day to do the identical action until the issues are resolved or entirely dismissed. |

Etymology and Analysis of "Levee"

The use of the word "levee" in the compound word "Levee Day" in the above passage may confuse modern readers, for it is far from the modern usage of the word. In twenty-first century vocabulary, however, there are many commonly known words that share the same root as Swift's "levee." A "levee," to the modern mind, is "an embankment to prevent the overflow of a river" ("levee" def. 1a OED). Modern readers of appropriations bills may also think of the verb "levy," another related word. Levy is defined as the "action of raising money, an army" ("levy"). "Levity" is another familiar word that is related to all of the aforementioned terms, and it means "light" or a lightening of the spirits ("levity"). Bakers using a Clabber Girl product might even recognize its contribution, along with yeast, as a *leavening* agent. A "levator" is a "muscle that raises" ("levator"). "Levant" became a word that denoted the East, especially of the Mediterranean regions ("levant"). Of course, rising and light are related terms that evoke sun imagery, and sun imagery is often associated with royalty (i.e. King Louis XIV of France, the Sun King). It is this line of associated ideas that leads the reader to the intended meaning of the word "levee" as it was used by Jonathan Swift in the specified paraphrase.

"Levee," in the way Jonathan Swift used it, is derived from French word meaning "the time of rising," according to dictionary maker Samuel Johnson. It can also mean a "concourse of those who croud [sic] round a man of power in a morning" ("levee" Johnson). Bailey, in his 1726 dictionary, agrees that it is the time when one gets up, but he also claims that it may mean "a lady's toilet," in the French sense of one's process of getting ready for the day ("levee" Bailey). This last definition, however, does not fit the context of the passage.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines levee in many ways, the most pertinent being "an assembly held (in the early afternoon) by the sovereign or his representative, at which only men

are received," and the dictionary indicates that this particular definition of the word was the one used by Britain and Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ("levee" def. 2b OED).

Although all of the prior definitions have been specific to the word by itself, "levee" is used by Swift as half of a compound noun to describe what *kind* of day or *which* day it was. Thus, Jonathan Swift's usage of this word in combination with "day" refers to the appointed days when men were allowed to approach the royalty's appointed representatives with their concerns, an institution which inhabitants of Britain and Ireland alike would have recognized.

## The Developments and Culture of 1726

The year of *Gulliver's Travel*'s publication, 1726, was marked by the characteristics of its era, namely the Age of Enlightenment. This era emphasized "skepticism towards the doctrines of the church, individualism, a belief in science and the experimental method, [and] the use of reason . . ." (Jones). In this tradition, advances were being made in almost every area of life. The era was open to or even avidly looking for new ideas; *Gulliver's Travels* entered into a world of new discovery and willing acceptance. The following chart outlines a few of the notable events occurring at the same time that Swift was publishing *Gulliver's Travels*.

| Science | Art and Theater |
| --- | --- |
| -Stephen Hales published *Vegetable Staticks*. He claimed in this essay that vegetables "imbibe" dew during hot weather in order to survive the heat of summer (Probyn 154, 156). This same man also killed a dog by making it breathe the same air over and over again, forcing it into the dog's lungs when it could no longer breathe on its own; he then forced it to breathe fumes from brimstone before it died (Probyn 157-160). This sort of horrendous experiment is strikingly similar to the experiment Gulliver satirically speaks of in his trip to the Academy. | -The artist G.B. Tiepolo (Grun 334-5) began his first great work, a fresco painting in the palace of the Archbishop ("Tiepolo").<br>-A British artist William Hogarth created twelve engravings to accompany the text of a satirical work by Samuel Butler called *Hudibras* ("Hogarth"). He also created a scandalous engraving entitled "The Punishment of Lemuel Gulliver" (see appendix 1) depicting the same sort of scatological humor that Swift indulged.<br>-In music, the German Handel (Grun 334-5) published one of his greatest works, *Scipione* ("Handel").<br>-A French composer, Francois Couperin, made musical innovations by taking an Italian musical form, the tri-sonata, and making a French version; he published *Les Nations*, a work composed of four "suits," in 1726 ("Couperin").<br>-Dancer Marie de Camargo debuted at the Paris Opera with fresh ideas about ballet, cutting her skirt off at her ankles and performing "male" dance steps ("Camargo, Marie"). |

| Literature | Politics |
| --- | --- |
| -Daniel Defoe (Grun 334-5) finished publishing his three volume work entitled *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*; it was a guide-book ("Defoe"). Perhaps this is evidence that travel books were becoming increasingly popular in this era of exploration. He also published *An Essay Upon Literature, The Political History of the Devil*, and *A System of Magick; or, A History of the Black Art* ("Defoe" Dictionary). These kinds of non-theological publications would have been banned in earlier eras, but the Enlightenment promoted the questioning of established religious ideas.<br>-A Scottish man, Allan Ramsey founded a circulating library in Edinburgh in 1726, the world's first ("Ramsey"). This event "greatly stimulated the production of books, particularly of novels..." ("libraries").<br>-French author Voltaire (Grun 334-5) moved to England after being exiled from France for inappropriate writings ("Voltaire"). England may have been more open to his presence. | -Sir Daniel Dolins published *The Third Charge...to the Grand Jury...of the County of Middlesex* (Probyn 188). In this essay, Dolins praises the authorities and claims that the government actively encourages "the universal Good and Welfare of the whole Community..." (Probyn 192).<br>-The British Empire and Russia made an alliance against Turkey (Grun 334-5). This move may indicate a desire to end the tumultuous conflicts that had already plagued England for over a century. |

| Theology | Daily Life |
| --- | --- |
| -In religion, St. John of the Cross was canonized (Grun 334-5).<br>-Joseph Butler, a bishop, was gaining increasing fame while preaching at Rolls Chapel in London. His professed theology was that morality lay in self-love, benevolence, and conscience ("Butler").<br>-Another Englishman, William Law, was producing such works as "*The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-Entertainment*" and "*A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*" ("Law"). It would seem as though the country of Great Britain was beginning to fall away from some of the more polarized policies that Swift lived through and beginning to branch out into new theological territory. | -In daily life, *Lloyd's List* was popular. This publication detailed commerce schedules, especially that of ships. A few years later, in 1734, its name would be changed to *Lloyd's List and Shipping Gazette* ("Lloyd's List"). The popularity of this type of publication points to a growing emphasis on industry and the commercial market. |

The marks of the Enlightenment can be found in all of the events enumerated above. One of the characteristics of this era was skepticism toward the church's doctrines. Although the church's influence can still be seen in the works of William Law and the canonization of St John, at the same time, a bishop is becoming famous for his popular idea that self-love led to morality (not the traditional Ten Commandments approach to morality). The birth of a shipping magazine shows an individualistic interest in the opportunity to profit financially from sea lanes. Science as depicted in the chart may have been primitive, but the presence of such bizarre ideas demonstrates the eagerness with which men were pursuing knowledge of all living things. Experimentation can be clearly seen in the innovations in music, musical forms, and dance. Despite the fact that England was still recovering from years of governmental instability, the praise of an Englishman and the formation of an alliance point to a government moving away from violence.

Ultimately, it would seem as though Jonathan Swift's most popular book was published in an era ripe to receive it. The Age of Enlightenment was an ideal setting for the production of a work that wished to shed light, albeit humorously, on the flaws of established institutions. Swift's earlier publications, like *Tale of a Tub* and the *Drapier's Letters*, were censured by many for impiety and for opposing the established authorities (Traugott 3). However, the rapidly changing Britain was now moving in the direction of advancement, rather than political upheaval and war. After all, by 1726, Defoe can publish a book on the origin of black magic without danger. Great authors such as Voltaire also wrote during this time, and he even sought refuge in England as a more liberal and sophisticated society than France. Clearly, England was becoming engaged in the Enlightenment way of thinking.

Perhaps the people received *Gulliver's Travels* so well, not only because of its universal appeal to both young and old (Knowles 29), but also because they were accustomed to being presented with new ideas and were looking for change. It is possible that the people of Britain were tired of the political intrigues, the wars, and the crises that marked the country's history, and that satire was readily welcomed as an echo of their own thoughts and feelings. The travels of the book captured their imaginations and satisfied their desire for exploration. The ideals of the Age of Enlightenment formed the attitudes of the book's audience.

## Concluding Reflections

The creation and development of this paper created a challenging learning experience for me. I struggled with this paper more than I would have with most; the amount of information to synthesize and explain succinctly was overwhelming at first. As a reflective learner, I struggled to complete an adequate level of research in a timely manner – I needed to thoroughly think through the steps of my paper in order to maximize my learning potential, a process that coincides with being both a reflective and a sequential learner according to the Felder Inventory. As I composed my paper, the pressing need for action instead of reflection may have lessened the information's impact on me during my initial research and composition stages. I then looked to my classmates and professor for feedback and critiques, fitting in with my designation by Grasha as a dependent learner. By reading other people's comments on my work and rewriting parts of my paper, I had the opportunity to be more reflective and think about word choice and unity. This, of course, resulted in much better work. Although it happened by chance, the combination of charts and text in the paper reflects my reported balance between visual and verbal learning styles assessed by Felder. The most challenging aspect of writing this type of paper is that I occasionally struggle to grasp the overall concepts, even though the details are

clear to me. In other words, I am not a “global” learner. As a result of my learning styles, I discovered that I first grasped terminology, then a basic chronology, an outline of how the varied parts would fit together, and then (almost at the last minute) the bigger concept of the work in context. However, despite the obstacles I encountered, I feel as though the end result was worth the effort and that I have gained valuable experience in learning quickly and actively.

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Appendix 1

**Figure 1 "The Punishment of Lemuel Gulliver" by William Hogarth**