



*The
Lilliputians*

The Lilliputians are men six inches in height but possessing all the pretension and self-importance of full-sized men. They are mean and nasty, vicious, morally corrupt, hypocritical and deceitful, jealous and envious, filled with greed and ingratitude — they are, in fact, completely human.

Swift uses the Lilliputians to satirize specific events and people in his life. For example, Swift's model for Flimnap was Robert Walpole, the leader of the Whigs and England's first prime minister in the modern sense. Walpole was an extremely wily politician, as Swift shows, by making Flimnap the most dexterous of the rope dancers. Reldresal, the second most dexterous of the rope dancers, probably represents either Viscount Townshend or Lord Carteret. Both were political allies of Walpole.

The articles that Gulliver signs to obtain his freedom relate the political life of Lilliput to the political life of England. The articles themselves parallel particular English codes and laws. Similarly, the absurd and complicated method by which Gulliver must swear to the articles (he must hold his right foot in his left hand and place the middle finger of his right hand on top of his head with the right thumb on the tip of his ear) exemplifies an aspect of Whig politics: petty, red-tape harassing.

Swift also uses the Lilliputians to show that English politicians were bloody-minded and treacherous. In detail, he records the bloody and cruel methods that the Lilliputians plan to use to kill Gulliver; then he comments ironically on the mercy, decency, generosity, and justice of kings. The Lilliputian emperor, out of mercy, plans to blind and starve Gulliver — a direct reference to George's treatment of captured Jacobites, whom he executed — after parliament had called him most merciful and lenient.

By the end of Book I, Swift has drawn a brilliant, concrete, and detailed contrast between the normal, if gullible, man (Gulliver) and the diminutive but vicious politician (the Lilliputian); the politician is always a midget alongside Gulliver.