

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen - Part 1

“He won't get far on hot air and fantasy”

The Age of Reason (Enlightenment): This period is called the Age of Reason because its writers as a whole applied reason to religion, politics, morality, and social life. In contrast to the 17th century, in which reason represented tradition, authority, stability, the 18th century saw reason as a tool, a means to authority. Questions were no longer envisaged under the aspect of pure thought, but were examined from a social and practical point of view. The views and philosophies of this age often were in opposition to the harsh and cruel realities of life during that time.*



Questions — the answer to the first one is at the VERY START of the movie — You should jot down the answers to the questions in bold face RIGHT AWAY the questions or parts of questions not in bold may be answered later when you have more time to think about them.

1. **When does this story begin? What age?** Why add – “Wednesday” (make sure you’ve read above)?
2. **Why is the officer ordered executed by the leader of the city?** Is Mr. Jackson’s reason just? Logical? If you remember a story from freshman year entitled "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut bring it into the discussion for more points.
3. **Who stops the performance of the play?** Why? What does it have to do with your answer to question 2? To the definition of the Age of Reason (above)?
4. **How does the Baron win his bet about the wine with the Sultan? What are the effects of his winning?** What does it have to do with what is happening to the town in the present (as far as the movie goes) day? (Historical context)
5. **When he is dying what does the Baron object to about the state of the world?** (be specific here).
6. What is the **"punishment"** for trying to escape the town? Is there an irony here? What is the importance of the quote given at the top of this worksheet? Who says it? Is he right?



The Adventures of Baron Munchausen - Part II

This, in effect, is what the neutron bomb is... a bomb by means of which it would be possible to kill people but to preserve all riches - here it is, the bestial ethics of the most aggressive representatives of imperialism.

-Nikita Khrushchev, in a speech to the Rumanian Party Congress, 1961

• Taken from Benet's Reader Encyclopedia. 3rd ed. Harper & Rowe

As you continue to watch the film, pay close attention to the elaborate and detailed worlds that director has created. How do the fantastical lands the Baron travels to compare with the bleak and violent city under siege by the Turks? Perhaps the contrast between these two worlds, the real & the fantastic, will help us better understand the relationship between the Age of Reason and the ages that preceded it (The Renaissance) and followed it (The Romantic Age). Remember to keep taking notes and jotting down ideas on why you think this movie is being shown (*how it fits in*).

Also notice that the king of the moon (Robin Williams) wishes to separate his head from his body. In other words, keep his mind free of the physical necessities of the flesh. During the Age of Reason, many great "thinkers" wished to do the same. They denied their humanity in favor of scientific and intellectual pursuits. The question is, what kinds of things does this lead to? Pay attention to what it leads to in the movie.

7. How are the leaders of the city (the man who orders the officer executed, and the Baron kicked out) like the King and Queen of the moon? (hint: the detachable heads). What do the leaders of the city have to do with the ideals of the time periods we're considering here (Romantic, Age of Reason? Be specific.
8. **Why does the king's head wish to be separated from his body? (be specific).** What does this have to do with the Romantic Age vs. The Age of Reason?
9. **What old friend does the Baron find on the moon? Why does the "head" hate the Baron so much?** Who in the town resembles (philosophically) the head? Why?
10. **Who frees the baron from his cage on the moon? How is the woman "head" different than the man head?** Do we see that reflected in our culture? Our literature? Try and be specific.
11. **How is the king finally, and permanently, free of his body? Try and jot down what he says...**notice he is ultimately still ruled by his body (albeit his itching nose). What does that seem to say about the attempt to try and separate the physical from the intellectual?
12. **Where do our three adventurers land once they land back on earth. What is quite unusual about the giants?** How does it go against our expectations? Think about the Baron in the city at the beginning and his reception – make a connection.
13. **How does the nuclear killing machine fit in with the idea of separating the mind from the body (pay special attention to the "giant's" words on the machine)?** How can you link this with the king and queen of the moon? What is so appealing about that bomb – and whom would it appeal to in the town. (trivia: Enola Gay is the name of the plane that dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima)
14. **Why does Albert want to stay with the giants?** How does this fit in with *Romantic* or *Age of Reason* notions? How does it fit in with the Baron's servant left on the moon -- think about these issues when you find the other servants. What do they ALL have in common about staying where they are?

The original Baron Munchausen is said to have lived in 1720-1797, to have served in the Russian army against the Turks, and to have been in the habit of grossly exaggerating his experiences.*

Pay special attention to what the rational leader has to say to the Baron when Munchausen gives himself up. Does the rational man see any promise in imagination, fantasy/new ideas?

Remember the two following quotes from the age of reason: "The proper study of mankind is man" & "A blade of grass is simply a blade of grass; mankind is my study." Not much room for Baron Munchausens in such a world.



15. **What seems to be happening to the Baron's age throughout the movie? When is he old? Young? (keep a running tally of how & when [what is going on in the movie] it changes).** What does age have to do with imagination? (make a special note of your answer here in figuring out the BIG QUESTION – see part 1). What has youth and age to do with the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, or Romanticism?
16. **How does the Giant's beautiful wife keep the Baron distracted from saving the town?**
17. **How does the Baron end up in the South Seas?** How does this echo the scene from the theatre, from where they just were? Be specific.
18. What purpose does Sally keep seeming to serve? She has no great powers like the others. **What does she do, or say? How does she save the Baron while they are in the Giant Fish? Has the Baron done the same thing to her (and/or will he later?)**
19. **How do they get out of the Giant Fish?** There is a literal and metaphorical answer to this question. **Pay attention to everything: what is the song being sung?** -- What does it have to do with the "giving up?" How does this contrast to **how the Baron pulls himself up out of the water after the fish?** (big question).
20. **Why does the Baron give himself up? Is he saved? If so, how? What effect does it have on the others?**
21. **After the Baron is shot, the action quickly moves back to the theatre at the beginning of the film, with the man claiming to be the *real* Baron, telling his tale. Has any of what we've seen, really taken place?** How do we know? **What about this Baron's age?** How could that be explained either from a literal or metaphorical position? In order to believe this, what must the viewer have (hint: perhaps it helps if they're younger).
22. **Pay very close attention as they approach the gate – when the Baron tells them to open it. How (language-wise) does the Baron tell them to open it? How does Sally's father?** What is the big difference? Think: Does it matter if the events *really* took place? Why or why not? Would the Baron and the leader of the town agree on this answer? Why? What does it have to do with battle of rationality vs. imagination? With the Age of Reason vs. the Romantics?

Big Question: (EC, due Monday)

If literature (including Baron Munchausen) really does shape us/our history – what happens when we are shaped by imaginative tales rather than what the rational mayor of the city would have us read? (Be specific & thoughtful)

* *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford Press, 1984.