



## “300 Years of Gulliver’s Travels”

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*Why Should I Read This?*

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) published *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* in 1726. Issued anonymously by London printer Benjamin Motte, the book presented itself as an ordinary travel narrative written by a ship’s surgeon named Lemuel Gulliver. Motte even included a fake frontispiece portrait of “Captain Gulliver” to enhance the illusion of authenticity. Readers would soon discover, however, that this travel narrative was anything but ordinary.

By 1726, Swift was living in Dublin and serving as Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, a prestigious position but one that he had initially regarded as a kind of political exile. Fifteen years earlier he had been in the thick of London party politics, writing and editing the Tory periodical *The Examiner* and helping to shape public debate during the War of Spanish Succession. After the fall of the Tory ministry in 1714, Swift found himself watching English politics from across the Irish Sea. This view of the factional rivalries, financial scandals, and expanding imperial ambitions of the early 1720s forms the backdrop of the satire that would become known as *Gulliver’s Travels*.

What began as a sharply topical political text has endured for centuries as one of the most recognizable works in English literature. As we mark the 300th anniversary of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Dr. Lanning’s lecture will explore how Swift’s story has been read and reimagined by generations of readers and why it continues to speak to us today.



**Questions:**

1. What is your earliest memory or impression of *Gulliver’s Travels*? How old might you have been when you first encountered some version of this text?
2. Have you seen any movie or TV adaptations of *Gulliver’s Travels*? How “faithful” do you think they were to the text? What parts of the story did they seem most interested in portraying?
3. Why might certain sections of *Gulliver’s Travels* resonate more and have greater popularity with certain periods? For instance, why might American publishers have been particularly interested in Gulliver’s time in Lilliput during the Revolutionary War?
4. Alternatively, why might certain sections of Gulliver’s Travels be bowdlerized or even omitted in certain periods? For instance, why might Victorian publishers have cut out Gulliver’s adventure in Houyhnhmmland?
5. What makes a book popular for three centuries? What is it about *Gulliver’s Travels* that has made it a classic text for so many readers?
6. Is the *Gulliver’s Travels* we read today the same text that Swift wrote in 1726? Is a Revolutionary-era American edition the same text as a Victorian edition? What do we make of the paradox that in order for a book to persist across centuries, it must be reprinted, repackaged, and sometimes significantly changed?