

FROM THE INSIDE



# Gulliver's travels in the intensive care unit

Andrea Cortegiani<sup>1\*</sup>  and Filippo Vitale<sup>2</sup>

© 2018 Springer-Verlag GmbH Germany, part of Springer Nature and ESICM

*“...from what I had heard and seen, my keen appetite for perpetuity of life was much abated. I grew heartily ashamed of the pleasing visions I had formed; and thought no tyrant could invent a death into which I would not run with pleasure, from such a life.”*

Gulliver's Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, Jonathan Swift, D.D. (1726)

Day 42 of the new life, out of the one that was really yours.

Damaged brain, inflamed lungs, weak muscles and a lot of “bips” heard around. Numbers in the grey zone, day after day. Tears, letters, anxious waiting, hopes and prayers. And thousands of words and whys. One's gaze has changed over time and is not the same as before (Fig. 1).

It was a rainy Sunday shift. It was 6 p.m.

- Are you ok, madam?
- Doctor, I regret for what I feel now. It seems that it is not my father anymore. I regret to say that I have unpleasant feelings while looking at him. Please, take a look at his face. Now, look at this picture, it was 26 years ago. I love it and I love him but it is not the same person anymore. I feel tired now, and I am sure he does too. I am not so sure now that he would accept this life.
- We are doing our best for him, madam. We have discussed what to do several times. I am really sorry for your feelings.
- Doctor, have you ever read *Gulliver's Travels*?

- Yes, Madam. I read it when I was a child but, to be honest, I can hardly remember it.
- Can I ask you a favor, Doctor? Please, look for this book and try to read it again. You are so young and I believe it would be helpful for your career. You will understand my words while reading it.
- For my career, Madam? Okay, I promise.

– Hi mom. How are you doing? Do you remember where is the book *Gulliver's Travels*?

– Hi darling. Look in your old room. Maybe it is still there

– .....

*“... he observed long life to be the universal desire and wish of mankind. That whoever had one foot in the grave was sure to hold back the other as strongly as he could. That the oldest still had hopes of living one day longer, and looked on death as the greatest evil, from which nature always prompted him to retreat. Only in this island of Luggnagg was the appetite for living not so eager, from the continual example of the Struldbrugs before their eyes.”*

*“...The diseases they were subject to still continue, without increasing or diminishing...”*

*“The Struldbrugs... were not able to hold any conversation with their neighbors the mortals... They were the most mortifying sight I ever beheld.”*

Then painful, human, thoughts came.

The fear of not knowing what is right and what is wrong.

- Good evening, madam. I kept my promise. It was about the Struldbrugs story, right? The men and women who have denied dying?

\*Correspondence: cortegiana@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Section of Anesthesia Analgesia, Intensive Care and Emergency, Department of Biopathology and Medical Biotechnologies (DIBIMED), Policlinico Paolo Giaccone, University of Palermo, Via del vespro 129, 90127 Palermo, Italy

Full author information is available at the end of the article



**Fig. 1** Gulliver's travels in the intensive care unit

– Yes, Doctor. And, concerning my dad, this room looks like Luggnagg.

Thank you, madam.

**Author details**

<sup>1</sup> Section of Anesthesia Analgesia, Intensive Care and Emergency, Department of Biopathology and Medical Biotechnologies (DIBIMED), Policlinico Paolo Giaccone, University of Palermo, Via del vespro 129, 90127 Palermo, Italy.

<sup>2</sup> General Intensive Care Unit, Policlinico Paolo Giaccone, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy.

**Acknowledgement**

We would like to thank Dr Emanuela Petrona Baviera for preparing the figure.

**Compliance with ethical standards**

**Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

Received: 7 April 2018 Accepted: 11 April 2018

Published online: 26 April 2018