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The Meaning of the Palace on Fire Scene in *Gulliver's Travels* and Its Adaptations in Selected English and Polish Abridged Versions of Jonathan Swift's Novel

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Pawel Kaptur (Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce)

ORCID: 0000-0002-8861-858X

Abstract. The palace on fire scene in the first part of *Gulliver's Travels*, when the main protagonist extinguishes the flames by urinating on them, has become the symbol of Swift's personal criticism of authority and the institution of monarchy. For obvious reasons, in children's version of the novel, the scene is remade and reinterpreted in a multitude of manners to remove the embarrassing physiological element that both young readers and their parents might find outrageous or simply offensive. The aim of the present article is to discuss the critical meaning of the scene in relation to Jonathan Swift's political views and to demonstrate the great miscellany of variants of the scene in selected abridged versions of *Gulliver's Travels* in Polish and English.

Key words: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 18th century England, political literature, palace on fire scene

1. INTRODUCTION

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is undeniably a masterpiece of English literature. Written in 1726 it is a multilayered novel which can be read at multiple levels of interpretation. It might be labelled as a universal utopia or dystopia, a topical novel full of critical allusions and undertones directed at the political reality contemporary to Swift's times, an adventure book, and a fantastic fairy tale. While analysing the palace on fire scene, the perception of the novel through the prism of topicality seems to be most logical and well-grounded. According to Oxford Dictionary, topicality, by definition, is "an immediate relevance, interest, or importance owing to its relation to current events" (Pearsall 2001, 1954) which means that a topical novel is the one which includes a number of concealed or straightforward allusions, often critical towards contemporary people, events or places. In this sense, *Gulliver's Travels*, and especially its Book One, teems with topical

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allusions. Swift constantly attacks the Prime Minister Robert Walpole, alludes to the political parties of Whigs and Tories, scorns the system of electing ministers, and laughs at the long-lasting conflicts between England and France. One of the most famous and, at the same time, most striking allusions of the novel which depicts the author's personal attitude towards the institution of authority is included in the fire on palace scene. The aim of the paper is to scrutinize the meaning of the scene and illustrate how the editors of twelve abridged versions of *Gulliver's Travels* in English and Polish have dealt with the problematic side of the scene.

2. THE MEANING OF THE PALACE ON FIRE SCENE

George Orwell (2010, 35) notices that in some moments it is hard not to notice that "Gulliver is simply Swift himself," which is especially conspicuous in "one incident in which Swift seems to be venting his private grievance against contemporary society," and it is the famous palace on fire scene in Book One of the novel:

I heard the word 'bulgrum' repeated incessantly; several of the emperor's court making their way through the croud, intreated me to come immediately to the palace, where her Imperial Majesty's palace was on fire. ... I had the evening before drank plentifully of a most delicious wine, called glimigrim... which is very diuretick. By the luckiest chance in the world, I had not discharged myself of any part of it. The heat I had contracted by coming very near the flames, and by my labouring to quench them, made the wine begin to operate by urine; which I voided in such quantity, and applied so well to the proper places, that in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished; and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction (Swift 2001, 40)¹.

Even though Orwell implies in his essay that the passage is Swift's "private grievance against contemporary society", the definition of the society in this particular case needs to be narrowed down as the scene actually stands for the novelist's private grievance against the institution of monarchy and political establishment, and even against the Queen herself. The scene is a contradictory juxtaposition of two elements: the actual noble and praiseworthy act of preserving the palace from destructive flames and the disgraceful method applied to achieve the set goal. At first sight, it seems that Gulliver perfectly fulfils his duty of a protector and defender of the Lilliputan society. Not only had he earlier assisted them in withstanding the attacks of the Blefuscu fleet, but he also rushed to save the palace from fire without much hesitation and clearly with good intentions. However, on second thoughts, while ruminating on the method that Gulliver used to extinguish the fire, readers begin to understand that even though the giant did not have much time to gain access to any other kind of liquid, preferably water, the instant decision to put out the flames by urinating on the royal residence was not the most sensible idea and its presence in the novel cannot have been only an accidental result of

¹ For clarity purposes, all further all quotations taken from various editions of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* will be referred to as GT.

the ongoing action of the scene stemming from Swift's rich imagination but rather a well-thought, purposeful and premeditated intention of the author. Orwell (2010, 50) claims that Swift was a rebel, an iconoclast and a "Tory anarchist, despising authority" and in the dense layer of allusions and hidden undertones it is hard to look for a more iconoclastic passage than the palace on fire scene. The whole novel abounds in Swift's personal expressions of his political and social views. But the palace on fire scene, taking place at the beginning of Gulliver's adventures and reflections about the nature of authority and society is evidently directed at one aspect of his detestation: the institution of monarchy.

Having extinguished the fire, Gulliver reports:

"It was now day-light, and I returned to my house, without waiting to congratulate with the emperor; because, although I had done a very eminent piece of service, yet I could not tell how his Majesty might resent the manner by which I had performed it: for by the fundamental laws of realm, it is capital in any person, of what quality soever, to make water within the precincts of the palace" (GT 2001, 40).

Gulliver himself notices and vocalizes the contrasting juxtaposition of the praiseworthy action of putting out the flames with the disgraceful manner of performing the rescue operation. Having realized that extinguishing the fires by means of urine might have triggered his Majesty's "resent" even though he "had done a very eminent piece of service" evokes a feeling of uncertainty as to what consequences he should expect. In fact, he soon finds out what the actual consequences of his action are:

"But I was a little comforted by a message from his Majesty, that he would give orders to the grand judiciary for passing my pardon in form; which, however, I could not obtain. And I was privately assured, that the empress conceiving the greatest abhorrence of what I had done, removed to the most distant side of the court, firmly resolved that those buildings should never be repaired for her use; and, in the presence of her chief confidants, could not forbear vowing revenge" (GT 2001, 40).

As a matter of fact, instead of saving the palace from total destruction, he destroyed it by choosing the extinguishing method which generally breeds public disgust and abhorrence. Having had good intentions, though, Gulliver did not expect this level of ingratitude and hostility and, as it has already been mentioned, Gulliver is Swift himself. Orwell (2010, 36), in his essay on *Gulliver's Travels*, refers to the theory of Professor G.M. Trevelyan (author of *England under Queen Ann*) who claims that "part of the reason for Swift's failure to get preferment was that the Queen was scandalized by *A Tale of a Tub* – a pamphlet in which Swift probably felt he had done a great service to the English Crown, since it scarifies the Dissenters and still more the Catholics while leaving the Established Church alone".

Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* was composed somewhere between 1694 and 1697 and published in May 1704. It was dedicated to Right Honourable John Lord Somers and was originally published anonymously. According to Michael Foot (1984, 21), it was "a stupendous satire on almost every established institution and custom of the age." It is a work divided into sections of "digressions" and a "tale" telling the story of three brothers, each representing three different factions of western Christianity: Roman Catholic

Church, Anglican Church and English Dissenters. As Foot (1984, 21) claims, it is a difficult satire where “nothing was sacred” and where the author upheld the ideas of political moderation with ribald extravagance and launched his crusade for the one true Church of Christ in the language of blasphemy. Many authors were suspected of writing the controversial work, including “two young wits from Oxford,” William King – “a high church writer,” and even Swift’s cousin Thomas Swift (Foot 1984, 21-22). According to Foot (1984, 21-22), “Swift was content to watch from afar the commotion created by the monster-child to which he had given birth” and even though he finally was unmasked “the controversy about the authorship of the famous satire continued.” To dispel doubts as to who the real author of *A Tale of a Tub* was, Swift “wrote an apology as a preface for a new edition” of the satire. In the preface, he attempts “to appease those among clergy” (Foot 1984, 23) who “are not always very nice in distinguishing between their enemies and friends” (Swift 1710) and to explain that his work “was written to celebrate the perfection of the Church of England” (Swift 1710). Even though Swift made an effort to clarify his intentions to write *A Tale of a Tub*, he did not receive the public understanding that he had anticipated: “The work made Swift notorious, and was widely misunderstood, especially by Queen Anne herself who mistook its purpose for profanity” and it “effectively disbarred its author from proper preferment within the church” (Head 2006, 1090).

The fire incident has some dire consequences for Gulliver himself. He soon finds out that Flimnap (the treasurer of Lilliput), Skyresh Bolgolam (admiral of Lilliput) and others have charged him with four articles of high treason, which embraces such crimes as extinguishing the fire and consequently devastating the royal palace, refusing to destroy Blefuscu, speaking to the peace embassy from Blefuscu, and preparing a journey to Blefuscu. The Emperor accepts the charges but is not willing to kill Gulliver and instead he proposes to blind him and slowly starve him to death. Upon being informed about the plans, Gulliver decides to leave Lilliput and escapes to Blefuscu. The charges against Gulliver are sometimes analysed to highlight their topical meaning and significance in Swift’s contemporary times when Robert Harley and Henry Bolingbroke (Swift knew them both personally), the two prominent English Tory politicians who supported the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, were threatened to be charged with treason. They were both accused of their sympathies to Roman Catholicism, of revealing the instructions of the English negotiations to the French, of their refusal to continue the War of the Spanish Succession, and of their alleged correspondence with French negotiations as well as their intentions to escape to France. Doreen Roberts, in a note to *Gulliver’s Travels* Wordsworth Classics edition (2001), comments on the following passage from the novel: “When I was preparing to pay my attendance to the Emperor of Blefuscu; a considerable person at court... came to my house very privately at night in a close chair” (GT, 2001, 48). Roberts implies (2001, 231) that this “person at court” might stand for the Duke of Marlborough, “on whose advice Bolingbroke, fearing the Whigs meant to execute him, fled to France and for a while worked with the Jacobites.” The editor goes on to explain that the Articles “satirise the charges brought in 1715 against Lords Bolingbroke, Oxford and Ormonde by Walpole’s Committee of Secretary” (Roberts 2001, 231). When it comes to the allusive and topical reading of the fire scene itself, the words uttered by Gulliver claiming that by urinating and hence extinguishing the royal premises he preserved it from destruction, might be understood as a reference to a view held by the

Tories that the “illicit negotiations for the Treaty of Utrecht were justified by their success” (Roberts 2001, 230).

The other source of inspiration for the palace on fire scene might stem from Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. The famous pentalogy of novels written by the French Renaissance writer and scholar became influential and popular in England after it was translated in English by Thomas Urquhart (the first three books in 1653) and Peter Anthony Motteux (books four and five in 1694). It seems quite obvious that Swift was inspired by the French story of two giants, which is especially conspicuous in the first two parts of his *Gulliver’s Travels*, where the author plays with the size perspective, first making Gulliver a giant and then turning him into a Lilliput in the land of giants. The analogy between the fire scene and Rabelais’s work is particularly tangible in Chapter XVII of Book I of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, entitled “How Gargantua paid his welcome to the Parisians, and how he took away the great bells of Our Lady’s Church”:

Some few days after that they had refreshed themselves, he went to see the city, and was beheld of everybody there with great admiration; for the people of Paris are so sottish, so badot, so foolish and fond by nature, that a juggler, a carrier of indulgences, a sumpter-horse, or mule with cymbals or tinkling bells, a blind fiddler in the middle of a cross lane, shall draw a greater confluence of people together than an evangelical preacher. And they pressed so hard upon him that he was constrained to rest himself upon the towers of Our Lady’s Church. At which place, seeing so many about him, he said with a loud voice, I believe that these buzzards will have me to pay them here my welcome hither, and my Proficiat. It is but good reason. I will now give them their wine, but it shall be only in sport. Then smiling, he untied his fair braguette, and drawing out his mentul into the open air, he so bitterly all-to-bepissed them, that he drowned two hundred and sixty thousand, four hundred and eighteen, besides the women and little children. Some, nevertheless, of the company escaped this piss-flood by mere speed of foot, who, when they were at the higher end of the university, sweating, coughing, spitting, and out of breath, they began to swear and curse, some in good hot earnest, and others in jest (Rabelais 2004).

The similarity of the above description from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to Swift’s fire scene is obvious enough. Although the physiological activity seems to be much more drastically and naturalistically illustrated than Swift’s report, there surfaces a clear-cut parallel between the gigantic Gargantua spitefully drowning numerous Parisians by giving them “their wine” and Gulliver destroying the royal palace by voiding wine in “such quantity... that in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished”. Except for the conspicuous parallel between the juxtaposed description and their strikingly explicit physicality and physiology, they both share the same figurative meaning, which is scorn and disdain of the authors themselves towards contemporary societies and capital authorities.

3. THE PALACE ON FIRE SCENE IN SELECTED ENGLISH AND POLISH ABRIDGED VERSIONS OF *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a universal novel. It was first published in 1726 by Benjamin Motte and immediately became popular among people of all nationalities, sexes and ages. As Julian Fung (2017, 395) claims, "within four months of its publication, no fewer than three condensed versions of *Gulliver's Travels* appeared in print." In Poland, the first edition of *Gulliver's Travels* was published in 1784, translated by an anonym. It proves that the novel became highly successful even in the countries situated far away from Great Britain. Throughout centuries there appeared numerous, abridged versions of *Gulliver's Travels* addressed to the youngest audience. The most common versions of the children's version included only the story of Gulliver in Lilliput. Later, some children's versions included the story of Gulliver in Brobdingnag.

The first abridged version of *Gulliver's Travels* appeared in February 1727 and was published by J. Stone and R. King. In the 19th century an abridgment of *Gulliver's Travels* was published by McLoughlin Company in 1850's as part of its *Aunt Fanny Fairy Tales* series. Later, when the company became more popular as McLoughlin Bros., numerous copies were published throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries. 1889 and 1900 editions became exceptionally famous for their illustrations made by Arthur Rackham. Pictorial versions of Swift's novel in magazines, anthologies and educational books were plentiful during the first decades of the 20th century. One of the examples could be *The Book of Knowledge* published in 1912 by The Glorier Society which included the whole section devoted to *Gulliver's Travels* and presented excellent illustrations to the story. The first comic book illustrating the story of Gulliver was included in *Classic Comics* (later known as *Classic Illustrated*) published in December 1943. There were many reprints of the comic book over the next 30 years.

Obviously, the adopted versions apply different techniques to make the novel suitable for children readers. As Haifeng Hui (2011, 245) notices, "contrary to the popular view, adaptation strategies vary drastically from one period to another." Some editions simplify the language to make it more understandable, some delete the scenes that are "deemed inappropriate for children" (Hui 2011, 245), and some decide to keep such scenes intact or adapt them in a way that would not shock young readers, but, at the same time, would not seriously damage the story-line.

Due to its physiological character, the palace on fire scene, and especially its extinguishing part, must have raised some doubts of the editors and publishers of the abridged versions of *Gulliver's Travels* both in English and in Polish. The present study is based on six available abridged versions of the novel in English published both in the 19th, 20th and 21st century and they include *Marvellous Adventures: Gulliver's Travels, Baron Munchausen and Peter Wilkins* (1862), *Gulliver's Travels, Illustrated Edition for the Rising Generation* edited by Peter Pindar Jr. (1874), a Priory Classics edition of *Gulliver's Travels* with no publishing date provided (probably 21st century), a "Two well loved tales" edition of *Gulliver's Travels and the Frog Prince* published in 1990 and two abridged editions directed at English learners: *Easy Classics* (1996) and *Oxford Progressive English Readers Grade 1* (1973). In Polish editions, also six abridged versions of the novel have been scrutinised for the depiction of the fire scene: *Podróże Guliwera* edited by Cecylia Niewiadomska and published by Nasza Księgarnia in 1986, a brochure-like edition of Gebethner and Wolf from 1942, the 1997 illustrated edition

published by Wydawnictwo Daria and, a 1967 version of *Podróże Guliwera* published by Nasza Księgarnia and edited by Jacek Bocheński and Marian Brandys, a 2012 Bellona edition and *Podróże Guliwera* published by Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW in 1991.

In two of the analysed English abridged editions of *Gulliver's Travels* the palace on fire scene has been deleted. The Priory Classics edition of *Gulliver's Travels* is a 189-page-long non-illustrated version of Swift's novel, which, at first glance, might be mistaken for the original full-length version. It is, in fact, a book embracing the first two parts of *Gulliver's Travels*. Judging by the length of the version and the structure of the novel, one might not expect the fire scene to be deleted. As a matter of fact, it does include the subchapter based on the original Articles of Impeachment against Quinbus Flestrin (the Man-Mountain). There are, however, only three articles instead of the original four. In the full version of the novel, the first article says "that whoever shall make water within the precincts of the royal place, shall be liable to the pains and penalties of high treason" (GT 2001, 49), whereas in the first article offered by the abridged Priory Classics edition, Gulliver is accused of treason because he refused to kill the Blefuscan army. Even though the Priory Classics edition omits the first original Article of Impeachment and hence changes the original numbering system of the articles, it does not refrain from explaining that "there are some other articles, but these are the most important, of which I have read you an abstract" (GT, Priory Classics, 76). The second edition which excludes the fire scene is *Gulliver's Travels and The Frog Prince* included in the "Two well loved tales" series. This is a densely illustrated version with a minimum text structure which is clearly addressed to the youngest readers, or most possibly to their parents who would read them a short bedtime story. The story of Gulliver occupies only 11 pages of the A4 format book and includes another 10 pages of the Frog Prince story. The version offers a condensed plot consisting of the most characteristic events of the story such as Gulliver's waking up on the shore in the land of Lilliput, being tied down and then transported to the capital, the attempts to feed the giant man, and the scene of Gulliver emptying his pockets. The climax of the story seems to be the moment when Gulliver is capturing the Blefuscan fleet only to realize that "the Emperor of Lilliput was only using him to fight his battles for him, and that the Big-Endians were not a wicked people at all" (GT 1990, page unnumbered). Then he decides to "go over to their island and live with them" (GT 1990, page unnumbered) with the final intention to go back to England. The editors of this children's version clearly considered the palace on fire scene as either irrelevant or improper for the youngest readers.

Among the studied editions of *Gulliver's Travels*, there are two books which have the palace on fire scene unchanged and uncensored despite their abridged character. The oldest edition in the study is a book from 1862, entitled *Marvellous Adventure* and including the stories of Gulliver, Baron Munchausen and Peter Wilkins. As it is a usual practice in abridged editions of the novel, the Gulliver part includes only the first two chapters of the original. It seems, however, that the abridgment in this particular case relies solely upon the exclusion of the last two parts of the original *Gulliver's Travels*, which means that the entire text of the two parts remains intact by the editors and hence it obviously does include the original description of the palace on fire. Another edition of Swift's novel which keeps the palace on fire scene is the Easy Classic from 1996 and is described as "a new series of well-loved novels... retold and abridged by native speakers for learners of English" (GT 1996, back cover). It is a 112-pages long book with several

black and white illustrations and its abridgment offers a simplified language and a glossary of important or difficult words at the bottom of each page to make reading easier. The book includes only the first two parts of the original *Gulliver's Travels*. The palace on fire scene is certainly maintained, but it proposes a simplified and shortened version of the description: "During the evening I had been drinking a most delicious wine. By the luckiest chance in the world I had not yet urinated, so I relieved myself in such quantities that in three minutes the fires was completely out" (GT 1996, 38). In the case of the above quoted edition, the maintenance of the extinguishing scene in its original shape results from the fact that the abridgement was aimed at adult learners of the English language and not necessarily at children, hence it only affects the linguistic side of the book, not its plot.

There are two editions of *Gulliver's Travels* included in this study which have kept the palace on fire scene but altered its essential message. The first one is the Oxford Progressive English Readers Grade 1 and it is an abridged version of the novel with "vocabulary restricted to 1900 head words. Illustrated in two and partly in full colours" (GT 1973, back cover), clearly addressed to younger English learners. In a subchapter entitled "How the fire was put out," we read: "I ran towards the water. I knelt down and filled my mouth with it. Then I spat this water over fire. It was not very nice but it was the only thing I could do at the time. It was successful and in three minutes the fire was completely out. The lovely building was safe" (GT 1973, 32). Although this abridged edition was created with the intention to improve younger students' English skills, its editors have not resigned from keeping the primary meaning of the fire scene. Obviously, since it is earmarked for younger readers, the urinating part has been altered, but not completely cut out. Most importantly, however, it has maintained the original critical tone of Swift's personal view on monarchy, as Gulliver puts out the flames by spitting on it, which is generally considered as an unpleasant and often disrespectful physiological act. The fire scene is also altered in *Gulliver's Travels, Illustrated Edition for the Rising Generation*, published in 1874. At the first sight, it is difficult to notice any abridgement to the edition as it includes all the four parts of the original novel and offers no changes to the plot and language. Since it announces suitability for "the rising generation," we might expect certain changes to the scenes which are not deemed appropriate for the young readers. The best example of such a change incorporated into the original text is obviously the fire scene:

The case seemed wholly desperate and deplorable; and this magnificent palace would have infallibly been burnt down to the ground, if, by a presence of mind unusual to me, I had not suddenly thought of an expedient. This was to use my hat for a water vessel, and filling it at the lake in the garden, which was nearly emptied by the process, I soon extinguished the fire, but to my consternation nearly drowned the Queen and the royal children. Indeed the water filled the rooms to which she and her ladies had retired, and I had the greatest difficulty to pick them out by the windows, in an insensible condition. This was very unfortunate for me, but in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished, and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction (GT 1874, 51-52).

The most unexpected element of the above passage is that it demonstrates how the original text transforms into an adaptation of it only to return to the root story. The first

sentence of the analyzed fragment is just a continuation of the original narrative which evolves into the extinguishing scene in which Gulliver uses a “hat for a water vessel” filled with lake water and then used to put out the fire. The last sentence of the quoted passage is a combination of the new, adapted text (“This was very unfortunate for me, but...”) with the original line (“in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished; and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction”). Among the six editions of Swift’s novel which are under scrutiny in the present study, this one seems to be the most unusual abridgement. It keeps the full original version with the root plot and language of the novel with only minor alterations in those scenes which might be considered as inappropriate for children. Moreover, it also keeps the critical character of the scene since, as a result of Gulliver’s rescue action the Queen and the “royal children” were nearly drowned. In such a case, the 1874 edition seems proper not only for children but also for adults who might not have noticed that they were reading an abridged version, if it had not been for the subtitle “for the rising generation.”

What is interesting about the Polish abridged versions of *Gulliver’s Travels* which have been analysed in the present study is that, contrary to the English set, none of them has kept the fire scene in its original shape. In the Gebethner and Wolff edition (1942) the full fire scene was simply deleted probably due to the book’s general concision as it covers only 10 pages including four full-length and six smaller illustrations, hence the editors highlighted only those adventures from the land of Lilliput which are appealing to children without the risk of having to reshape the original scenes. The remaining five abridged editions of Swift’s novel offer a wide variety of alternatives to the physiological character of the extinguishing method. In the Daria edition (1997), which is a typical brochure-like booklet for the youngest children with 13 pages of dominating illustrations and very scarce text, the fire scene has been maintained but instead of urinating on the flames, Gulliver uses his hat filled with moat water to put them out. A similar approach is adapted by Cecylia Niewiadomska in Nasza Księgarnia edition of the novel ([1958]1986). Compared to the previous two versions discussed, this one clearly aims at teenage or even young adult readers. It includes the edited version of the voyages to the land of Lilliput and Brobdignag, it is a 177-pages long and includes very few illustrations. In the preface to the edition we read:

“Told by parents and educators, this semi-fairy-tale novel was very much appreciated by children. Therefore, already in the 19th century, Cecylia Niewiadomska, abandoning matters that were too difficult, developed ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ especially for children, so that when they read on their own, they could experience extraordinary adventures with Gulliver in the fantastic land of Lilliputians and in Brobdinnag - the land of giants” (GT 1986, 2)².

Apparently, the editor of the above mentioned book came to the conclusion that the original undertone of the fire on palace scene did belong to the category of the “matters that were too difficult” and decided to maintain the scene itself for its undoubted

² All quotations from Polish to English have been translated by the author of the present article, unless otherwise stated.

adventurous merit but in a reshaped form, where Gulliver extinguishes the fire by means of his hat filled with “impurities” taken from a nearby cesspit. Even though the extinguishing technique has been altered to hide the physiological element, the editor’s idea seems relevant as it includes the critical character of the original scene. It is obtained by using equally repulsive material to put out the flames and in this way expose the protagonist’s attitude towards the royal institution. Another edition of *Gulliver’s Travels* published by Nasza Księgarnia (edited by Jacek Bocheński and Marian Brandys) in 1967 offers quite a similar approach to the fire scene. Here, Gulliver is looking at the flames and wondering how to prevent the “magnificent historical building” from burning and suddenly remembers that in his pocket he has got his enema syringe which “could hold as much water as in one thousand tiny buckets.” He runs to the nearby river, fills his enema syringe with water and within a few minutes he puts out the flames. Again, knowing that the enema syringe is “intended for completely different purposes,” adult readers can feel that the critical and disrespectful undertone of the original scene has been successfully maintained, whereas younger readers are not offended with indecent behaviour of the main protagonist. In the two remaining editions of *Gulliver’s Travels* (Bellona and BGW) the palace on fire scene has been maintained but it has lost its critical undertone. The Bellona edition includes the first two parts of the original, covers 64 pages, and almost each page is illustrated. Here, when the fires are raging, Gulliver runs to the sea and fills his mouth with “as much water as it could contain” and eventually manages to quench the fire. In the BGW edition, which is clearly intended for the youngest children as it has very little text based only on the voyage to the land of Lilliput and full-size illustration on each page (44 pages long), Gulliver utilizes yet another method to extinguish the fire by soaking his handkerchief in water and then squeezing it over the destructive flames.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* is undoubtedly one of the harshest political satires teeming with allusions and undertones directed at the people, events and times contemporary to the writer himself. The palace on fire scene still remains one of the most explicit instances of Swift’s critical attitude towards the political elites and the institution of monarchy itself. The physiological act of extinguishing the flames devouring the royal palace might be interpreted in several ways. First and foremost, it is the author’s expression of detestation and reluctance towards the institutionalized forms of power. Secondly, it stands for Swift’s disappointment with Queen Anne’s misunderstanding of the intended meaning of *A Tale of a Tub* and, as a result, preventing him from a preferment within the church. The consequences of Gulliver’s disgraceful act trigger some other, more complex topical allusions to the political intricacies of Swift’s times. The scene entails some associations with the case of Robert Harley and Henry Bolingbroke, the Tory politicians threatened to be charged with treason, as well as with the negotiations for the Treaty of Utrecht. Finally, the fire scene seems to be inspired by Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* – the work that was widely criticised by the environment of the Parisian Sorbonne University and caused great controversy, similarly to Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*.

The analysis of the selected abridged versions of *Gulliver’s Travels* in English and Polish indicates that the palace on fire scene might be considered somewhat troublesome

for editors. In the six scrutinized English versions, two had the scene deleted, two maintained it in an unaltered form, whereas the other two offered different extinguishing techniques, with only one maintaining the original, physiological, and hence critical character of the scene. In the six Polish abridged versions which were taken under scrutiny, only one had the scene deleted, whereas the other five kept it in place offering a great variety of alternative extinguishing methods with two (water from the cesspit and enema syringe) maintaining the critical metaphor intended by Swift. The overall analyzed material of twelve abridged versions of Swift's novel shows that the majority of editors perceive the scene as significant either for the critical or adventurous character of the novel. The results also indicate that the Polish adaptations offer a wider range of alternatives to the quenching method in the palace on fire scene than those written in English.

Swift's attitude towards monarchy is best portrayed by the phrase "noble pile" used in the fire scene in reference to the royal palace. This juxtaposition of an obviously positive adjective "noble" with the negative noun "pile" creates contrasting and, at the same time, sarcastic image of the institution of monarchy which the writer projects to his readers. It still remains one of the most clear-cut and explicit messages of the author of *Gulliver's Travels* and thus makes the scene challenging for the editors of the abridged versions of the novel.

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AUTHOR'S BIO: Ph.D in English literature, assistant professor at the Institute of Literary Studies and Linguistics, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland. His research concentrates around social and political life in Stuart England, political, utopian and dystopian literature as well as relations between history and literature. The author of two monographs: *John Dryden as a Political Poet* (2019) and *To Dinner and There Merry. On Food and Drink in Samuel Pepys's Diary* (2022).

E-MAIL: kapturpawel@gmail.com