

## **GULLIVER'S TRAVELS BOOK 4 (DETAILED SUMMARY)**

**CC3**

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### **Chapter I**

"The Author sets out as Captain of a Ship. His Men conspire against him, confine him a long Time to his Cabin, and set him on Shoar in an unknown Land. He travels up into the Country. The Yahoos, a strange Sort of Animal, described. The Author meets two Houyhnhnms."

After five months at home, Gulliver leaves his children and pregnant wife yet again to go on his fourth voyage, this time as captain. Not long into the trip, his crew mutinies, locking him into his cabin for a great deal of time and threatening to murder him. Eventually the crew, who plan to become pirates, drop Gulliver off on an unknown island.

Gulliver walks inland until he comes across a field of strange creatures. After observing them for some time he comments, "Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my Travels so disagreeable an Animal, nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an Antipathy." Soon Gulliver comes to realize that these are actually naked human beings behaving like cattle. Gulliver comes face to face with one of them. He hits it with the side of his blade when it comes at him violently. The animal-like human (which Gulliver later learns is called a Yahoo) cries out, causing the rest of the forty Yahoos to surround Gulliver.

Gulliver fears the worst until the Yahoos suddenly flee because of a grey horse coming toward them. The horse takes an interest in Gulliver and circles him until another horse comes along. Gulliver observes that their whinnies to each other sound almost like a language. Gulliver hears the word Yahoo several times and repeats it to the great surprise of both horses. The horses then teach Gulliver the word Houyhnhnm, which Gulliver later learns is their word for themselves-for horse. Afterward, the grey horse signals to Gulliver that he should walk in front of him, which he does.

### **Chapter II**

"The Author conducted by a Houyhnhnm to his House. The House described. The Author's reception. The Food of the Houyhnhnms. The Author in Distress for want of Meat. Is at last relieved. His Manner of feeding in this Country."

Gulliver and the grey horse arrive at a home where Gulliver expects to meet the horse's human masters. The two move through every room of the house and meet several other horses before Gulliver realizes that the grey horse is the master of the house.

After some discussion between the horse and his wife about whether or not Gulliver is in fact a Yahoo, he is brought out to the stable where the Yahoos are kept and is made to stand next to one of them. Aside from the extra hair, longer nails, and nakedness of the Yahoo, they are the same.

Gulliver makes a kind of bread out of the horses' oats for his dinner and is given a small room near the house with some hay to sleep in.

### **Chapter III**

"The Author studies to learn the Language. The Houyhnhnm his master assists in teaching him. The Language described. Several Houyhnhnms of Quality come out of Curiosity to see the Author. He gives his Master a short Account of his Voyage."

After about three months of living among the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver has learned their language quite well and can answer most of their questions. He tells them about the mutiny that landed him on their shores, but they have a very difficult time understanding, because they have no concept of what a lie is. They tell Gulliver that "The Word Houyhnhnm, in their Tongue, signifies a Horse, and its Etymology, the Perfection of Nature."

The horses believe that Gulliver is a Yahoo-but a more rational and civilized Yahoo. Gulliver, wanting to separate himself from the Yahoos as much as possible, asks not to be called a Yahoo anymore.

### **Chapter IV**

"The Houyhnhnms' Notion of Truth and Falsehood. The Author's Discourse disapproved by his Master. The Author gives a more particular Account of himself, and the Accidents of his Voyage."

Gulliver continues explaining the concept of lying to his master. He also explains the relationship of horses and humans back in England. The horses cannot believe that humans would be able to control creatures that are so much stronger than they are, but Gulliver explains that horses are tamed beginning at a very young age.

## **Chapter V**

"The Author at his Master's Commands informs him of the State of England. The Causes of War among the Princes of Europe. The Author begins to explain the English Constitution."

Over the next two years, Gulliver explains much about the English government and political systems. Gulliver tries to explain war and the reasons why humans kill each other. His master says that Yahoos in England are worse than Yahoos because they use their reason to gain power but use it badly.

## **Chapter VI**

"A Continuation of the State of England. The Character of a first Minister."

Gulliver continues telling his master about the vices of the English people. He paints a particularly disturbing picture of lawyers and doctors, saying that lawyers are the stupidest among the Yahoos and doctors are corrupt and seldom cure their patients.

### Analysis

In the country of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver meets the species that is the most skeptical of him-and for good reason. Gulliver must do everything he can to separate himself from the Yahoos, a very different situation from his distinct positions in Lilliput and Brobdingnag. In order to accomplish this, Gulliver does small things daily like using his best manners, eating with a knife and fork, keeping his clothes on, and being as clean as possible. He shows that he can use language, can reason well, and can be prudent and mannerly.

It is interesting to note that from the very beginning of his time in the country of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver strives to separate himself from his own species. Is this what Swift has been trying to do his entire life? It often is difficult to strive for individual human greatness among a mass of people who hardly try and have hardly any notion of what greatness would be. In Brobdingnag, when Gulliver explained the English people and their way of life to the king, the king decided they were lowly creatures and Gulliver became offended, trying to defend his people. Something is different now in the country of the Houyhnhnms. When the grey mare tells Gulliver that he thinks his people are worse than the Yahoos, Gulliver is quick to agree.

What is different here? Only Gulliver's experiences since Brobdingnag and his contact with the Yahoos. Through the Yahoos, Gulliver has come to see some awful aspects of human nature, and Swift has shown his readers what they would be (and often are) without the intelligence and graces of which they are capable. Gulliver seems willing to turn his back on the English people in favor of those he deems better than the English. Now that he has been exposed to many alternatives, he can think carefully about who to admire and what political systems to favor, and the English certainly come up short in relation to the Houyhnhnms.

Also interesting in these chapters is Gulliver's plain admonishment of lawyers and doctors. Gulliver's negative commentary about lawyers is in many ways not surprising except for its level of ferocity. Lawyers seem no better than politicians, going to court over the petty human squabbles that Gulliver satirized as early as Part I. Gulliver's description of doctors as shallow and greedy people who would kill a patient as soon as cure him is surprising to contemporary readers, especially because Gulliver has spent so many years working as a surgeon. One should remember that eighteenth-century medicine was still rather poor.

## **Chapter VII**

"The Author's great Love of his Native Country. His Master's Observations upon the Constitution and Administration of England, as described by the Author, with parallel Cases and Comparisons. His Master's Observations upon Human Nature."

Gulliver has come to love the Houyhnhnms, their society, and their way of living. He writes, "I had not been a Year in this Country, before I contracted such a Love and Veneration for the Inhabitants, that I entered on a firm resolution never to return to human Kind, but to pass the rest of my Life among these admirable Houyhnhnms in the Contemplation and practice of every Virtue."

Gulliver then describes a conversation with his Master in which he is honored by being asked to sit farther away. His Master tells Gulliver that his conclusion, after learning all about Gulliver's fellow human beings, is that they are not as different from Yahoos, "their Brethren," as originally thought.

## **Chapter VIII**

"The Author relates several Particulars of the Yahoos. The great Virtues of the Houyhnhnms. The Education and Exercise of their Youth. Their general Assembly."

In order to study the Yahoos more closely, Gulliver asks to spend some time among them, which is granted. Gulliver is completely disgusted by the Yahoos. They smell terrible, are completely unkempt, and act ridiculously, even throwing their excrement at one another. When Gulliver sneaks away to a pond for a bath, he is nearly assaulted by one of the female Yahoos but is saved by a Houyhnhnm.

### **Chapter IX**

"A grand Debate at the General Assembly of the Houyhnhnms, and how it was determined. The Learning of the Houyhnhnms. Their Buildings. Their manner of Burials. The Defectiveness of their Language."

Gulliver's master attends a great assembly as the representative of his district. When he returns he tells Gulliver that they were discussing whether or not to exterminate the Yahoos- and that he suggested they be castrated when young, just as Gulliver told him horses in England often are. That way they will be easier to tame, and they will eventually die off. In the meantime, the Houyhnhnms can breed asses, which are much stronger and more manageable than Yahoos.

Gulliver tells the reader that the horses have no system of letters and do not read or write, but that they maintain their knowledge through oral tradition. They also have very few diseases and can calculate the year by the revolutions of the sun. Houyhnhnms live to about seventy or seventy-five years old, and when they die no one makes a big fuss.

### **Chapter X**

"The Author's Oeconomy and happy Life among the Houyhnhnms. His great improvement in Virtue, by conversing with them. Their Conversations. The Author has notice given him by his Master that he must depart from the Country. He falls into a Swoon for Grief, but submits. He contrives and finishes a Canoo, by the help of a Fellow-Servant, and puts to Sea at a venture."

Gulliver is given a nice room in the Houyhnhnms' home, where he settles in very comfortably. He makes new clothes and enjoys his life very much. The other Houyhnhnms, however, begin to worry about a Yahoo living among Houyhnhnms. They fear that Gulliver may lead a revolt among the other Yahoos. They tell Gulliver's master that it is time for him to leave the island. When Gulliver hears this news, he faints from grief. Having no other

choice, Gulliver builds a canoe over the next two months. Heartbroken, he sets sail, but not before kissing his master's hoof.

## **Chapter XI**

The Author's dangerous Voyage. He arrives at New-Holland, hoping to settle there. Is wounded with an Arrow by one of the Natives. Is seized and carried by Force into a Portugueze Ship. The great Civilities of the Captain. The Author arrives at England."

Gulliver paddles away from the shore, determined not to go too far from the Houyhnhnms. He writes, "My Design was, if possible, to discover some small island uninhabited, yet sufficient by my Labour to furnish me with the Necessaries of Life, which I would have thought a greater Happiness than to be first Minister in the Politest Court of Europe." He finds a small island, where he lives for four days on raw oysters and other shellfish until he is discovered by the natives. He runs to his canoe and rows away, but not before being shot in his left knee.

Gulliver sees a Portuguese ship, but he feels disgusted by the thought of sharing a ship with Yahoos, so he chooses to return to another side of the same island. The Portuguese land and find Gulliver. He refuses to leave, but the crewmates decide not to leave him by himself on the island. The captain, Don Pedro, is very kind to Gulliver, but Gulliver cannot stand to be near Yahoos, so he spends most of the voyage in his cabin alone.

Finally back in England, Gulliver's family is thrilled to see him alive, but Gulliver thinks of them only as Yahoos and cannot stand to be near them. He buys two horses and spends at least four hours a day in the stables conversing with them.

## **Chapter XII**

"The Author's Veracity. His Design in publishing this Work. His Censure of those Travellers who swerve from the Truth. The Author clears himself from any sinister Ends in writing. An Objection answered. The Method of planting Colonies. His Native Country commended. The Right of the Crown to those Countries described by the Author is justified. The Difficulty of conquering them. The Author takes his last leave of the Reader; proposes his Manner of Living for the future; gives good Advice, and concludes."

Gulliver concludes the tale of his travels, saying that everything he has written is true. He also tells the reader that he is now able to eat at the same table with his family although he is

still working to teach them to overcome their vices. He only wants to help the world he lives in to become more like the world of the Houyhnhnms.

### Analysis

Gulliver tells his master about the way horses are treated in England, and the master cannot believe it, just as the English would never believe that there was a place where humans are ruled by horses. Yet, in the country of the Houyhnhnms, this relationship makes perfect sense. (Compare Planet of the Apes.) Again perspective plays an important role in Gulliver's journeys. There has been a major change between the two places. Here the horses have intelligence and virtue while humans, according to the grey mare, are different from Yahoos only in appearance-their morality is the same. Gulliver does not disagree. Swift encourages us to consider what really does distinguish better and worse examples of humanity.

Swift creates an interesting parallel between the governments of the Houyhnhnms and of the English when the grey horse attends the great assembly-both exhibit similar senses of entitlement to rule on the basis of merit. The Houyhnhnms are discussing whether or not to exterminate the Yahoos, never pausing to discuss whether or not they have the right to subjugate and kill the morally weaker species. Similarly, the English colonists of Swift's time often felt moral superiority to the native peoples-but if they really were like Yahoos, they had little right to think so. And even if they were superior in various ways, the English needed to think carefully about the alternative ways of ordering life and society before deciding what to do about it-as Gulliver has learned.

The Houyhnhnms' decision to do away with the Yahoos is very interesting. First of all, the idea to slowly kill off the race by castrating the males came from Gulliver. He has directly contributed to the destruction of a subspecies of his own race, but he shows no remorse. Also, the horses seem to feel better about killing off the Yahoos slowly by keeping them from breeding rather than actually murdering them, even though the end result is the same.

Even though the reader has been on Gulliver's side throughout his adventures so far, here we wonder if Gulliver has gone too far in giving up on humanity in favor of another species altogether. Why would he choose to abandon his people, his life, and his family? It is true that Gulliver is the kind of person who is called to the sea, to live apart from traditional society. And we understand the criticism of humanity, especially if we have some of the religious sensibilities of most of Swift's readers, knowing that humans are flawed in many

ways. Can we redeem ourselves? When Gulliver returns, he slips into his reclusive state, spending large amounts of time talking to his horses, but he retains some interest in helping humans become better-apparently through the work of comparing alternatives and choosing what is better-the life of the Houyhnhnms.

Meanwhile, one should not forget that even though the Yahoos are disgusting, they express something attractive about human nature. The Yahoos have strong emotions and are sexual beings. They have fun, frolicking and playing in the fields. They are not afraid to get dirty or to have less-than-perfect manners. The Houyhnhnms, on the other hand, do not have love, do not shed a tear when one of them dies, and are aloof and rather cold. Perhaps it is not so bad being a Yahoo-but we should be wary of this pull toward rough-and-tumble life. It was not quite right to be an absentminded intellectual, and it is not quite right to be aloof like the Houyhnhnms, yet it is not quite right to be a Yahoo. We must consider the alternatives and decide for ourselves.