**Gulliver's Travels**

**By Jonathan Swift**

**Summary and Analysis of Part III, "A Voyage to Laputa ... and Japan"**

**Chapter I**

"The Author sets out on his Third Voyage, is taken by Pyrates. The Malice of a Dutch-man. His arrival at an Island. He is received into Laputa."

After being at home for only ten days, [Gulliver](https://www.gradesaver.com/gullivers-travels/study-guide/character-list#gulliver) is visited by a ship captain who invites him on a voyage departing in two months. Gulliver convinces his wife that this is a good opportunity and sets off, again working as the surgeon.

After they sail for three days, a storm arises, driving the ship to the north-northeast, where they are attacked by pirates. They are unable to defend themselves. Gulliver insults the captain of the pirate ship and as punishment is set adrift in "a small Canoe, with Paddles and a Sail, and four Days Provisions."

On the fifth day of sailing in his canoe, Gulliver reaches a small island, where he spends the night in restless sleep. In the morning he notices that what he thought was a cloud floating above the island is actually a floating island. Gulliver calls up to the people he sees moving about the island. They lower down a system of pulleys that can pull Gulliver up.

**Chapter II**

"The Humours and Dispositions of the Laputians described. An account of their Learning. Of the King and his Court. The Author's Reception there. The Inhabitants subject to Fears and Disquietudes. An Account of the Women."

As soon as Gulliver steps onto the floating island, he is surrounded by a crowd of people. He finds them very strange even though they are of a size similar to his. Their heads are slanted to the left or right, and their clothes have pictures of either musical instruments or astronomical signs.

Gulliver learns that he is on Laputa. The people here have terribly short attention spans, so they carry around "Flappers." These are used for hitting other people during conversation in order to keep them focused. After dinner a man is sent to teach Gulliver the language.

Gulliver finds that the Laputian houses are built very poorly and with no right angles. This is odd because the men here are obsessed with mathematics. The people here never have peace of mind. They are constantly worrying about dangers such as the possibility that the sun might go out. The women are very sexual creatures who often cheat on their husbands, especially with their preferred men from Balnibarbi, but the men are so wrapped up in mathematics that they do not notice. [The King](https://www.gradesaver.com/gullivers-travels/study-guide/character-list#the-king) of Laputa is not remotely interested in the government of England.

**Chapter III**

"A Phenomenon solved by modern Philosophy and Astronomy. The Laputians' great Improvements in the latter. The King's method of suppressing Insurrections."

Gulliver learns that Laputa is floating above Balnibarbi, the island on which he landed his canoe. Laputa contains 10,000 acres and is perfectly circular. It is able to move about the surface of Balnibarbi but not beyond its borders, and it can move up and down because of its magnetic forces. When a town from Balnibarbi acts up, the King has Laputa moved directly above it so that it can receive no sun or rain. No one from the Royal family is allowed to leave Laputa.

**Chapter IV**

"The Author leaves Laputa; is conveyed to Balnibarbi; arrives at the Metropolis. A Description of the Metropolis, and the Country adjoining. The Author hospitably received by a great Lord. His Conversation with that Lord."

Gulliver finds Laputa terribly boring because the people there are all much more intelligent than he is. He has a hard time conversing with them and is generally ignored. He petitions to go down to Balnibarbi, and his request is granted. On Balnibarbi, Gulliver meets Lord [Munodi](https://www.gradesaver.com/gullivers-travels/study-guide/character-list" \l "munodi), who invites Gulliver to stay at his home. Munodi's home is beautiful and kept well, but when the two travel out into the country Gulliver finds that the rest of the land is barren and sadly kept. Munodi explains that this is because many years back, people from Balnibarbi visited Laputa, and when they returned they decided to change things to a more academic way of living. This idea has failed. Munodi's land is plentiful because he never changed his way of living.

**Chapter V**

"The Author permitted to see the grand Academy of Lagado. The Academy largely described. The Arts wherein the Professors employ themselves."

Gulliver visits the Grand Academy of Lagado, the largest metropolis of Balnibarbi. The scientists there are constantly working on experiments that Gulliver finds pointless. For instance, he meets a man who is trying to extract sunlight from cucumbers. Other experiments are trying to turn excrement back into the food it began as, trying to make gunpowder from ice, and trying to employ spiders as weavers of silk. Professors are also attempting to alter the communication of Balnibarbi by doing away with language altogether.

**Chapter VI**

"A further account of the Academy. The Author proposes some Improvements, which are honourably received."

Gulliver then visits the part of the Academy designated for studies of government. He finds the professors especially in this wing to be entirely crazy. They propose such things as studying excrement to find treasonous people and taxing people based on beauty and wit.

**Chapter VII**

"The Author leaves Lagado, arrives at Maldonada. No ship ready. He takes a short Voyage to Glubbdubdrib. His Reception by the Governor."

Gulliver decides to take a trip to the Island of Luggnagg but finds that no ships will be available for the voyage for a month, so it is suggested that he visit Glubbdubdrib, which he translates to mean the island of sorcerers or magicians. Once he arrives in the governor's home, he finds that "The Governor and his Family are served and attended by Domesticks of a kind somewhat unusual." Gulliver learns that the governor has the power to bring back the dead for the purpose of serving him. Gulliver is given the option to bring back anyone he would like. He chooses Alexander the Great, who tells Gulliver that he actually died because he drank too much. He then brings back a parade of other famous dead.

**Chapter VIII**

"A further Account of Glubbdubdrib. Antient and Modern History corrected."

Gulliver spends a great deal of time speaking with various famous dead people. He speaks with Homer, Aristotle, and Descartes and even gets them into conversation with one another. He later brings back a few English Yeomen and finds them much larger and stronger than the English people today. He worries that his countrymen are diminishing with time.

**Chapter IX**

"The Author's Return to Maldonada. Sails to the Kingdom of Luggnagg. The Author confined. He is sent for to Court. The manner of his Admittance. The King's great Lenity to his Subjects."

Gulliver travels to Luggnagg, posing as a Dutchman. He says, "I thought it necessary to disguise my Country, and call myself an Hollander, because my Intentions were for Japan, and I knew the Dutch were the only Europeans permitted to enter into that Kingdom." His true identity is discovered, however, and Gulliver is made a prisoner. He later learns that anyone who wants to come before the king must crawl on hands and knees and lick the floor. The king, it turns out, uses this tradition to his advantage when he wants to get rid of someone-simply by poisoning the floor.

**Chapter X**

"The Luggnaggians commended. A particular Description of the Struldbrugs, with many Conversations between the Author and some eminent Persons upon that subject."

Gulliver learns about the Struldbrug children who are born to Luggnaggians but who have a red dot on each of their foreheads. These children are immortal, which causes Gulliver to fantasize about what he would do if he were immortal. He dreams of the ability to take his time becoming a master of many different subjects and amassing great wealth. But Gulliver soon comes to learn that the Struldbrug children are actually very unhappy and jealous of those people who can die. They find their own lives depressing.

**Chapter XI**

"The Author leaves Luggnagg and sails to Japan. From thence he returns in a Dutch Ship to Amsterdam, and from Amsterdam to England."

After offering Gulliver employment in the court but finally seeing that he is determined to leave, His Majesty gives him license to leave, a letter of recommendation to the Emperor of Japan, and a gift of 444 pieces of gold and a very valuable red diamond. In Japan he is told to trample the crucifix, which all Dutchmen are happy to do, but Gulliver manages to get out of doing so. He takes a ship to Amsterdam and then to England, where he happily returns to his family.

**Analysis**

Again, Gulliver arrives at his new adventure in dramatic style, this time being cast from his ship by pirates and left to drift about the sea. The time alone serves as a kind of existential preparation for encountering a new society. He arrives exhausted, hungry, thirsty and alone, completely ready to take in new ideas and opinions. Even so, he finds many of the Laputians' ideas difficult to swallow. In general, Part III gives Swift a chance to try out a number of ideas for alternative civilizations, and each one could support its own full narrative.

On Laputa, the floating island, Swift creates a way of physically stratifying a society. Those who work with their hands for a living-and the ridiculous professors-live on Balnibarbi. The upper class, including the royal family and the more able intellectuals, live on the floating island of Laputa. In this way Swift makes the separation between the two types of people visually obvious, with the better above the lesser.

We also learn that when a town from Balnibarbi acts up and needs to be punished Laputa is moved above them, blocking out the sun and rain. This signifies a serious problem that Swift sees in many governments. Justice should only be about retribution when necessary, but the royalty makes the citizens even more unhappy by taking away that which they need to live. Swift indicates that rebellions could be avoided all together if the citizens' satisfaction became a priority of the royalty.

One main difference between the people of Laputa and the people of Balnibarbi is that those living in Laputa have very limited attention spans. One thinks here of the absentminded professor.

Indeed much of what goes on there seems to be related to the curse of being smart but impractical. Although the people of Laputa are very intelligent, it gets them little. With their slanting heads, they do not see things directly as they are. They seem to have no common sense, which for someone like Swift, who cares a great deal about the material world, may be more important than raw intelligence. Because of their lack of sense, they spend too much time worrying about ridiculous things rather than noticing what is really wrong in their own lives. They are so unaware that the men do not know that their wives cheat on them. This emasculating fact is all too common for the unmanly intellectual.

When Gulliver visits Balnibarbi, he finds that the people have suffered an even worse fate. Being unsuited for the intellectual life, they have tried to live on the basis of pseudo-academic life and have failed miserably. The land has become barren because the people neglect it completely. Instead they focus all of their attention on their ridiculous academics. By trying to be something they are not-that is, like many would-be intellectuals-the Balnibarbi people have lost what they once had, and now they are left with nothing. Swifts comments here on the importance of self-evaluation and living the life to which one is suited. There is elitism here, with the lower people needing to understand their natural place-but it is an elitism based on nature. A society needs many different kinds of people in order to survive, and not everyone should be an intellectual-and besides, the intellectuals do not do so well themselves.

In Glubbdubdrib, Gulliver is able to bring back great figures from history, including truly wise people such as Aristotle. Nearly everything that he learns is different from what has been recorded in the history books. Swift shows here that history cannot be trusted, especially because those involved typically are not the ones who write their own history. The trouble now is that Swift has shown us that we cannot trust others and we do not often do well when we falsely trust in ourselves. We must trust in ourselves but only with a clear view of who we really are-our proper location, perspective, and size all matter.

In Luggnagg, Gulliver meets a king who has his courtiers lick the floor as they approach him, crawling on their hands and knees. Once again, we find Swift commenting on the ridiculous rules of royals who abuse their power.

Immortality turns out not to be as wonderful as many people think. The Struldbrugs are depressed, perhaps because there is no reason to act quickly. They have all the time in the world. Meanwhile, they have plenty of time to see what mortals have done for themselves and their society in their fleeting time alive.

It is interesting that Swift includes Japan, a real place, among these fantastic places. In his time, Japan was a closed society that did not generally want to traffic with the outside world. It was at the far edge of the East and as mysterious as these truly fictional places.