

Reconstruction for Children Across Two Centuries: Educational Strategies and Moral Transformation in the Adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726-1895)

Haifeng Hui
School of Foreign Languages
Huazhong University of Science and
Technology Wuhan (China)
huihf@mail.hust.edu.cn

ABSTRACT: This study examines the historical adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* into children's literature across the 18th and 19th centuries, focusing on the interplay between educational imperatives, societal norms, and textual revisions. By comparing key adaptations – such as the 1727 Stone and King edition (18th century) and the 1864 Betton and 1895 Routledge editions (19th century) – the analysis reveals distinct strategies in handling gender perspectives, sexual taboos, and ideological framing. The 18th-century adaptations, exemplified by the Stone and King version, prioritized moral conservatism through textual omissions and euphemistic language, particularly regarding gender equality and sexual innuendos. In contrast, 19th-century editions retained original language but selectively excised content deemed inappropriate for children, reflecting Victorian-era moral rigidity and educational reforms that emphasized literary integrity alongside moral safeguarding. The study underscores how children's literature adaptations serve as cultural artifacts, mirroring evolving educational philosophies, class dynamics, and societal anxieties. By contextualizing these adaptations within industrial revolution-era urbanization, Enlightenment critiques, and shifting perceptions of childhood, the paper highlights the pedagogical and ideological motivations shaping literary sanitization for young readers.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Children's Literature adaptation; Educational factors; Gender concepts; Social norms; Victorian morality; XVIII-XIX Centuries.

Introduction

Although both are travelogues written in similar time periods, *Gulliver's Travels* is not a natural continuation of *Robinson Crusoe*. On the contrary, it is a parody and questioning of the latter and the entire genre of novels and their premises. However, the fate of these two novels in the children's literature world is very similar. They have been adapted into children's works since the 18th century and have always been loved by children. The popularity of *Gulliver's Travels* after its publication can be seen in Pope and Gay's letter to Swift: «It is read by people in high places and common people, from the Privy Council to the nursery»¹. Therefore, the two novels are very complementary to each other. Their differences in themes, literary styles, narrative strategies and even underlying values have led to different treatments of them in children's literature adaptations. The differences in their adaptation strategies confirm each other and help us understand children's literature adaptation more comprehensively. This paper selects the historical children's version of *Gulliver's Travels* for research, and fully explores the shaping role of educational factors in children's literature adaptation.

The first edition of *Gulliver's Travels* was published by Benjamin Motte in 1726 (hereinafter referred to as the Motte edition). Many versions appeared later, the most authoritative of which was the Faulkner edition in 1735, while² children's editions were quite rare. In the appendix of his book *Gulliver's Travels as Children's Literature*, M. Sarah Smedman listed the main children's versions of *Gulliver's Travels* that he examined, among which the only 18th-century British version was published by J. Stone and R. King in 1727 (hereinafter referred to as the S. King edition, a total of 175 pages)³. The S. King edition is also the only 18th-century children's edition that the author has found⁴. This

¹ F. Elrington Ball, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, London, G. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1913, Vol I, p. 359.

² Although Swift complained that some parts of the Motte version were changed by the publisher after it was published, and critics often consider the Faulkner version to be the most authoritative version, since the Motte version was the first edition of the novel, published in 1726, and the Faulkner version was published in 1727, the version that SK adapted should have been the Motte version, and the adapter could not have seen the Faulkner version. Therefore, the Motte version and the Faulkner version are selected for comparative analysis here.

³ M. Sarah Smedman, *Like Me, Like Me Not: Gulliver's Travels as Children's Book*, «The Genres of Gulliver's Travels», ed. Frederik N. Smith, Delaware, University of Delaware Press, 1990, p. 77.

⁴ The British book market had just started to rise in the 18th century, and the adult book market had yet to be developed, let alone children's books. After the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, booksellers saw the huge business opportunities in the book and published related books one after another. Some pretended to be Gulliver's relatives and continued to write other adventure stories, such as *The Adventures of John Gulliver*, *The Son of Captain Gulliver* and *Fables Adapted from the Manuscripts of Captain Gulliver's Great-grandson*. Some wrote sequels based on a country or scene in *Gulliver's Travels*, such as *The Academic Situation in Lilliput*

paper selected the Motte edition instead of the most authoritative Faulkner edition for comparative analysis with the S. King edition, taking into account the issue of publication order. The Motte version was published in 1726, the Stone & King edition was published in 1727, and the Faulkner version was published in 1735, so the adapter of the Stone & King edition could only use the Motte version as the original version for his adaptation.

2. *Views on women in Gulliver's Travels*

Margaret Anne Doody believes that Swift has a sympathetic and supportive attitude towards women, and women are indispensable to balancing Swift's world⁵. In *Gulliver's Travels*, we can see Swift's attitude towards women, and in the adapted version, we can see that this attitude is not accepted by everyone.

1. Thus the young Ladies there are as much ashamed of being Cowards and Fools, as the Men, and despise all personal Ornaments beyond Decency and Cleanliness: Neither did I perceive any Difference in their Education; made by their Difference of Sex, only that the Exercises of the Females were not altogether so robust; and that some Rules were given them relating to domestic life, and a smaller Compass of Learning was enjoined them: For the Maxim is, that among People of Quality, a Wife should be always a reasonable and agreeable Companion, because she cannot always be young. When the Girls are twelve Years old, which among them is the marriageable Age, their Parents or Guardians take them home, with great Expressions of Gratitude to the Professors, and seldom without Tears of the young Lady and her Companions (Motte edition, Part I, Chapter VI, p. 105).
2. Thus the young Ladies there are as much asham'd of appearing Cowards and Fools, as the Men, and despise all personal Ornaments beyond Cleanliness and Decency. When they are Twelve Years of Age, or marriageable, they are taken Home by their Parents with Expressions of Gratitude to the Professors for their Care (Stone & King edition, Part I, Chapter VI, p. 45).

The paragraphs compared here are obviously different. The sixth chapter of the King edition retains all the key points of the Motte edition from the beginning to the quoted part, but here the underlined part in the Motte edition

and the Story of the King's Librarian and The Giants in the Land of Giants. There are also comments on the original work, such as *Gulliver's Secret – Comments on Gulliver's Travels*. In short, *Gulliver's Travels* gave birth to a large number of best-selling books, but there were few children's versions. At that time, the books published for children were mainly textbooks and classic children's stories and rarely included long contemporary novels like *Gulliver's Travels*.

⁵ M.A. Doody, *Swift and Women*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2003, p. 87.

is completely omitted without any mention, so this omission is very important. The deleted content is: 1. Gulliver did not find that the education of men and women is different due to gender, only the intensity of exercise and the scope of academic research are slightly different; 2. They have a motto: the wife of a rich family should be a kind and sensible partner, because she cannot stay young forever. The first point involves the relative status of men and women and the educational problems it brings, and the second point is an explanation of it.

From his life, Swift was relatively fair to women⁶. He did not put on a chauvinistic face to sneer at women, saying that they were wrong in this way or inferior to men in that way. On the contrary, from his correspondence with women throughout his life, we can see that although women were in a relatively low status at that time and had few opportunities to receive education or to develop knowledge and intelligence, Swift showed a sympathetic, encouraging and supportive attitude towards women. He also wrote or said compliments to women as was popular, but he was concerned about their vision, mind and talent, not their appearance or manners. In a letter to Ms. Pendarves on October 7, 1734, he wrote:

I wrote this for the good of the public, because there is now a vicious and absurd saying among men in this country that women should be fools in any place except in family affairs, and there are still many men who hold this view⁷.

Swift's second sentence that was deleted was a refutation of such popular views. He was highly recognized by these women. Ms. Pendaforth wrote at the beginning of her letter to Swift in 1734: «I find it as wonderful to correspond with you as to listen to a nightingale sing»⁸.

However, the phenomenon of relative equality between men and women in Liliput (not complete equality, it is just a matter of degree) is different from the situation of male superiority and female inferiority in Britain at that time. The tradition since Christianity has always emphasized the underground status of women and required wives to obey their husbands completely. This situation has not changed after the Renaissance and the Reformation. In the 18th century, even the thinkers of the Enlightenment still held this idea. Rousseau believed that:

Women should obey men by nature. Although men are not perfect at all, women absolutely obey them and learn to endure unfair treatment and insults from their husbands without complaint⁹.

⁶ This is Doody's view. However, some scholars believe that Swift does not have a welcoming or sympathetic attitude towards women. He may not like women, but just behaves in a condescending manner.

⁷ Elrington Ball, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, cit., p. 95.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹ W. Xiaoyan, *Study on the Status of Women in Britain in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Beijing, People's Publishing House, 2007, p. 56.

On the issue of women's education, Britain began to establish girls' schools in the 18th century. Before that, only girls born in families with conditions had the opportunity to receive family education. Therefore, when the novel was adapted, the idea of women receiving education (especially education similar to that of men in Lilliput) was not generally accepted by society. The deletions here reflect the more conservative style of the adapted version.

In his introduction to Swift¹⁰, Ellington Pole, the editor of *The Letters of Swift*, pointed out that a more serious matter is that there are many obscene jokes in Swift's correspondence. Not only in his letters to men, but even in his letters to Stella, there are many jokes that any decent man would blush when reading them, and this is written to a woman he admires very much. Although people at that time were far more straightforward than modern people, Swift was incomparable to people at that time in this respect. Laurence Sterne defended himself like this:

I am not as outrageous as Swift. He tried to keep a distance from Rabelais, and I tried to keep a distance from him¹¹.

Gulliver's Travels is often accused of being indecent because it contains some more exposed satires, jokes and descriptions. Thackeray once angrily criticized it, saying that it «has dirty words, dirty ideas, anger, and obscene»¹².

3. Motte edition's adaptation of texts involving gender or sexual references

It can be seen that some of the plots in the novel are criticized for being out of line even in the adult world, not to mention being inappropriate for children. Swift's novel does have some vulgar or sexually suggestive descriptions, so the following illustrates how the children's version handles this.

1. THAT which gave me most Uneasiness among these Maids of Honour, when my Nurse carried me to visit them, was to see them use me without any manner of Ceremony, like a Creature who had no sort of Consequence. For, they would strip themselves to the Skin, and put on their Smocks in my Presence, while I was placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies, which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting Sight, or from giving me any other Emotions than those of Horror and Disgust (Motte edition, Part II, Chapter V, pp. 86-7. Underline mine).
2. What gave me the greatest Uneasiness, when I went to visit these Ladies of

¹⁰ Ball is referring here to Esther Johnson.

¹¹ Ellington Ball, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, cit., p. XLVII.

¹² From C.W. Eliot, *Essays: English and American*, vol. 28, New York, PF Collier & Son, 1909, p. 32.

Honour, with my Nurse, was to see them strip and shift themselves before me, as if I was of no manner of Consequence, which gave me no other Emotions than those of Horror and Disgust (Stone & King, Part II, Chapter V, p. 119).

When the nurse took Gulliver to visit the ladies-in-waiting, the girls did not care about Gulliver's presence at all and changed their clothes in front of him recklessly, as if he did not exist. The description of this scene in the Motte version is more straightforward and clear, while the Stone & King edition has a lot of deletions. The Motte version says «they stripped themselves to the Skin», while the Stone & King edition is more subtle and removes the last three words. The Motte version says:

When they put me on the dressing table, facing their naked bodies, to be honest, I don't seem to feel any temptation at all, except horror and disgust, I have no other feelings. (91)

In contrast, the Stone & King edition is much more conservative. It deleted all the previous sentences and only retained the sentence «This scene gave me only horror and disgust». The deleted sentences are undoubtedly considered inappropriate for children by the adapter, especially words like « tempting sight» should not appear in the children's version.

1. That the Productions of such Marriages are generally scrofulous, rickety, or deformed Children; by which means the Family seldom continues above Three Generations, unless the Wife takes care to provide a healthy Father among her Neighbours, or Acquaintance, in order to improve and continue the Breed. That a weak diseased Body, a meagre Countenance, and sallow Complexion, are no uncommon Marks of a Great Man (Motte edition, Part IV, Chapter VI, pp. 96-7. Underline mine).
2. That a weak Body, and lean Countenance were no uncommon Marks of a Great Man; and a healthy, robust Mind was seen being disagreeable in a Man of Quality [...] (Stone & King, Part VI, Chapter VI, pp. 143).

In the fourth volume, Gulliver introduces the life of young nobles to the Houyhnhnms in this way: they have lived a leisurely and luxurious life since childhood, and have been living a life of debauchery once they grow up. In the end, they have to marry a woman of humble origin, ugly face, and weak body. The offspring produced in this way are often weak and sickly, but everyone believes that this is the sign of aristocratic blood. The beginning of the Motte excerpt goes on to say,

If this man's wife does not try to find a strong father for her child among the neighbors or servants to improve the breed so that it can pass on the family, the family will be extinct before the third generation (Motte edition, Part IV, Chapter IX, p. 3).

While satirizing the life of the nobility, this sentence also satirizes the common phenomenon of adultery among the mistresses of the nobility. As above, this is all content that is not suitable for children, so it was completely deleted in the Stone & King edition.

For sexually suggestive texts, the editors are not limited to deletion. They can also use more ambiguous and implicit words or adjust the word order to reduce the impact, as shown below:

1. THE Women of the Island have Abundance of Vivacity; they condemn their Husbands, and are exceedingly fond of Strangers, ... Among these the Ladies chuse their Gallants: But the Vexation is, that they act with too much Ease and Security, for the Husband is always so wrapt in Speculation, that the Mistress and Lover may proceed to the greatest Familiarities before his Face, if he be but provided with Paper and Implements, and without his Flapper at his Side (Motte edition, Part III, Chapter II, p. 31-32).
2. The Women of Laputa have a great Deal of Vivacity; they despise their Husbands, and are very fond of Strangers, whereof many, ...Out of these, the Ladies chuse Lovers; but what's most vexing is, that they act with too much Ease and Safety, for, the Husband being always rapt in Thought, if he be but furnish'd with Paper and Instruments, and without his Flapper, the Mistress and her Gallant may proceed, even to Enjoyment, before his Face (Stone & King, Part III, Chapter II, p. 19).

The adaptation here is likewise out of consideration of sexual allusions, and hence «familiarity» in the Motte edition was replaced with the more general and ambiguous «enjoyment». «Familiarity» has the broader meaning of «familiarity» in daily life. According to the *OED*, another explanation is «undue intimacy». This meaning appeared in the 17th century. Combined with its usage characteristics, it should be the meaning in the above text. Therefore, this word has a bit of sexual teasing and is relatively direct. The S. King edition adopts a vague approach and replaces this word with the more general «enjoyment», which has a more bland meaning and obscures the sexual teasing in the original text, which is more in line with moral norms and censorship.

The Stone & King version made important adjustments to the order of sentences. The Motte version says:

But the most annoying thing is that their behavior is so calm and safe, because the husband is always in deep thought, so the lovers can be bold and intimate in front of him, if he (the husband) is given paper, pen and instruments but clapping is not there (Motte edition, Part III, Chapter II, p. 31).

The Stone & King edition is:

because the husband is always in deep thought, if he is given paper, pen and instruments but clapping is not there, the hostess and her lover can flirt as much as they want in front of him (Stone & King, Part III, Chapter II, p. 19).

The Motte version first explains that the lovers can be bold and intimate in front of the male host, which will give readers a strong psychological and moral impact, but this is precisely Swift's strongest criticism of the pseudoscience and unrealistic nature of the flying islanders. The target audience of the Stone

& King edition is children, so this situation is not appropriate, so it adjusts the position of the conditional clause, first explains the situation, let the readers know that the husband is in deep thought, paper, pen and instruments are by the side, and clapping is not there, and then tells the readers how bold the lovers are. This makes it easy for readers to understand, and the psychological and moral impact of the original work is also cancelled. When it was mentioned that these women really liked the people coming up from below, the Stone & King edition replaced the degree adverb «exceedingly» with «very», and the reason is the same.

Coincidentally, the following sentence again sees the order being adjusted, but this time the situation is reversed:

1. THE Wives and Daughters lament their Confinement to the Island, although I think it the most delicious Spot of Ground in the World; and although they live here in the greatest Plenty and Magnificence, and are allowed to do whatever they please, they long to see the World, and take the Diversions of the Metropolis, which they are not allowed to do without a particular License from the King; [...] (Mort Edition, Part III, Chapter II, p. 32).
2. Tho' this Island be the most delicious Tract of Ground in the World, and the Wives and Daughters live here in the most magnificent and plentiful Manner, being allowed to do whatever they please; yet they look upon their Abode in it as a Confinement, and long to see the Metropolis, [...] (Stone & King, Part III, Chapter II, p. 19).

The Motte version directly points out the fact at the beginning of the sentence, that is, the women on the flying island regret being confined to this place, and then uses a compromising parallel sentence to state how comfortable and pleasant life on the island is, but they still don't like it here, and it is very difficult to go on. Because of the use of compromising parallel sentences and the placement in the second half of the sentence, the statement is stable. The Stone & King edition puts «although» at the beginning of the sentence, and because «although» leads to more elements, it creates a suspense. Readers are eager to know the content of the subsequent turning point, and have to read until the end to understand that no matter how good the island is, these women still don't like it here, and also add a «yet» to strengthen the tone, so the Stone & King edition of this sentence has a more turning and surprising effect.

In the previous example, the Stone & King edition cancelled the surprise and shock effect of the Motte version by adjusting the order, while in this example, the surprise and suspense effect was strengthened by adjusting the order. Why? The previous example was about sexual allusions and ridicule, so the Stone & King edition weakened the impact of this aspect as much as possible in consideration of moral constraints and censorship, while this one is a general storyline, which enhances suspense in order to attract readers and mo-

bilize their curiosity and initiative. Although the effects of the two adjustments are positive and negative, they are both caused by the adapter's ideological and market motivations during the rewriting process.

The differences in Gulliver's individualistic factors, views on women, sexual taboos, and scientific views are mainly due to the genre. When Swift was writing, he once said: «My main purpose in writing this travelogue is to irritate the world, not to please it»¹³. In the book, he satirized many people and events, including Prime Minister Walpole, Wood coinage, Newton, and so on. In addition to timely satire, there is also satire on human nature, which is particularly evident when Gulliver introduces Europe to the Brobdingnags and the Houyhnhnms. The adapted version by Stanley King is a children's reading material, and education is the adapter's primary consideration. The name Gulliver means «credulity». He traveled from one island country to another and saw many places that were completely different from Europe. But what he observed was often only surface phenomena. He was passive and credulous. He was taken prisoner several times, but never escaped by his own wisdom and strength. He was always controlled by fate. Influenced by the individualism of the time, society attached great importance to the cultivation of children's independent spirit. Although the adapter could not completely reverse the direction of the whole story, he still made some subtle changes. When introducing his life background, a more independent image of Gulliver was created, which resulted in the relationship between Gulliver and the people around him in the Stone & King edition being different from that in the Motte version. Of course, the image of the more independent Gulliver conflicts with the structure and meaning of Swift's entire novel, but whether the adapter realizes this or not, he must put the fundamental purpose of education first.

In addition to being influenced by individualism, moral norms are another major issue that the adapters must consider. The characteristics of moral norms in British society during the Georgian period were that they focused on kindness to oneself and others, inner emotions and personal moral judgments, and correct and healthy emotions. This was a compensatory adjustment¹⁴ made due to the decline in the moral power of religion. After experiencing the catastrophe of the civil war and the restoration of the monarchy, the British welcomed a relatively corrupt and hedonistic Charles II. At the end of the 17th century, the social moral standards also declined along with the royal family's enjoyment. Jeremy Collier's «Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage» published in 1698 was a typical response to the moral decline. When people's belief in religion declines, they must rely more on their own inner moral power to maintain social stability. In this case, some defenders of traditional morality suggested strengthening the review of media and

¹³ See Elrington Ball, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, cit., Vol. III, p. 276.

¹⁴ R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, Penguin Books, p. 323.

public opinion tools and emphasizing the necessity of moral preaching. Swift's book contains many satires on the domestic situation in Britain at that time, and the comparison between Houyhnhnms and Yahoos in Book 4 is a slap in the face of human nature. These controversial points are worthy of consideration by the adapter, so it is reasonable for the adapter to make changes to the original text in order to cater to the mainstream moral norms of society¹⁵.

4. *The nineteenth century children's adaptation and the underlying educational factors*

The paper selected two children's versions of *Gulliver's Travels* published in the 19th century and the Motte version of 1726 for analysis and comparison. The purpose is to find the differences in adaptation strategies by analyzing the differences between children's versions in different historical periods, so as to find the social and historical reasons that affect the concept of children's literature and outline the historical changes in its development. The first one was published by S.O. Beeton in London in 1864. Its feature is that it is equipped with about 300 illustrations. The illustrations are in the style of sketches and are very vivid. These illustrations were designed by J.G. Thomson and engraved by W.L. Thomas. The illustrations are colorless. Hereinafter referred to as the Beeton version. The second one was published by George Routledge and Sons in London in 1895. The title page is equipped with color illustrations. There are also 43 black and white illustrations in the book. The title page also specifically states «Adapted for the young». Hereinafter referred to as the Routledge version.

After comparing the children's editions of the 18th and 19th centuries with the Motte edition of 1726, it is found that the children's editions of the two centuries have very different adaptation strategies. From the macro-level narrative structure and plot, although the St. King edition simplifies the plot, it rarely completely deletes a plot, and the story content is very complete. However, from the micro-level wording and sentence structure, the St. King edition can be said to be a version with relatively large changes. It often replaces words and adjusts the word order of the Motte edition and sometimes supplements it with abbreviations. The two versions published in the 19th century all retain

¹⁵ Swift was very cautious when publishing this novel. He stuffed the manuscript directly into Motte's door to avoid direct contact with the publisher, so that any subsequent speculation about the author of the novel could only be speculation and could not be confirmed. He further used various means in the preface to conceal his identity. This greatly reduced the political risks he might suffer. Even if someone guessed that he was the author of the novel, Swift enjoyed this guessing and was unwilling to admit it publicly.

the language of the Motte edition at the micro level without exception, without any word replacement, order adjustment or other text changes, but the plot has been deleted to varying degrees. These two different adaptation strategies are closely related to many factors of the social, historical, political and educational background at that time.

The Industrial Revolution first began in Britain in the second half of the 18th century, and then gradually expanded to other European countries. With the development of industry, a large number of rural people lost their land and had to leave their hometowns and flock to cities, which brought a large number of cheap labor to the development of industry. The dense population also accelerated the urbanization process, promoted the formation and confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the working class, and the middle class also rose in the city with the trend of industrialization. This series of changes greatly changed the historical environment at that time, had a profound impact on education, and also had an impact on children's books.

Before this, education in cities was generally limited to the wealthy middle and upper classes, and was generally based on hiring tutors. The content of education lacked a unified standard, and the methods varied from person to person. In rural areas, children received sporadic and informal education. After a large number of people poured into cities, the number of children increased significantly with the rapid growth of urban population, and many people began to call for attention to their education. However, in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, due to the lack of labor, the phenomenon of child labor was very serious, and children were physically and mentally devastated. It was only a luxury to set aside time for education. In addition, the shadow of the French Revolution had been lingering in European countries in the first half of the 19th century. The ruling class was worried that the growing working class would be a powerful force, and believed that after receiving primary education and learning to read, the people would be easily deceived by various media or «ulterior motives» works. Therefore, a suppressive policy was always adopted for the education of the masses. By the second half of the 19th century, with the further development of the Industrial Revolution and the improvement of urbanization, the problem of labor shortage was basically solved, and the number of child laborers decreased year by year. Moreover, with the continuous development of industry, the quality requirements for workers are also constantly increasing. The illiterate labor force initially liberated from the land is increasingly unable to meet the latest needs. Therefore, for the bourgeoisie, it has become an urgent need to improve the cultural quality of the general public. In addition, the benefits of the industrial revolution first unfolding in Britain have also emerged, and Britain's national strength has continued to increase. While the bourgeoisie has made huge profits, in order to ease class contradictions, maintain social order, and better serve capitalist production, it has used part of its profits to better exercise public functions. Against this

background, the issue of children's education has been raised again. Compulsory primary education was generally implemented in European countries in the mid-19th century. Britain was slightly behind in this regard and also generally implemented compulsory education in the second half of the 19th century. Even so, after the implementation of universal compulsory education, the upper class and elites were still very vigilant and paid particular attention to the content of education. The *School Review*, the earliest academic journal in the field of education, was founded by the University of Chicago in 1893. At that time, the contributors were not limited to the United States, but also many authors from Britain and other European countries. The main areas of research were the system of school education, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching materials. The establishment of academic journals is only an important and phased sign of the development of the field of education. Before that, the number of articles discussing education was already quite large. Taking *The Times* as an example, the number of articles on education between 1785 and 1900 reached 8,541¹⁶, and the number of articles on school education was 521. The two main issues that the ruling class and the elites are concerned about are what content is the most appropriate and safest, or, on the contrary, what content may disrupt social order and cause people to question the current ideology and should be avoided; the second is what content can effectively improve the quality of the educated. The first issue involves ideology and censorship, specifically in this paper, it is the issue of deletion of *Gulliver's Travels*.

The second issue is the quality of education, which explains why the two 19th century versions did not change the text. Richard Burton published an article titled *Literature for Children?* in the September 1898 issue of the «North American Review». He pointed out that modern education is based on the correct teaching of children. An important change at present is that people have re-recognized the cultural importance of English courses for native English speakers. One of the effects of the increased importance of English courses is the emphasis on literature. Many people realize that English language and literature are extremely important for the development of thinking. Therefore, Burton believes that it is necessary to increase the proportion of literature appreciation courses and to offer such courses earlier. The compilation of teaching materials is also important. The previous practice was to select some beautiful chapters from literary masterpieces for reading, and they were often edited and modified. The current practice is to read the complete work. Because literature is an organism¹⁷ no matter how young the reader is, it should be read from beginning to end. Burton said that this concept was

¹⁶ This is the search result for «education» in the Gale Group's «Times Online Database».

¹⁷ This concept comes from the Romantic view of literature as an organic and holistic concept.

widely implemented at that time. Many textbooks include entire works of literary classics¹⁸.

The two versions selected for this paper have not been altered, which is consistent with the popular practice in the education community at the time mentioned in Burton's article, which was to include literary works as completely as possible. However, we cannot simply conclude that there were no restrictions on the inclusion of literary works at the time. In the same article, Burton quickly mentioned: «But we cannot ignore the moral factor»¹⁹. Compared with the previous century, one significant difference in Britain in the 19th century was the emphasis on morality. Burton said:

When editing literary works, the moral factor must not be ignored... Mr. Howell said: «When the barbaric nature of mankind is conquered, we will no longer see its reflection in literature; the obscene sentences in great poems are deleted to make them suitable for public reading, and no one will read the works of pedant-pride. Because these things are indeed decadent»²⁰.

Therefore, although on the whole, the practice at that time was to include literary works as a whole, rather than just selecting some fragments, this did not exclude the necessary deletion of some paragraphs.

According to the statistics, the deletions related to sexual taboos in the two 19th century versions are as follows:

(1) The sixth and seventh paragraphs of Chapter 5 of Book 2 describe the ladies-in-waiting in the court of Brobdingnag. Because Gulliver was too small, the inhabitants of Brobdingnag often did not regard him as a human being, but as a pet, from the queen to the ladies-in-waiting. Therefore, they changed their clothes in front of Gulliver and even urinated in front of him without any scruples. This scene was unbearable for Gulliver: he could not stand the unpleasant smell emanating from their bodies, nor could he stand these vulgar behaviors. The skin of the ladies-in-waiting was so disgusting in his eyes. These two paragraphs were retained in the Beeton edition²¹; in the Routledge edition, both paragraphs were deleted²².

These two paragraphs involve descriptions of the body (although this kind of description of body exposure is not provocative, but disgusting), descriptions of women urinating, and even the way the maid put Gulliver on her naked breasts, which are all taboos. As Gulliver commented in the novel:

¹⁸ R. Burton, *Literature for Children*, «The North American Review», vol. 167, n. 502, 1898, p. 280.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ J. Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*, London, S. O. Beeton, 1864, p. 135.

²² Id., *Gulliver's Travels and Other Works*, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1890, p. 153.

Facing their naked bodies, to be honest, I don't seem to feel any temptation at all, except horror and disgust, no other feelings (Mort Edition, Part III, Chapter V, p. 86).

Readers are also likely to feel disgust and nausea, so these two paragraphs were partially deleted.

(2) In the third volume, Gulliver traveled to the flying island. The island was ruled by the king and nobles, but they were obsessed with their own research and did not care about their families. The abnormal interpersonal relationships made their wives and daughters very dissatisfied and yearned for a normal emotional life. In the fifteenth paragraph of Chapter 2, Gulliver mentioned that the women on the flying island despised their husbands, but were extremely fond of foreign guests. They chose their lovers from these people and cuckolded their husbands.

The Women of the Island have Abundance of Vivacity; they condemn their Husbands, and are exceedingly fond of Strangers, ...(1) Among these the Ladies chuse their Gallants: (2) But the Vexation is, that they act with too much Ease and Security, (3) for the Husband is always so wrapt in Speculation, that the Mistress and Lover may proceed to the greatest Familiarities before his Face, if he be but provided with Paper and Implements, and without his *Flapper* at his Side (Motte edition, Part III, Chapter II, p. 31-32. Numbers mine for later reference).

This passage is completely preserved in the Beeton edition. Not only that, it is also accompanied by a vivid illustration on page 195. The picture gives a positive description of the lady's face, and the adulterer wears a hat, so it is difficult to see his appearance clearly. The male host is far away from the couple, in a marginal position, and is blurred by shadows. He holds his head with his hand, as if thinking about something, and there is a globe in front of him. The protagonist in the illustration is the lady, while the two men have no obvious facial features. This artistic treatment and the text together highlight the irony of the story.



Pic. 1. A Woman of the Island with her gallant.

The Routledge edition takes a more cautious approach to this passage. Sentences 1-3 were deleted from page 220, and no illustrations were given. This actually damaged the plot and logic of the story to a certain extent, because after the adaptation, this paragraph started with saying that they were very lively and liked foreign guests, but it was vague about what they did, leaving the readers confused.

(3) The next paragraph describes the noble ladies and their daughters on the flying island, telling a story about the elopement of the prime minister's wife. Although they lived a wealthy life on the flying island and had no worries about food and clothing, the noble ladies were eager to see the world below. The wife of the prime minister of the kingdom was one of them. Although she had many children and the prime minister was a respectable man who loved her very much, she still went to Lagado under the pretext of recuperating from illness. Later, people found that she lived in a shabby little restaurant with an old and ugly servant. Her life was extremely miserable, but she was unwilling to come back. This paragraph was retained in the Beeton edition from page 195, but was deleted in the Routledge edition from page 221.

(4) The end of the eleventh paragraph of the eighth chapter of the third volume says that in the past hundred years, human beings have degenerated a lot. Syphilis has made the British people short, mentally unstable, and their fat smells bad. This was deleted in both versions.

However, we must always pay attention to the strict distinction between Swift's writing purpose and the adapted version. The original work belongs to satirical literature. Swift's two paragraphs (including similar paragraphs in other places) are not pornographic descriptions. Their purpose is not to arouse readers' associations or interests in certain aspects, but to exaggerate and satirize. Although the Lilliput and flying island he wrote about are both in a remote corner of the world (or should we say that they only exist in people's imagination), his starting point and end point are the familiar Britain. He just moved the sharp satire of reality to a remote flying island in a clever, imaginative and exaggerated way. This island is like the real British society, full of intrigues, politicians' intrigues, men and women in society and their romantic and happy lives. The arrogant posture of the little king, the infighting among the favorites, their arrogance, and their own insignificant and ridiculous stature, which they have not yet realized, form a sharp irony. The noblewoman's affair on the flying island and the example of syphilis causing human degeneration here are all intended to be ironic. As adult literature, they have their own profound connotations and meanings, but they are not appropriate as children's literature. The adapter neither needs nor can it consider such complex social realities in children's literature, so these paragraphs are deleted. The deletion reflects the difference in the adaptation process and genre, rather than the adapter's denial of the original work. This is the case with all the treatments of sexual taboo themes discussed later. Taboos always have specific

objects. The same theme is not a problem in adult literature, but may become a taboo in children's literature. It may even be a taboo in a certain period, but not in another period.

(5) Even more extraordinary is the scene in Book 4, Chapter 6, where Gulliver explains the situation in Europe to the Houyhnhnms. There are also differences in rank and status within the Houyhnhnms, which are determined by genetics; different Houyhnhnms are born with different talents, and there is no possibility of them getting better. Therefore, some Houyhnhnms are always in the position of servants and can never think of surpassing their own kind. Gulliver told his master that the nobility of his own country was completely different from that of the Houyhnhnms.

That our young *Noblemen* are bred from their Childhood in Idleness and Luxury; (1) that as soon as Years will permit, they consume their Vigour, and contract odious Diseases among lewd Females; (2) and when their Fortunes are almost ruined, they marry some Woman of mean Birth, disagreeable Person, and unsound Constitution, merely for the Sake of Money, whom they hate and despise. (3) That the Productions of such Marriages are generally scrofulous, rickety, or deformed Children; by which means the Family seldom continues above Three Generations, (4) unless the Wife takes care to provide a healthy Father among her Neighbours, or Acquaintance, in order to improve and continue the Breed. (5) That a weak diseased Body, a meagre Countenance, and sallow Complexion, are no uncommon Marks of a *Great Man*; ... (Motte, Part IV, Chapter VI, pp. 96-97. Numbers mine for later reference)

In the Beeton edition, sentences 1, 2, 3, and 4 are deleted from page 310, and in the Routledge edition, sentences 1 and 4 are deleted from page 351.

The differences in the deletions between the two versions also reveal the standards of the adapter when deleting the content. Sentence 1 tells readers that these young nobles fooled around with prostitutes and contracted venereal diseases. Sentence 2 tells readers that they had to find some women with bad family backgrounds and bad character to marry, just to covet their dowries;²³ Sentence 3 tells readers that the offspring of such families often get sick. Sentence 4 tells readers that young nobles are cuckolded. Sentence 5 tells readers that physical weakness is the true mark of nobility. Sentences 2 and 3 were retained in the Routledge edition because the content involved are relatively minor and tolerable. However, sentences 4 and 5 were deleted in all versions because they involve venereal diseases and cuckoldry, which are absolutely forbidden in children's books.

(6) The 15th paragraph of Chapter 7 of Book 4 says that a pregnant female Yahoo will have sex with a male Yahoo. This paragraph is retained in the Beeton edition (317), but deleted in the Routledge edition from page 359. The 18th

²³ This situation is also reflected in the work *Marriage -a-la-mode* by the 18th-century British painter Hogarth.

paragraph of Chapter 7 of Book 4 describes the coquettish female Yahoo in heat. This paragraph is retained in the Beeton edition (318), but deleted in the Routledge edition from page 360. These are all contents that are not suitable for children, so they were deleted.

Eighteenth-century Britain had its ideological roots. Porn writers found a perfect defense in materialistic philosophy, believing that everything in the world, including people, was material, so there was nothing wrong with the body getting pleasure. Pleasure in any form, even if it was brought about by pain and death, was acceptable as long as it was natural and rational, because pleasure was natural. In the 18th century, people believed that sex was good for physical and mental health. Decolletage and pornography were rampant, and there were even prostitute directories (such as Jack Harris's *The Whoremonger's Guide to London*), with more than 10,000 prostitutes in London. In contrast, the Victorians were notoriously prudish, and their excessive emphasis on morality was often ridiculed by later generations²⁴. Living in a post-Enlightenment era, they valued rationality very much, and Bentham's utilitarianism tried to study how to achieve the greatest happiness for the most people through concrete calculations. They believed that sex was the animal instinct left in human thought and was anti-rational. Although it could not be completely wiped out from the human world, it should be suppressed as much as possible. Muller wrote in his diary:

As long as the animal instinct of sex in people still occupies its always disproportionate position, any great progress in human life is impossible²⁵.

They disagreed with the habit of 18th century writers to like sex ridicule. In this respect, the style of 19th century novels is far from that of the previous century.

The change of philosophical concepts and class situation can be said to be the root cause of the difference in the attitude towards sex in literature in these two centuries, but this influence is deep-seated, and it affects people through the subtle influence of ideology. The direct manifestation of this deep-seated reason is the change of censorship system. It is a factor that writers, adapters and publishers need to fully consider when doing business. Although Britain also implemented compulsory primary education in line with the trend of continental Europe, its upper class and elites always worried that with the improvement of education level, the spread of new ideas among the people

²⁴ The famous female writer Virginia Woolf is an example. She grew up in the late Victorian era and was deeply imprisoned by Victorian moral norms and male worldviews during her teenage years. She was also trapped by them as an adult. For this reason, she devoted her life to awakening women's consciousness and improving their social status.

²⁵ J. Eli Adams, "Victorian Sexualities," *Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker, Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999, p. 128.

would bring instability. For the ruling class, the purpose of education is mainly to impart primary skills to improve the ability of the masses in order to improve the overall national strength, and to instill patriotic feelings and serve the political function. In Germany, the government believed that the excessive reading of ordinary people led to the decline of social morality, the disturbance of social order, and the unrest of the crowd. The publishing industry was considered by the government to be ideological poison and needed to be strictly controlled²⁶. Therefore, the censorship system of various countries was relatively loose in the 18th century, but later became more and more severe, and Britain was no exception. Although the UK abolished prior censorship in 1695 and has never restored it, this does not mean that the freedom of publication is unlimited. Books may be banned after publication for excessive speech or defamation²⁷. In addition to books, the government has also strengthened monitoring in other areas, especially focusing on visual media such as comics and theater. Because these media do not rely on text, they do not require the audience's education level, have a wider audience, and are more noticed by the government²⁸. Not only that, the British newspaper industry has been thriving since its rise in the 18th century. Many newspapers have a large readership due to their low prices (especially considering that a newspaper is likely to be read by multiple readers). Newspapers are a unique medium with a short circulation cycle, which means that traditional pre-publication inspections are not applicable. By the time it is discovered that the publication is unfavorable to the government or other content that is considered unhealthy, it is difficult to reverse the impact. In response to this situation, the government began to impose stamp duties on newspapers, the main purpose of which was to force newspapers to increase their prices and thus reduce circulation. Sometimes stamp duty accounted for 1/4 of sales revenue, and some newspapers had to double their prices. The increase in newspaper prices meant that many lower-class people could not afford newspapers, so the government achieved its goal of restricting public opinion in disguise. This tax was called «knowledge tax» in the UK until it was abolished in 1861 due to huge pressure.

In addition to prohibiting what content is not allowed to be published and reducing its readership through taxation, a more effective approach is to not clearly define what is unhealthy (or defamatory, etc.) content, and the legal provisions are vague, especially on sexual issues. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 is the main anti-obscene publication law in the UK. Before that, although the sale of obscene books was also illegal, the punishment for this

²⁶ R. Justin Goldstein, *The War for the Public Mind: Political Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Westport, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000, p. 5.

²⁷ In fact, publishers prefer pre-publication checks so that they can feel more at ease and don't have to worry about the books being banned after publication.

²⁸ The Licensing Act in England in 1737 is a perfect example.

behavior was mainly based on the relevant provisions in the Vagrancy Act 1824, which was introduced in response to the problem of vagrants caused by the large number of veterans in the UK after the Napoleonic Wars. Therefore, the provisions prohibiting the sale of obscene publications were marginalized in the Vagrancy Act 1824. Moreover, this behavior was treated as a common law misdemeanor, with lighter penalties and greater difficulty in enforcement, which could not effectively combat illegal authors and publishers. In view of this, Lord Campbell, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, introduced the draft of the Anti-Indecent Publications Bill, which caused heated debate in Parliament. The bill was eventually passed by Parliament. The law against obscene publications has evolved from being attached to the Vagrant Act to a special Anti-Indecent Publications Bill, which shows the increasingly strict trend in Britain's attitude towards sex in the 19th century²⁹.

In addition, the change in people's concept of children and childhood is also very important for the adaptation strategy of children's literature. An important change in education during the Enlightenment was Locke's blank slate theory. His view completely reversed the traditional Puritan view that children were born with original sin, thus giving rise to a climax of children's education reform. People adopted a gentler and more caring attitude towards children, focusing on the physical and psychological development of children. Locke's *On Education* had a great influence for a long time. Later, Rousseau's view on the good nature of children further contributed to the optimistic attitude towards children during the Enlightenment. For the Victorians, their views were much more complicated. According to the research of Claudia Nelson and Michelle H. Martin, the Victorians had contradictory views on children. On the one hand, they still firmly believed that (middle-class³⁰) children were morally pure and innocent, and their pure nature could often infect adults and save them spiritually and morally. At the same time, influenced by the early 19th century, they believed that it was difficult for children to be redeemed and they urgently needed guidance from adults. The former was a potential possibility, while the latter was a reality, that is, children with the power of redemption did not naturally possess such power, and not every child was like this³¹. They could only do this under the influence of good teaching (from adults). Popular stories at the time, such as Hesba Jessica's *First Prayer* (1867), George Eliot's

²⁹ According to Leonard Freedman, censorship became increasingly strict not only in the publishing industry, but also in the theater (except for some comedies and musicals), where Puritan attitudes continued into the 20th century, and censorship also played a role. See L. Freedman, *The Offensive Art: Political Satire and Its Censorship Around the World From Beerbohm to Borat*, Westport, Praeger, 2009, p. 82.

³⁰ They believed that children from the lower classes were born with original sin, and therefore it was right for them to live a hard and tiring life.

³¹ C. Nelson, M.H. Martin, *Sexual Pedagogies Sex Education in Britain, Australia, and America, 1879-2000*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 17.

Silas Marner (1861), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885) are all examples of children with spiritual redemption. Books on teaching methods, child rearing, and health guides warn readers that children lack strong moral self-control and are therefore particularly susceptible to temptation and corruption, so parents must always be vigilant.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Gulliver's Travels* adaptations across two centuries illuminates the profound influence of sociohistorical contexts on children's literature. In the 18th century, adaptations like the Stone and King edition navigated Swift's satirical complexity by excising or softening content related to gender parity and sexual critique, aligning with emerging bourgeois sensibilities and limited educational access. By the 19th century, industrial advancements and compulsory education necessitated a balance between literary preservation and moral censorship, as seen in the Betton and Routledge editions. The Victorian emphasis on moral purity and childhood innocence led to strategic deletions of sexual references and subversive themes, even as Romantic ideals of organic literature prompted textual fidelity elsewhere.

These adaptations reveal children's literature as a contested terrain where pedagogical goals, class ideologies, and moral orthodoxies converge. The sanitization of Swift's original critique – whether through omission, rephrasing, or narrative restructuring – reflects broader efforts to mold young minds into socially compliant subjects. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how shifting perceptions of childhood, from Lockean «blank slates» to Victorian symbols of moral redemption, directly shaped editorial choices. Ultimately, this research underscores the dual role of children's adaptations: as vehicles for cultural transmission and as mirrors of the tensions between literary authenticity and ideological control. By tracing these dynamics, the paper contributes to interdisciplinary dialogues on education, censorship, and the enduring negotiation between satire and didacticism in children's literary traditions.