

Q: Compare and contrast the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians in *Gulliver's Travels*

The first two books of the *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift comprise of two successive voyages to first the land of Lilliput, and then to Brobdingnag. There are many similarities in the way both these travels are narrated. The shipwreck technique is used, as the Gulliver reaches these islands after an accident and the eventual rescues. However these two journeys are distinctly representing two worldviews, two associated principles of living that intersect each other. The basic major difference between the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians is the difference between the "small" and the "big", the "petty" and the "lofty," the "dwarfs" and the "giants." The small Lilliputians as well as their king are more severely engaged in futile disputes, quarrels and battles that seemed to satirize the English-French and the Catholic/Protestant conflicts. The big Brobdingnagians and their king were more generous and sympathetic and less quarrelsome or corrupt. The empire of Lilliput is full of civil controversies and commotions whereas the land of the giant Brobdingnagians is a society of simple laws and having little civil litigation.

The Lilliputians stand about six inches tall and are ruled by an Emperor who appoints his high court (unfortunately he bases his appointments on rope dancing rather than brains). The court is mischievous- those in power plot against one another. As far as technology is concerned, they are master mechanics, their favorite piece of machinery being weapons. Gulliver tells the reader that everything in Lilliput is proportionate to the Lilliputians' size and that even their eyesight is adjusted so that they can see things closer than Gulliver can.

Gulliver also describes many of Lilliput's laws, telling the reader that dishonesty and false accusations are punished more severely than theft and other terrible things are punished in England. If someone in Lilliput accuses another but is proven to be wrong in the accusation, the accused is punished severely while the falsely accused person is rewarded.

Also, Gulliver tells the reader that children are raised by the state rather than their parents. Different classes learn about different things. The nobility's children, for instance, learn about honor, justice, courage, modesty, clemency, religion, and love of country.

The Brobdingnagians on the other hand are giants. The king laughs at English politics but requests a detailed description of the government of England, which Gulliver relates. The king asks him many questions, challenging various aspects of the government and having particular difficulty with England's violent past. In the end the king concludes that the English are well below the Brobdingnagians, calling them "the most pernicious Race of Little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth."

Unlike the Lilliputians, the Brobdingnagians abhor weapons and desire peace, but their government also tends to make rash decisions. No form of government is ideal, the simplistic Brobdingnagians enjoy public executions and have streets infested with beggars. Lilliputians are vicious and unscrupulous, they have two religious sects which are divided between those who prefer cracking open their soft-boiled eggs from the little end, and those who prefer the big end.

Recommended reading (all can be found in J-Stor)-

1. Sir Walter Scott, 'On Gulliver's Travels'.
2. Laura Brown, 'Reading Race and Gender in *Gulliver's Travels*'.
3. Douglas Lane Patey, 'Swift's Satire on "Science" and the Structure of *Gulliver's Travels*'.
4. J. Paul Hunter, 'Gulliver's Travels and the Novel'.