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Gulliver's Travels to the Screen, Giant and Tiny

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Gulliver's Travels to the Screen, Giant and Tiny

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Gulliver's Travels, by Jonathan Swift, has captured readers' imaginations for almost three hundred years, spawning countless adaptations over several different mediums. As different means of communicating and transforming art have been invented, these adaptations have grown to fill the new mediums and make use of the various possibilities each form has created. Film in particular has created an enormous opportunity to re-imagine *Gulliver's Travels*, since it can directly show the audience the fictional foreign locations in which Gulliver finds himself.

In this study, I examine seven screen adaptations of Swift's novel to determine what our current culture views as the core of the work, or what we see as the important pieces to pass on to current and future audiences. The seven chosen adaptations were selected based on how well they have survived over the last century; adaptations which are no longer available for commercial purchase and/or viewing were excluded from the study. I have also only included works which maintain a resemblance to the original story in structure, even if merely loosely, and have excluded works which bear only a thematic tie; I based my choices on the works which make an overt claim to be interpretations of the

original text. This study examines only the works which seek to directly represent the original novel. By looking at Swift's work through the lens of adaptation, this study will show how Swift's work is currently perceived, and examines what that may mean for the future of Swift's legacy. As cultural views and connotations of language have changed, the directors of the adaptations have used different means to achieve sometimes similar, sometimes different messages.

Gulliver's Travels was originally a satiric work that addressed social problems of eighteenth-century England. Popular views on society have changed, however, as have the politicians holding office. Certain events in *Gulliver's Travels*, such as the reading of Gulliver's offences in Lilliput, no longer have nearly the same relevance. Therefore, it is important to examine how the directors address these changes to determine what will retain relevance over time.

Chapter One

Introduction

Published in 1726, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift is one of the most celebrated works in English literature, retaining its immense popularity even centuries later. The story relates a first-person narrative of the events of Lemuel Gulliver, a doctor who feels the call of the sea, and subsequently joins a crew as the ship's surgeon. He sets out four times, and each time he is stranded on an uncharted island. Gulliver relates to the reader the various living conditions or peculiarities of the natives, wherein Swift uses the opportunity to satirize contemporary English society. Apart from being particularly well-written, the work's longevity of survival makes it an interesting subject in studying adaptation.

The primary diversion from the original source material in literary adaptations involves changing it to be more suitable to a very young audience. This is perhaps due to the initial scenes within the work, wherein Gulliver is a giant among Lilliputians, then as small among the Brobdingnagians as the Lilliputians were to him. The fantastic nature of the work lends itself well to fairy tale retellings, and excites the imaginations of young children. The original satire of the work does, unfortunately, become left behind as the work is reinvented with the new audience in mind. M. Sarah Smedman examined several of these

adaptations in her work “Like Me, Like Me Not: *Gulliver’s Travels* as Children’s Book,” in which she begins:

Since 1726, there have been innumerable editions of *Gulliver’s Travels* for children in English—including abridgements, expurgations, retellings, textbook editions, shorthand editions, some which can only be called prostitutions. Each abridgement or retelling reflects an adult’s conception of childhood and of what is or is not suitable material for children, both in content and in difficulty of language (83).

From her examination of fifty-five of these adaptations, it is clear that there is no real agreement on what should and should not be kept in the text, even when the medium of text is retained. Smedman uses strong language to condemn works as “prostitution,” but most people would probably agree with her terminology given many of the versions of famous texts in existence: cut apart, changed, and remolded in the interest of making money with no real artistic or scholarly intent. Definitions and qualities of adaptations vary greatly, but I write with the assumption of my own idea of adaptation for this thesis: any work which recreates in some capacity the original work’s intent, and makes claim to do so overtly. Of course, the claim can be made that nearly any fictional and satirical travel narrative is in some ways an adaptation of *Gulliver’s Travels*, but the definition then becomes so broad as to be unworkable.

When the medium switches to film beginning in the early twentieth century, several new requirements must be met; specifically, requirements that

audiences have come to expect within films. For example, audiences expect the film to take full advantage of the idea of the spectacle. Sometimes this takes the form of special effects, sometimes a moving musical score, and sometimes action must be placed into a work in places where no action existed previously. Audiences also have a new set of values and judgments which they bring with them into the movie theatre.

It is a given, therefore, that changes must be made to the original work to make it fit into a new medium. However, the meaning of a work can be drastically changed with even the smallest omission, edit, or differing perspective. As an example, if the director decides to change the perspective of *Gulliver's Travels* from Gulliver to Lilliputians, it then becomes their story instead of his. He is no longer examining the country in relation to his own, but rather they are marveling at his inability to comprehend even what are to them simple concepts, such as political appointments via acrobatics. The situation changes from Gulliver making the connection of Lilliput's culture to his own home, to the reader making the connection to their own home by means of Gulliver's "oddities." By analyzing how directors make changes to their versions, what they decide to omit and retain, and how they represent their choices, we can see how our culture's view of the story has also become reshaped over time.

Chapter Two

The Original Work

Before the adaptations can be analyzed, a brief examination of the original text must be made. Since most film adaptations only portray the story before the third book, this examination is only concerned with the major points of the first two parts. The original *Gulliver's Travels* was a satiric masterpiece, but most of the people, history, and customs are lost on modern audiences. This chapter should serve as a primer for the analysis of each movie, as the changes made by each director will be made more evident.

Although the first printing of *Gulliver's Travels* did not contain the prefatory material with which modern readers begin their reading, it was appended to the text less than ten years later, so nearly all adaptations have had it for reference (the exceptions being extremely early adaptations and those who simply ignored or were somehow otherwise ignorant of the material). This material, in addition to a title page and a description of the contents for each chapter, most notably contains an "Advertisement," "A Letter from Capt. Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson," and a note from "The Publisher to the Reader." This prefatory material's addition, in the words of Michael Seidel, change the reading so that "[w]hat had been a breezy and plausible story of a young ship surgeon's maiden voyage now begins with the ranting of an obviously disturbed older man, a man

whose vocabulary and locutions betray a private world of ‘Yahoos’ and ‘Houyhnhnms’ and a set of paranoid convictions about life as an Englishman, a traveler, and a memoir writer” (xiii).

This prefatory material presents a challenge to directors that they have each addressed in ways which provide context to their versions. Although as several scholars claim, it was possibly an attempt by Swift to further distance himself from the opinions of Gulliver and therefore deflect criticism before it was even launched at him, the material, particularly the letter, does serve to introduce Gulliver to the reader so that they may understand a little more about Gulliver’s state of mind. In building Gulliver’s first impression, directors must also take into consideration the first part of the first chapter, in which Gulliver explains how he came to be on a ship in the first place. For example, the Sturridge version shows a Gulliver that has had his mind completely addled by the voyages. While he is not shown to be writing a letter or complaining about misspellings, etc., he does tell the story to anyone that will listen in a manner befitting a madman, nearly oblivious to his surroundings and, at times, yelling the tale. Conversely, the Sher and Hunt versions both show introduce Gulliver as a kind-hearted and generous doctor. Neither of these two versions portray Gulliver as anything but heroic, so their equivalent to the prefatory material must create a different sort of Gulliver. Only the Fleischer and Hannah-Barbera versions omit any sort of prefatory material, at least relating to the title character himself, opting to instead begin immediately with Lilliput.

Another necessary change from the original novel is the shift in point of view. The original is told through the point of view of Gulliver, in a tone similar to a journal. Gulliver has written about his travels after he has returned, which creates several effects upon the reader. Most importantly, this point of view causes the reader to call into question the credibility of what Gulliver is relating. While it has obviously always been a work of fiction, although scholars note that the earliest edition led some people to believe otherwise (Seidel xiv), Gulliver's believability within the framework of the story itself must be taken into consideration when forming an opinion of the man within the story telling the story. If he has truly been driven crazy by his adventures, the reader must wonder what the original events were, and how directly Swift himself is making implications. The point of view also impacts how the reader understands Gulliver from the way Gulliver makes the observations. For example, if Gulliver criticizes the politics of Lilliput without understanding the parallels to England, he is a buffoon. If he does recognize the parallels, he is criticizing his country, and some might even say that he is unpatriotic (something Gulliver professes to be entirely untrue in Part II).

In the first two books, there are several scenes which have become iconic of the original text. In Lilliput, wherein Gulliver finds himself on an island in which the residents are roughly six inches high and everything else is proportional to the tiny natives, the first of these scenes is the binding of Gulliver while he sleeps in exhaustion from being shipwrecked. Every adaptation uses this scene, primarily because it gives an early indication of Gulliver's character; if he is

meant to be a strong, heroic character, he breaks himself free, unlike the original version, in which Gulliver weighs the consequences of freeing himself, then decides to allow the native people to do what they will with him. This decision showed the original Gulliver to be more pragmatic in his approach of the various cultures he encounters.

This section is also the first time the language barrier is shown. With only one possible exception detailed later, the adaptations choose to omit this point, more than likely for the sake of brevity. However, it is very important to the understanding of the original Gulliver's character to know that he learns the language of the natives. It shows a commitment to Lilliput, as well as later lands, and shows the intellectual side of Gulliver, just as his weighing of the decision whether not to break himself free illustrates.

Once Gulliver begins to understand the language, he delves into an examination of the politics of Lilliput. The Lilliputians obtain public office not through standard politics, but through acrobatic skill, and gain favors from the Emperor by leaping and creeping over and under a stick. This point on politics seems to indicate the absurdity by which Swift's England chose appointments for political office, and it is one of the points that does translate well into modern society. Several of the adaptations use the scene for this very reason, the exceptions painting Lilliput as more of a fantasy kingdom.

There are, of course, several points within the first chapter that do not translate very well for modern audiences. For example, the issue of high and low heels are omitted completely from the adaptations. The original mentions the

difference in political parties within Lilliput as the Tramecksans and Slamecksans, differentiated by low and high heels. Although the idea of two competing political parties is still relevant, the differences between Whigs and Tories, as they represent, may not translate as well, although the prince wearing one heel higher than another does still maintain its meaning.

The primary conflict within Lilliput is with the nearby land of Blefuscu over a matter of which end to break an egg. While the issue originally referred to religion (Catholics and Protestants), each adaptation chooses to portray the conflict for different purposes, as detailed later. This central issue is also the driving force behind the other events in Lilliput, eventually forcing Gulliver to flee.

First, Gulliver decides to help Lilliput by stealing the naval fleet of Blefuscu, thus earning him the title of “Nardac,” which is a great honor. However, after he refuses to destroy the remainder of Blefuscu’s military power, he loses some of his favor with the court. Most adaptations recreate this sequence, largely due to its spectacular nature and characterization of Gulliver, although the remainder of Gulliver’s fall from favor is changed often. In the middle of the night, the Empress’s room catches fire, and Gulliver puts it out by relieving himself. Since this scene is a turning point in Gulliver’s position at court, it is a scene each adaptation must at least acknowledge unless they do not wish for him to lose favor at all. In the interest of decency, it is sometimes only related, or in Sher’s case, changed to spitting the water into the room.

Once out of favor, officials in Lilliput decide that Gulliver must be punished. Reldrasil, a character often portrayed as Gulliver’s friend in the

adaptations, convinces the other officials to simply blind Gulliver instead of kill him, citing health and safety reasons. As an example of the way in which an event in the novel loses its original reference point but retains meaning, Robert P. Fitzgerald excellently illustrates:

In the most general way the episode tells us that ingratitude is a common failing among men; in a more specific way it tells us that princes tend to turn upon great men who have served them; in a private, allegorical way it renders the truth of an historical event, the treatment of the members of the Oxford-Bolingbroke ministry by the Whig government of George I (250-251).

This event is often still portrayed in modern adaptations showing that the theme is still relevant.

After Gulliver is told of his impending blinding, he escapes to Blefuscu, where he had received an invitation to visit after they had been told of his kindness. He is able to hide there while receiving aid from Blefuscu to build a new boat, since the officials in Lilliput were not aware of Gulliver's knowledge regarding his punishment. He manages to set out to sea, and return home before setting out once again.

Returning home and setting out again, despite the often life-threatening events that occur in each new land, is a very large part of the original Gulliver's character, but it is something that none of the adaptations address. In his own reasoning, the sea calls to Gulliver. While it was not entirely uncommon for a man to leave his family behind for months or even years at a time to take

employment on a ship, Gulliver displays what must be either incredible courage or stupidity in setting out again after the events that continually occur to him. On his second voyage, he is once again marooned in a distant land, although this time the other sailors do witness the very different and fantastic residents before subsequently rowing away for their lives. In this land of Brobdingnag, the residents are giants, and Gulliver is the little person, reversing the roles from Lilliput. Only two of the adaptations covered within this text recreate the Brobdingnag scene, although only the Sturridge version maintains a similar plot structure. Therefore, I will only describe a few of the key points of this part of the text.

Unlike in Lilliput, Gulliver does not wash ashore Brobdingnag after a storm, although the ship does pass through one, once again obfuscating the exact location of the new land. Instead, the ship anchors offshore while Gulliver and a team of sailors explore the land; the sailors to discover fresh water, Gulliver to “make what discoveries [he] could” (Swift 91), again showing Gulliver’s curious nature. After being separated, Gulliver sees the sailors running for their lives towards the rowboat, followed by a giant. Gulliver tries to hide, overwhelmed by the giant flora, but to no avail. After being found by a farmer’s servant while hiding in a field, Gulliver is taken to the farmer’s home where the natives marvel at the little man.

At the farmer’s house, Gulliver is at first treated relatively well, although still as a spectacle. This parallels and contrasts his treatment in Lilliput, where he had been a novelty treated with some deal of resentment, but he is always an

“other” to the places he lands. Unlike in Lilliput, where Gulliver was a misfit because he was large and dangerous, Patrick Reilly states:

In Brobdingnag he is misfit because his insignificance makes him the prey of rats, dogs and monkeys. Trifles, literal and culinary, threaten his existence: drowning in the soup, stifling in the cream, falling from the table, being pecked to death by birds or stung to death by bees; even reading a book is both strenuous and hazardous, like the regimen of an Olympic athlete (175).

The farmer places his daughter, whom Gulliver takes to calling his “Glumdalclitch,” in charge of Gulliver’s care. She is described as being very kind to him, although she still treats him more as a doll than a person.

The farmer decides to make money on showing Gulliver off as a novelty. Gulliver quickly begins to fall ill as the farmer becomes more and more greedy, working him as hard as he can to make more money, until finally an order comes from the court that the queen wishes to see the show. The queen is impressed, and buys Gulliver from the farmer, who had assumed the tiny man was near death. Glumdalclitch is also permitted to stay at court, as Gulliver had developed a fondness for her. The parallels here to showing off a foreigner from a lesser developed land, to the point that the person dies, is very evident, and may be too dark for modern adaptations. This event even parallels Gulliver’s own actions when he went back to England after the first voyage, wherein he showed his countrymen some of the tiny livestock he had brought back.

While at court, Gulliver is a constant point of amusement, and he gradually begins to think the same way about himself and his country that the Brobdingnagians think about him. He talks with the king about differences in politics and customs, and the king points out how silly it all is, allowing Swift once again to satirize English society fairly directly. When Gulliver arrived, he displaced the court dwarf, who then decided to vex Gulliver every chance he found, again showing Gulliver to be in competition for the court's amusement. His position does eventually wear his spirits down, however, particularly when the king suggests that his subjects should look for more people Gulliver's size so that they may propagate and make more. Gulliver is horrified at this notion, wanting nothing to do with putting others into slavery. His opinion on this matter parallels his decision in Lilliput not to completely destroy Blefuscu's power, which could have resulted in their enslavement.

By luck, Gulliver is taken away from Brobdingnag while in his travelling box by a large bird, and is then found while floating in the ocean. This time, it is not Gulliver's cunning or even real intent to escape; rather, he is taken away through no will of his own. Even after returning home after such a harrowing journey, Gulliver once again sets back out, showing that he is responsible for his destiny, and that he prefers the odd lands despite his treatment so far. Some readers have claimed this is further proof of Gulliver's madness. Each time between the journeys, however, Gulliver produces some sort of proof that he was where he claimed, so he cannot be called completely mad; at least, not so mad that his accounts are completely false, merely exaggerated.

Chapter Three

Gulliver as Animation

Since the beginning of animated films in the early twentieth century, the medium has always been more closely associated with the audience of children and family. Anthropomorphic animals and extreme size disparities are much easier to relate when drawn, particularly before the technology to duplicate these effects in a live action setting became as available as they were in the later part of the century. *Gulliver's Travels*, therefore, is a natural fit for animation, and in fact served as the primary medium for the motion picture adaptations up to 1960.

The main focus of the three adaptations of this chapter is fantastic spectacle. There is much less time given to satire and commentary, and much more time given to showing scenes of Gulliver as a giant among little people. Animation lends itself well to spectacle, since the scenes can easily be portrayed as impressively as they can be drawn. Animation is also a medium with equal parts of painting and action, drawing on older illustrations placed within countless adaptations of the novel intended for children. This is especially true given animation's roots as a series of still images.

The idea of a giant is also much less frightening if he is animated. Later live action versions show Gulliver peering in through a window from the Lilliputians' point of view, and it is genuinely startling. In versions meant for

children, a perpetually smiling animated giant is much easier to handle. Gulliver can appear as much more innocent, and he makes for a more amiable protagonist. Similarly, the Lilliputians can be drawn as much more exaggerated versions of humans with animation. The imagination of audiences allows for more caricaturizing of characters when drawn, as opposed to live action actors in an abundance of make-up. A large, bulbous nose, exceedingly pointed beard, tall, hooked haircut, or floppy feet carry the same ridiculous meanings regardless of animation or live action; however, if it is animated, audiences can simply continue watching without dwelling on the utter ridiculousness of the appearance. In this way, the Lilliputians become quickly set aside as different, or simply *other*, particularly contrasted with the usually normal-looking Gulliver. Even when Mickey assumes the role of Gulliver, he seems more normal and less caricatured, which is odd considering that he is a giant mouse.

Short and Episodic Cartoons

Although the most well-known film and television adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* are full-length, a few considerably shorter versions of the work have been created over the last century. These have always been only very loosely based upon the original, as shortened time requirements and different audiences demand. Interestingly, the shortened cartoon versions still retain several aspects of the original; which aspects were retained in so short an expanse of time give a key insight into what modern viewers see as central to the original text, and what directors see as useful to their own purposes.

In 1934, Walt Disney Studios released one of the earliest motion film adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels*. The story of the cartoon is brief, but in a way mirrors the purpose of the cartoon itself. The cartoon begins with Mickey excitedly reading the novel *Gulliver's Travels*. He then sees his nieces and nephews playing on a large toy boat, accidentally overturns them while trying to play with them, and needs to tell them a story to quiet their crying; since they were playing in a boat, and he was just reading the story, he puts himself into the role of Gulliver as he tells the condensed story. Mickey's audience is now the same audience as most of the adaptations of the original story: children. The story becomes condensed down into several pieces of extraordinary spectacle for their entertainment.

Mickey's story begins similarly enough; he washes ashore on an island, falls asleep, and is then tied to the ground. While he is incapacitated, the Lilliputians enact one of the more iconic scenes: the searching of Gulliver's

pockets. The key differences in this scene, “Gulliver’s” incapacitation during the search and several more Lilliputians doing the searching, present a much different meaning to the scene. Originally, the search was much more formal and authoritative. Since at this point there is no communication between Gulliver and the Lilliputians, the little people appear much more curious, and much more intrusive, while still seeming goofy at the same time. Some of the original satire is retained, however, since the Lilliputians do not understand most of the items in Mickey’s pockets; his knife is seen as a frightening beast that attacks of its own accord, and the pen is accidentally used to attack and smear a person’s clean face.

Even as brief as the cartoon is, it is one of the few motion adaptations to reference the language barrier that Gulliver faced in his journeys. The Lilliputian General makes a speech to Mickey, but cannot be understood due to the tiny high-pitched squeak of the tiny man’s voice. The brevity of the cartoon might be the reason behind this inclusion, even though it is not necessarily a language barrier in this version, but rather an understanding barrier as the tiny general sounds like he is speaking English, although there is no effective difference in the two barriers for this case. Since this adaptation is a highly condensed version of the Lilliput journey, communication between “Gulliver” and the Lilliputians would only require more time and extend the narrative. If oral communication is not possible, everything becomes a reactionary show of spectacle.

The show of spectacle continues through the remainder of the cartoon, showing snippets of references to some of the more definitive Lilliput scenes, as

well as a few nods to later scenes of the novels. Even Mickey's treatment of the General begins the exploration of an alternate course the novel might have taken. When the original Gulliver was first discovered by the Lilliputians, he thought strongly "to seize Forty or Fifty of the first that came in my Reach, and dash them against the Ground" (30). While this would have been a bit too dark for a Disney cartoon, Mickey does playfully attack the General, beginning a fight with the Lilliputians and signaling the beginning of a very quick run through the Lilliput section of the novel.

Mickey tries to crawl into a church to avoid the cannon blasts, making a quick nod to Gulliver's sleeping arrangement. He pulls on a horse's tail, which could be a brief reference to Gulliver's first thoughts regarding Houyhnhnms, although it might just as easily be coincidence or the source of a writer's brief chuckle. Mickey falls into the channel between Lilliput and (presumably) Blefuscu, at which time he plays with the ships like toys. During the water battle, he does not drag the ships along to Lilliput, as it would not make sense for this "Gulliver" to aid the Lilliputians he was working to tease. But the inclusion of the playful fight with the ships shows the importance of the original scene as a highly recognizable icon, though in this case it is purely as spectacle.

The end of the cartoon makes a strange reference to Brobdingnag: a giant spider attacks Lilliput and Mickey. Of course, it makes little sense to have a giant spider in Lilliput, since not only is everything in Lilliput to scale, but there is never a giant spider anywhere in the original text. This inclusion is the most telling example of a re-purposing of the original novel. Because of the change in

audience, the spectacle of disproportionate sizes becomes the key important characteristic of the tale; this not only makes the focus of the work more related to spectacle, but it is also indicative of wish fulfillment for children, who must feel very out of place for their size in an adult world. Just as Mickey was giant, now he must fight with something else larger than it should be in the same vein as the original Gulliver in Brobdingnag; this is, of course, assuming for the allowance of a giant mouse to begin with. Just as the inclusion of the battle with the spider shows the importance of size disparities in Lilliput, it also implies that the importance of Brobdingnag in the original work is simply that Gulliver must fend for his life against very large beasts: wasps and rats in the original, a spider in this adaptation. The important aspect of the work as a whole in turning it into an adaptation for Disney is its fantastic nature.

Hannah-Barbera's *The Adventures of Gulliver*, premiering in 1968, takes a very different direction; instead of a Gulliver in opposition to Lilliput, this version creates a Gulliver much more interested in helping the Lilliputians. Despite its somewhat long-running episodic nature, this adaptation is substantially looser in its following of the original text, moving away from intentional thematic parallels and instead focusing on a few iconic scenes. The Gulliver of the story is, in fact, the original Gulliver's son, and the story begins with them looking for Lilliput and hidden treasure. This version's importance to understanding what is key to the original story for modern audiences is, again, how it portrays spectacle above all else. References to the original work are almost completely foregone, inventing a

new story involving a relatively giant person named Gulliver and relatively little people named Lilliputians.

In this version, Gulliver becomes a much more heroic, adventure-oriented figure. To accomplish this, the world of Lilliput is no longer relative in size to the Lilliputians; rather, the world is normal-sized and the Lilliputians are tiny, connecting to children just as in the Disney cartoon. Echoing the same concerns that the Brobdingnagians raise in the original work about how a tiny Gulliver could possibly survive even a fight with a field mouse, the size of the Lilliputians in a giant world immediately draws attention to their need for a protective hero. Of course, had the world remained tiny, Gulliver would become less heroic since his feats would become standard fare in the audience's eyes, much like in the original novel. Since he must protect them against a wild, untamed jungle island, his heroic character becomes much more pronounced.

Even though the original story is completely changed, there are still a couple notable similarities. The scene of Gulliver being tied down by the Lilliputians is the one constant in every major adaptation, beyond the very general idea of Lilliput, and Gulliver as a sailor that discovers it. This scene allows for the development and detailing of the relationship between Gulliver and the Lilliputians. In this version, Gulliver frees himself as any respectable children's hero ought to be able to do, but then puts himself at the mercy of his captors to establish himself as peaceful. Since this is a strong, heroic Gulliver, he must be able to define his role in the story himself; the thought processes of the original Gulliver could be seen as too fearful, or not decisive enough for this

version. Critics also decry Gulliver as more concerned with etiquette and therefore performance in this scene (Conlon 411), which does not translate well for Hannah-Barbera's less introspective and more reactionary hero.

The other major similarity is very likely unintentional on the part of Hannah-Barbera. In the original text, Lilliput is a sort of mirror of English society, wherein practices and customs are changed just enough so that the audience can view them as absurd. The two kingdoms fighting over breaking eggs, choosing ministers by something as arbitrary as acrobatics, and their lack of understanding the simple uses of the items in Gulliver's pockets all paint the Lilliputians as a somewhat silly foreign culture. Hannah-Barbera's version retains some of this original satire in the character of the Lilliputians. They each appear as buffoonish caricatures, particularly when contrasted to Gulliver, who presumably comes from normal society. This group of little people on a foreign island must rely on a bold explorer to solve their problems. Because of this, it seems that Swift's original intent is lost, and Gulliver instead comes from a relatively superior society

Fleischer's Gulliver's Travels

The Max Fleischer version of *Gulliver's Travels*, premiering in 1939, presents the story from the perspective of the Lilliputians. In fact, the film could more readily be called "Lilliput's Giant Problems," since the tale only includes Gulliver as a sort of side addendum. This film makes no mention of Big-Endians, and instead has the two kingdoms fight over which song should be sung at the wedding of the princess and prince of Lilliput and Blefuscu, respectively. This plot point has thus been molded into a new shape to be more appealing to movie patrons, but still retains the original design of a war over a petty issue; the removal of the issue does, however, cause the story to lose its sharp satire of religion, though the movie could be considered more family friendly.

The important point about this adaptation is the year it was produced, 1939, and the war currently raging in Europe. This film could have been analogous to World War II for the viewers at the time, and the differences between the book and the film seem to point in that direction. Despite the original novel's assertions that the Lilliputians' dress was something between Asiatic and European, the Lilliputians of this film wore very definitively Medieval English clothes (although the variety of fashions shown did span over 500 years). The King of Lilliput had a thin moustache and longer hair, and carried himself with a timid demeanor; a possible sentiment from America about western Europe while it was being invaded. While the citizens of Blefuscu received little to no air time, not counting the spies wearing robes, the King of Blefuscu has an Eastern

European-esque beard and a gruff demeanor. Blefuscu is trying to invade Lilliput, and never the other way around.

Gulliver as a symbol for America is fairly obvious. His voice has a very Bing Crosby-esque sound to it, deep and with a sing-song quality, he speaks with a bit of a southern drawl, and he is a giant, at first asleep, no less. An American audience might see the conflict in Europe as a needless battle, at least from a distance, and Gulliver reacts in much the same way. In the original text, Gulliver is only given his relative freedom after he agrees to Lilliput's terms, and only then by the good graces of the king. In this film, Gulliver forcefully breaks from his restraints and takes his freedom for himself. Showing Gulliver at the mercy of Lilliput after he wakes up would not send the right message, that America should be powerful, to viewers. Gulliver also still draws in Blefuscu's boats, an iconic scene in nearly every adaptation, which would seem like America making short work of Germany's navy.

This re-imagining of Gulliver unfortunately misses several points due to the change in focus from satire on English society by an Englishman to satire on European conflict by an American. All of the social commentary about government officials securing their positions by means of an arbitrary contest is gone, possibly due to Americans not liking some of the similarities to their own government. Lilliput never accuses Gulliver of treason, even though there is a perfect opportunity when he conceals the Blefuscu prince. While the reading of the list of offenses is an important satiric point in the original text, that particular satire would be lost on a modern American audience. Several of the less child-

friendly plot points are also done away with, as this is intended for a younger audience (marching under Gulliver's legs while he wears tattered pants, Gulliver relieving himself on the palace to put out the fire, figuring out what to do with his waste, etc.). This is a shame, since the political commentary evoked on these points could have been incisive bits of satire in this film, referencing the absurdities of both Lilliput's kingdom and modern society's squeamishness on such issues.

Language in the film also plays a vital role in understanding directorial intent, and whether or not Fleischer intended this work to resemble the original novel in function, if not form. The two kingdoms wage a war over which song is more appropriate for the ceremony: Lilliput's "Faithful" or Blefuscu's "Forever." This conflict is only one of many examples of language that identify the characters of the film; characters are also identified by dialect, speech rhythms, and word choice, as well as several non-audible characterizations, such as richness and originating culture of dress and hair style. Regardless of whether or not these identifiers were used intentionally or subconsciously on the part of the director, they are nevertheless important to the ways in which the audience views the characters, both due to preconceived notions attached to various types of speech and appearance, and because any difference in speech patterns within an area as small and contained as Lilliput-Blefuscus is bound to draw attention to why those differences exist.

The two songs, as the source of the main conflict, illustrate the power humans attribute to sometimes arbitrary choices in linguistic style. Two songs,

which sound fairly alike, have such strong connotations attached to them that it drives the countries to war. At their base, both songs sing about eternal love (one emphasizing being true forever, the other emphasizing forever being true). However, each country claims one for itself. Because of this, the songs take on more meaning as being representative of each country. In the earliest scenes with the kings, they act very amiable towards one another, discussing the marriage of their offspring. After "Faithful" is sung, the king of Blefuscu even comments that it is a lovely song before he learns that it is Lilliput's song. Once the song has that political marker, he instantly turns against it, declaring that it must be the Blefuscu song that is to be played at the wedding. Later, the character Gabby, a Lilliputian, begins to absentmindedly sing along with the Blefuscu prince as he sings "Forever." He dreamily sings along as if it were a favorite of his, until he catches himself: "Forever...Forever!? That's the song of Blefuscu! Spy! Guards! A spy!" (Fleischer). A song about love quickly changes meaning, even for one character, from a dreamy song about love to the marker of a spy. There is a very clear difference between the song's actual meaning and its implied cultural meaning.

The songs also establish the prince of Blefuscu and the princess of Lilliput as storybook characters, and tie them together in the audience's mind through their shared characteristic of singing. Although it is a politically charged song, it also serves as a marker for the prince of Blefuscu, David. The majority of his lines in the movie are from this song, and it sounds somewhat out of character to hear him speak without singing, further compounded by the difference between

his deep, masculine singing voice and his squeaky speaking voice. The princess of Lilliput, Glory, has the same characteristic, except that the majority of her lines are from the song “Faithful.”

Similar patterns of speech, or song as the case may be, identify other groups of characters, as well. For example, members of the torch-bearing mob that was assembled to find the giant on the beach inexplicably speak in a Brooklyn accent, which is strange for a vaguely medieval setting. This accent is identifiable not only through the dialect used, such as the way in which vowels are accentuated, but also through the use of lexemes associated with the accent (for example, “Hey fellahs”). Since this accent is out of place in the setting, it draws particular attention to itself. It is only used while the mob is poking fun at Gabby before they realize that they are standing on top of Gulliver. There is a certain connotation attached to the Brooklyn accent: it is often (or was, as is evidenced by countless cartoons in the first half of the twentieth century) used by wise-guy characters with a proclivity for poking fun at the foibles of other people. Even though the accent is very jarringly unfit for the setting, it does manage to establish characterization very quickly in a medium that is very sensitive to pacing.

Exaggerated accents are used to mark stereotypes in professions, as well. Near the beginning of the film, the wedding planner arrives with a greatly exaggerated generic foreign accent. Every *R* is rolled ad nauseam, *As* are added randomly, and words such as “and” are pronounced “und,” among other differences from standard pronunciation. This may play to an old stereotype of

foreign help. It is too exaggerated to be a coincidence. Later, a group of barbers works on Gulliver's hair and face. At first, only some of them look the part of a stereotypical Italian barber, while others look like any other peasant. One of the peasant-looking barbers, however, then shouts, in an Italian accent "Hotta towel, push im up" (Fleischer), marking himself as another Italian barber. Once the peasant-looking barber is associated with the Italian stereotype, all of the barbers, whether they look the part or not, become Italian in the audience's mind, especially once the next barber accentuates the accent with "Hotta towel, she's a comin up" (Fleischer).

Other characters have their personalities accentuated by their speech, as well. The Blefuscu assassins speak in harsh, whispered tones. The first syllable in every word is stressed, drawing even more attention to the scratchy voices. The hushed scratchy whispers match their clothing (large, baggy cloaks that mostly cover them) to paint them as the sneaky villains. The techniques used to make the villains villainous, and even the previously discussed Lilliputians definitively ethnic, stay true in some ways to Swift's original intent. Lilliputians should be strange but oddly familiar; different, yet we should see aspects of our culture within them.

The difference between the two kingdoms is exemplified primarily through the dialect used by the two kings, particularly since Lilliput is full of varying dialects, and Blefuscu has such a small number of spoken lines. The king of Blefuscu is represented as a warrior-type king through his appearance and language. Gulliver even refers to him sardonically as the "mighty warrior"

(Fleischer), although when Gulliver says this, he is saying so scornfully because of the King's refusal to stop attacking Lilliput. This again shows the nature of a single lexeme having multiple meanings. The King is a big man with a full, pointed beard and heavy vestments. To fit this persona, he speaks with an Eastern European accent, although he does occasionally fall out of it. He softens his R's, replaces W's with V's, and softens his vowels: "It vill be Forevahr, or there vill be no vedding" (Fleischer). This accent has a connotation of strength behind it, although it could also carry connotations of a foreign "other." The King of Blefuscu even has a belly laugh to match. Apart from his laugh, every line is spoken with a guttural resonance, whether it is a line simply complimenting the Lilliputian song once, or waving his fist and proclaiming "It's wahr!" (Fleischer).

The king of Lilliput is much more timid, sporting a thin mustache, lighter clothing, and speaking in a quaking, wavering, and stuttering voice. He also speaks in a dialect much closer to standard pronunciation. It is not a stretch to think that the king of Lilliput is representative of Western Europe, whereas the king of Blefuscu is representative of Eastern Europe. This film was made during WWII, although prior to the involvement of the US, so having the kings of two countries at war over a song sounds like a biting comparison of the current war pitting Germany versus West Europe, and possibly expresses a desire for America to intervene.

Gulliver's voice and language exemplify him as American, strengthening the symbolism. He speaks in a deep, lazy, sing-songy voice that is very reminiscent of Bing Crosby. He uses occasional idioms, such as "I can lick

anybody my size” (Fleischer) and a constant stream of “my, my,” which further paint him as an American. The frequent use of the idiomatic expression “my, my” whenever the little people, namely Gabby, do something to amuse him associates him with southern culture, as it is always spoken with a slow drawl and is reminiscent of a plantation dialect. If Gulliver is representative of America, his role in the Lilliput-Blefuscu war could be construed as encouragement for the US to become involved in the real war. Once the two fictional countries are done bombarding one another, Gulliver swoops in and delivers a lecture about how they should live in harmony. He is even the person to suggest singing the songs together, again exemplifying the similarity of these songs.

There is still some satire retained from the original novel and channeled through the movie’s Gulliver-character from his speech to the “poor, poor, foolish little people” (Fleischer), even if Gulliver is not meant to represent America among warring factions in Europe. Gulliver is the only person able to rise above the warring of the kingdoms, and lectures the kings as though they were petulant children; he is not a giant, they are little people.

The big civilized man entering the land of the little savages is further shown by the Lilliputians not understanding the various bits of technology Gulliver brings with him. They are mystified by things like his pocket watch, and especially his gun. The Lilliputians do not know what the gun is, but accidentally set it off. Since they do not know what it is, they invent a name for it: “Gulliver’s Thunder Machine.” Instead of bothering to ask him what it is called, they instead

give it a name that matches what it does, showing the natives' technological backwardness.

Regardless of the character Gulliver's satiric nature, or possible lack thereof, he is still made into an outside entity by his conventions of speech. No other character in the movie has a voice as resonant, to be expected from a giant among little people, marking him as something very different from the natives. No other character has the lazy, sing-song dialect either, marking him as coming from a different culture. Even if the audience is not aware of where the dialect originally came from, they can still pick up that Gulliver sounds different from the Lilliputians. Gulliver's ability to speak the same language as the Lilliputians is never explained as it is in the novel, but the difference in dialects is enough to create the feel of an outside entity; that is, another way other than the fact that Gulliver is as big as a Lilliputian mountain.

Just as the other two animated versions have shown, Fleischer's version is primarily concerned with the spectacle of a giant in a land of tiny people. It was made primarily to appeal to children, so much of the original satire was lost, and yet it was made by adults, so pieces of the original satire resurface, sometimes in new forms or complete re-purposings, adding new intent to the story. This theme repeats itself even in later adaptations when the target audience becomes older.

Chapter Four

Live Action and Animation

The mixture of animation and live action within film adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* brings a new tool to the medium: a very definite and instant way to differentiate between Gulliver's normalcy and a foreign nation, by means of one being animated and one being a human actor. If the Lilliputians are animated, it magnifies their buffoonery and caricaturizing, as discussed in earlier examples. The mixture also brings in an extra element of fantasy; with a real person in what becomes a pretend world, the viewer becomes much more firmly attached to Gulliver, who is the anchor in reality.

Of course, only Hunt's version completely animates the Lilliputians. Letts' adaptation uses real actors, but presents some of the more famous scenes as paintings in which a live action Gulliver performs. This usage of paintings is, again, a harkening back to older adaptations' illustrations in books. The scenes presented as drawings are made into an even more fantastic representation of themselves. Hunt therefore makes a fantasy setting within a fantasy setting, using the contrast of animation to draw attention to these pivotal and iconic scenes.

Hunt's Gulliver's Travels

Hunt's version of *Gulliver's Travels* from 1977 is the only version to both represent Lilliput as animation, and Gulliver as a live actor. The animation quality is, to put it bluntly, well below the standard of contemporary and previous animated films, so it raises the question of why it was used in place of actual actors. The answer may lie in its purpose of melding what had become a children's classic with political satire, which typically appeals to a more adult audience. Unfortunately, the attempt to portray political intrigue within the court becomes much more cartoonish, where the villains wear pointed beards on elongated, mouthy faces, and talk in scratchy voices, every syllable dripping with evil intent. Then again, there is some merit in attempting to bring a familiar theme from the original novel to a younger audience, which may only be acquainted with Gulliver as a friendly giant and Lilliputians as silly little people.

The Lilliputians all appear as cartoonish as possible: large button noses, gravity-defying hair, bodies as round as they are tall, sometimes even legs no bigger than their heads. In this case, they are meant to be buffoonish and silly, with three notable exceptions. An unnamed General, presumably a much more active Limtoc, is shown in full plate armor, carrying around a mace. His jaw protrudes beyond his face, always spread in a toothy frown. His beard juts out to a point, though it is sometimes curled. Bolgolam acts as his accomplice, and again takes on a much more active role in this version. He is dressed like a caricature of a pirate, again with pointed beard and perpetual toothy frown. Where the original versions of these characters were only judged to be immoral

by their actions, the medium of the movie makes it so much easier to define them as quintessential villains. This does somewhat detract from the political satire of the novel, since if these characters are simply evil, it feels as if there is even less malice involved; their reasoning is simply because they are evil. It may help children understand who should not be trusted in the movie, though.

Reldresal, who, similar to the Sher version, becomes much more heroic than the character he is based upon, is the other notable exception in appearance. The original character serves as the man who informs Gulliver about the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu, and later convinces the Emperor to blind Gulliver instead of kill him, as an act of mercy. This version's Reldresal is differentiated first by appearance, since he is the sole Lilliputian to have much more realistically sized, as well as staunchly masculine, facial traits. As blinding Gulliver would not be a very heroic action to suggest, he instead plots against the Emperor to devise a plan saving Gulliver's life. He is also the person who informs Gulliver of the plot against him, instead of a nameless Lilliputian giving the news. He is self-sacrificing, and loyal to his kingdom, as he decides to return and face punishment. Keeping with the theme of happy endings consistent with children's movies, however, he conveniently learns of a plot to kill the Emperor by Limtoc and Bolgolam, thus saving the Emperor's life and regaining favor.

The director shows a keener interest in following the original text by making the character of Gulliver more closely resemble his character in the book than in other adaptations. He goes to sea not for personal gain or to provide for his family, but because it calls to him. Only this and the Letts version had Gulliver

return home after Lilliput, then set back out again instead of going from one foreign land to the next consecutively. Even though in this version, Gulliver must empty his own pockets for searching, he does still conceal his spectacles, maintaining that bit of privacy and self-concern that rounds out his character well. The only time this Gulliver mocks the size of the Lilliputians in jest is, just as in the original, when he jokingly acts as though he will eat one of the men attacking him. This act is important to the characterization of Gulliver, as it implies an exertion of power over a weaker people, even though Gulliver uses the opportunity to show that he will, in fact, not eat the Lilliputians. Beyond this act, however, he maintains a steady respect for the Lilliputians, regardless of their size, just as the original admired much of their ingenuity.

The addition of the character Subtracto, however, takes away from the character of the Lilliputians as a whole. The original residents of Lilliput were shown to be very industrious and mathematically minded. They designed and built engines to transport Gulliver, calculated the necessary food needed, and even designed a bed stitched together from a number of tiny beds. The novel makes a reference to the industriousness of smaller creatures, such as ants, which paints the Lilliputians accordingly, although perhaps not in a completely positive light. With the introduction of Subtracto, all computations are performed by a single person, negating the characteristic of Lilliputians as a whole. It seems his character is merely brought into the film as a means of both convenience and spectacle itself, as every time he makes his computations, the animation begins to use trail effects, and show montages of the large amounts of machinery,

arrows, manpower, etc. he calculates as needed. By placing all of the intelligence and mechanical capability into one person, Hunt does make the remainder of the Lilliputians seem more buffoonish; if they had at least been as able as the original Lilliputians of Swift's story, the audience may have had a more difficult time picturing them as silly.

One scene makes an attempt at satirizing politics as a whole, but even it is turned into a song and dance number filled with fantastic scenery and goofy characters. The two incompetent guards and their gruff, straitlaced commander, who make appearances throughout the film as comic relief, sing a song about the relation between politics and acrobatics. Although it is unclear through the silly music whether the director is meaning to satirize and poke fun at the ridiculousness of only the Lilliputians, or else the institution of politics as a whole, the focus of the scene is very definitely on the circus-like atmosphere and spectacle of performance. This may be a way of bringing the adult part of the family into the audience, but in a way much more intended for children.

While Hunt's version makes an attempt to bring together the satire of the original and the audience of older adaptations, the outcome falls a bit short on both points. The Lilliputians are too cartoon-like for an older audience, and attempts at political satire will most likely be over the heads of younger viewers. This version even includes a singing Gulliver, which is invariably just a bit of show, and does little to shape his character. The two songs in the film seem out of place, as there are not enough musical numbers to qualify this as a musical adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*, and they both employ the trope of placing the

songs outside of the plot so that it does not actually happen within the story; this is evidenced by characters falling into make-believe oceans and Gulliver walking outside of the city while supposedly chained, creating a strange contradiction in narrative, but an accepted one in movies.

Letts' Gulliver in Lilliput

Letts' version of *Gulliver's Travels*, created in 1982 and titled *Gulliver in Lilliput*, assumes for a much more intellectual audience than other adaptations. The focus almost entirely becomes intrigue within the court, relegating scenes of spectacle to drawings in which a live action Gulliver recreates the scene. The film starts with Gulliver sitting at a table, writing his story while classical music plays in the background, adding an air of authority to the narrative. Even the drawings used through the piece use a style reminiscent of older times in viewers' minds, showing heavily detailed still-action scenes in light brown color. Letts retains many of the original plot points, but makes drastic changes to characters. The new interpretations of old characters, as well as newly invented characters, lend themselves quite well to the satire of eighteenth-century aristocracy and royalty; the new view of characters also makes the audience much more connected to the Lilliputians' personalities, pulling the viewer into the scene in a very different way than the original novel, since the viewer can now connect to the individual personalities of the Lilliputians.

The two characters from the story which become much more central are the Empress and Flimnap's wife. The Empress' role in the original novel was simply to seek Gulliver's death after he urinated on the palace to save her from a fire. In this adaptation, she becomes the real ruler of Lilliput, and the Emperor himself is merely a figurehead. Beyond changing the Emperor into a narcissistic, self-indulgent, ineffectual character for the purposes of further satirizing eighteenth-century aristocracy, the Empress' rise to power does not seem to

change much. She is easily flattered and manipulated, sharing several qualities with the original story's Emperor, as well as bits and pieces of the Emperors from other adaptations. Her manipulability does serve the narrative nicely, however, when she is the one falsely informed of Lady Flimnap's indiscretion with Gulliver, as opposed to Flimnap being informed, since she can then quickly begin a discussion with advisors on how to kill Gulliver. Apart from the convenience of having a spurned love interest order Gulliver's death, as she had fancied him herself, the Empress' behavior pokes fun at lazy and self-pitying monarchic figures, in addition to any such aristocracy as well, as the Empress constantly bemoans even the simplest parts of her job.

The change in the character of Lady Flimnap is based upon a small mention in Part I, chapter VI of the novel. Gulliver describes how two informers falsely accused himself and Flimnap's wife of having an affair. The point was made to further the story and intrigue at court, since this is the event which turns Flimnap against him, and ultimately the Emperor himself is influenced by Flimnap's hatred. It is also possibly a point satirizing Sir Robert Walpole's notoriously unfaithful wife (Traugott 130), in which case the satire carries over nicely into this adaptation, and quite possibly even furthers the point. The Lady Flimnap of this film is shown to be having an affair with Reldresal, and is completely unconcerned with Flimnap, save for not being caught. She does develop feelings for Gulliver, although does not act on them, and even ends the film beginning a bit of seduction with the Emperor.

The changes in the characters are made to make them much more relatable to the audience. Each of the actions in the original novel committed by unnamed characters, or named characters that only appeared once with no description, are now performed by fully formed personalities. For example, the impertinent rabble that shot arrows at Gulliver in Part I, Chapter II is replaced by two new characters: the child prince and princess of Lilliput. As they are characterized as petulant brats, they also serve as the false informers of Lady Flimnap and Gulliver, giving the viewer actual faces to dislike, and punctuating the event as more tragic and contemptible.

Politics are made even more ridiculous because of the more detailed personifications. Reldresal, for example, becomes a country bumpkin that can perform well on a rope because of his circus background, further pressing the satire of arbitrary qualities in a court appointee. In the original text, the reader can imagine that the court officials had some talent; in this version, Reldresal exemplifies that they do not, and so the audience not only realizes the satire in a more pronounced way, they have a face to which they can attach the court's idiocy. The Emperor becomes a comedic character, obsessed with appearance and pretty words, showing the viewer that this particular ruler, and other rulers by extension, cares more for the appearances of things rather than the quality. This trait harkens back to the original satire of acrobatics deciding public office, as all a candidate needs to do for the position is perform prettily. Skyresh Bolgolam, while retaining his jealousy of Gulliver's military success, is not represented as so much a pet of the Empress. He becomes his own character, however petty that

character may be, to establish him squarely as the story's villain much like in the Hunt version. By making him a villain, the implicit statement is that the manner of choosing appointments and subsequent carelessness of the Emperor has allowed for an evil schemer to infiltrate the government at a substantial level. This characterization is also a common theme in popular culture, so the audience can pick up on it quickly.

The newly established romantic nature of the story arising from the change in characterization is placed surprisingly well into the story. As shown, each of the main consequences of the romance are direct descendants of plot points of the original story; even a great deal of the original satire regarding the originally referenced political figures is retained, if not magnified, since the named characters of the original are mostly still intact. Of course, most modern audiences will not make the same connections as eighteenth-century audiences would, but the more general points about absurdities in the court, double dealing, and punishment for good deeds are still universally understood. Since romance has become an almost necessary piece of any modern movie, it is only natural for it to appear even in adaptations of works that contain no trace of it. To Letts' credit, while it may not have been put in seamlessly, it was at least placed into the narrative with due care for the original's integrity.

Chapter Five

Live Action

As the adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* move from animation to live action, the target audience becomes older and the focus tends to shift from spectacle to political intrigue within the court. With less of the adaptation existing as cartoon or drawing, more realistic sets, costumes, and actors present a more realistic picture of Gulliver trapped in various situations, including both the foreign lands and England itself.

Similar to Letts' *Gulliver in Lilliput*, having the foreign lands populated by real people instead of cartoon animation takes away from the silliness or otherness they may have otherwise exhibited. Every previously discussed adaptation which used cartoons for Lilliputians showed them as buffoonish caricatures, with only a few notable exceptions for effect; namely, the prince of Blefuscu and princess of Lilliput from Fleischer's version of the story. The satire becomes much more biting when the lands are populated by real humans that have simply been reduced or increased in size. The residents of each of the lands must now be real, and much closer to actual humanity.

Of course, using only live action does have a few drawbacks for the purposes of adapting the text to film. The Lilliputians in Sher's *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver* are dressed very colorfully and vibrantly, creating a very silly appearance

that seems at odds with a more real setting. When Sturridge creates the world of the Houyhnhnms, he creates the problem of having horses both talk and look natural talking, as well as having the horses look where they were intended to look. With animation, these problems could have been resolved much more easily.

Sher's The 3 Worlds of Gulliver

Sher's *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver*, which premiered in 1960, transforms *Gulliver's Travels* into a moral tale. Gulliver begins by wanting to be something grand, and create something more than an obscure life, but learns his lesson quickly in Lilliput, stating "False pride and vanity: they destroy everything for lovers. Oh, Elizabeth was right. The only safety is in being obscure." This version includes both Lilliput and Brobdingnag, one of the few, and perhaps earliest, adaptations to include both of the first parts of the novel. Although Brobdingnag is typically left out of the film versions probably due to each of the parts maintaining the capability of being a self-contained story, Sher's version maintains Brobdingnag as a necessary part of his revised narrative. The story becomes a romantic film, both between Reldresal and his newly created girlfriend, Gwendolyn, and Gulliver and his fiancée, Elizabeth, who takes on a much more prominent role in this version. The director seeks to meld the satire on political life with old plot points that have been revisioned, as well as new plot points created for the reshaped intention to make Gulliver more action-oriented and decisive.

The revisions of characters' personalities contribute the most to the difference in meaning between original and adaptation. Gulliver's desire to live a grand life becomes the impetus to his journeys, and thus leads to his disappointment, leading inevitably toward an ending involving him going back to England happy to live in obscurity. The ending personality of Gulliver in some ways mirrors the original, in that Swift's Gulliver prefers obscurity as well,

although primarily only because he wishes to not be around humans. Sher's Gulliver takes much more liberty in doing as he wishes in Lilliput, owed mostly to his ability to communicate with the Lilliputians from the very beginning. Without the impediment of language, Gulliver can explain his peaceful desires and situation as a rational being, therefore appearing much less monstrous. His immediate communication also serves to make the Lilliputians more relatable from the beginning, allowing the viewer to see them as fellow humans instead of a strange little society. He offsets the costs of his upkeep, and therefore the initial principle reason for the Emperor's advisors to wish for his death, by uplifting trees and tilling the land himself, thus showing the change from the novel's spectator Gulliver as described by Conlan (411), to a decisive Gulliver, which as noted before is popular in cinema.

In Brobdingnag, where he is reunited with Elizabeth, he becomes an even more heroic figure. He braves challenging the court alchemist, and thus challenges the society's view of science. In the original, Gulliver views Brobdingnag as somewhat backward due to their spurning of war technology like gunpowder. In this adaptation, their technology really is centuries behind England, relying on magic for medicine. If Brobdingnag is actually a technologically backwards nation, Gulliver changes from a petulant nationalist to a man, once again, from a superior society. Size no longer bears the same meaning as it did in the original novel. Swift presented two societies in the first two books, presenting the petty, squabbling society from the view of a physically, and in his mind culturally, superior being, thereby allowing the reader to see the

foibles of society from a larger vantage point. Brobdingnag can be seen as the opposite: a society with fewer flaws, but seen from a point of view where the flaws are more visible (Wasiolek). When Brobdingnag is intentionally flawed, arguably more than Lilliput, the flaws become greatly magnified, exaggerating the characters, causing some of the meaning behind the satire to be lost.

When Gulliver, who is conveniently a doctor, beats the alchemist in curing the Queen of a stomach ache, the kingdom turns against him. The lesson the story's hero learns in this land is the importance of dignity; he refuses to lose to the king in chess, and refuses to acknowledge magic until threatened with death. His new wife convinces him to yield, whereupon they decide to kill him anyway, creating a reference back to a good deed, or at least a yielding to authority, that ends badly. Gulliver's clinging to dignity does hearken back to the original story, however, as the original Gulliver did often cling to dignity, although not consistently. After all, he could kiss a tiny ring in supplication, but became offended when his country was mocked. Maintaining dignity does make Gulliver into a more hero-oriented character, however, which is more popular in film.

The competition between Reldresal and Flimnap for the position of Prime Minister of Lilliput shows the efforts made by the director to recreate the political satire of the original, although it becomes a much more general satire to the overall nature of politics, as opposed to the satirizing of particular authorities. In addition to the romances during the film, this seems to be a natural way to bring an adult audience into the movie. As the movie was created in 1960, all popular

English adaptations to date had been created with a younger audience in mind, specializing in spectacle and completely animated.

The battle between the two politicians also serves to personalize characters in the original novel that, beyond the references to real world people, went largely unexplored and undeveloped. Flimnap becomes the perpetual thorn in the protagonist's side, with a constant hatred for both Reldresal and Gulliver with little provocation. He no longer even has the reasoning of a false indiscretion between Gulliver and his wife, or as Letts' later adaptation claims, an indiscretion between his wife and Reldresal. His transformation into a more villainous character gives the viewer a face to hate, instead of a largely ignored name. The plot also becomes much easier to follow if all of the conflict is driven by one person manipulating the events.

Reldresal, conversely, is the heroic Lilliputian who puts his life on the line and refuses to renounce his love, who has been accused of treason. Predating the Letts version, but in a similar characterization, he defeats his opponent, in this case Flimnap, in acrobatics for his position. By showing a heroic character standing against tyranny, Reldresal becomes a parallel for Gulliver in this version, showing humanity in the tiny Lilliputians. Unlike in the original novel where Reldresal's fighting for his love and being placed in a tiny prison might appear somewhat comical to Gulliver and the reader, Sher portrays him as a very real character with real problems, taking away some of the characterization of the strange attached to the Lilliputians by Swift.

The director makes a point of further explaining the relationship between politics and acrobatics, mixing spectacle and satirizing the process of choosing real world leaders in an interesting way. Beyond pointed additional asides, such as the queen stating that there was formerly a literal mud-slinging contest to determine the winner, the king provides commentary as each competitor makes his attempt. From juggling the problems of the state to jumping over difficult questions, the comparisons help modern audiences make the connection between the absurdities of Lilliputian government and modern governments. If this version simply showed the contests with no commentary, the satire could be lost on audiences who would not have the luxury of deep reading. While the method of portraying the satire became a bit heavy-handed, Sher does pass the original idea onto the audience.

Despite a few jokes and nasty characters to bring the vices of politics into the film, spectacle is, once again, at the forefront of the director's focus. For example, once again there is a singing Gulliver, crooning away to the delight of the Lilliputians. This version does, however, make the song part of the narrative, as the Empress very quickly turns from loving him and his voice to hating him for the way he put out the fire, within the span of about two minutes. The manner of extinguishing the fire this time was by having Gulliver fill his mouth, then spit the fire out, dousing the Emperor and Empress in spit; this was a child-friendly version, after all.

The director does present some of the more well-known scenes from the original, as they serve both the purposes of bringing in faithfulness to the original,

as well as adding to the awe factor of the film. Gulliver is still tied down by the tiny Lilliputians, he still drags the warships from Blefuscu, and he still must battle larger than normal creatures in Brobdingnag. This final point was changed from mice and insects to a squirrel and an alligator, possibly due to the perceived more threatening nature.

Several new events are added, though, to accentuate the story's larger, or smaller, than life nature. In Lilliput, sword fights abound, seemingly put in just to add effect, since they end quickly and with little consequence. Gulliver breaks through a wall to rescue Reldresal after he is imprisoned, showing not only Gulliver's strength, but also a bit of a rebellious nature; something modern audiences like in their protagonists. The King of Blefuscu has a large collection of tiny animals and demands all be brought to him; this both serves to expedite the story along past the farmer portion of this chapter, and lets the director show off the rather impressive collection of creatures. Even Gulliver's fights in Brobdingnag become more sensational, and the first gave some very nice material for the trailer, as Glumdalclitch had to let Gulliver climb her hair out of a squirrel's burrow.

The primary romance of the film, between Gulliver and Elizabeth, is the focus of most of the film, apart from Lilliput in which Reldresal and Gwendolyn serve as their romantic proxy. Elizabeth begs Gulliver not to leave on his journey, then stows away aboard his ship. Afterwards, she does not turn up again until Brobdingnag. They hastily marry, Gulliver oddly eager for the wedding night in a family-friendly film, with a giant wedding certificate to cover themselves. This

romance serves mostly to hasten along the story, as well as provide motivation to Gulliver to succeed and survive. He becomes more relatable to modern audiences, who may see the leaving of his wife and children to go to sea in the original novel as a very inappropriate character fault for a hero. The romance leads him to fall overboard when he chases after Elizabeth when she is discovered, it leads him to fight the squirrel when they leave the castle for their short honeymoon, it causes him to give into the accusations of Brobdingnag's alchemist so he can live, and it provides him with a happy ending upon his return home. The story revolves around this romance to provide a new feeling to the story, which modern audiences often expect, and may have even been intended to make the film more targeted to women, as men would surely watch for the action..

Sturridge's Gulliver's Travels

A made-for-television mini-series version of the novel premiered in 1996, directed by Charles Sturridge. This version was made to be a closer approximation of the book, and is the only popular motion adaptation to encompass all four parts of the novel. The differences, however, create a much different interpretation of the novel than previous adaptations. Several of the differences make this adaptation more in-touch with a modern culture, although a good bit of the satire is lost, since most modern audiences would not understand the references. Then again, much of the original satire is kept in, but is transformed by the director's intention, and the audience's perception. I have omitted the second half of the miniseries, which details the latter two parts of the book, since the focus of this thesis is only on the original two parts; however, Sturridge's emphasis on retaining original story points with new thematic meaning holds true for the duration of the production.

The story is narrated by Gulliver immediately after his final journey. He comes home after years lost at sea to find that his wife is entertaining a suitor, and his son, whom his wife was pregnant with before he left, is now nine years old. This bit of Odysseus allusion seems oddly placed at first, although there is a modern preoccupation with fathers leaving behind single mothers and reappearing later in life, not to mention the possible acknowledgement of Odyssean themes in the original work itself. It stands to reason that a modern audience might see this scenario as more acceptable than a Gulliver that repeatedly leaves behind his family to go on an adventure. It is not until the final

part of the series that the audience learns of Gulliver's reason to go to sea: not for the sake of discovery and yearning as in the original, but to provide for his family.

When he returns home, however, he obviously has a form of advanced post traumatic stress disorder. With the modern emphasis on mental disorders, this one in particular, it makes the Gulliver character more real. This is what a modern audience would expect of a man who has undergone such traumatic experiences. Of course, it also gives the director a chance to satirize stereotypical eighteenth-century notions of mental illness and mental hospitals, as Gulliver is locked away in horrid conditions. Despite the truth behind Gulliver's adventures, he indisputably suffers from mental instability. He shouts at Lilliputians that exist only in his memory, cowers from non-existent giants, and has conversations with people from his journeys when they are not in the room. Regardless of this, the audience sympathizes with him, and it is the dishonest doctor attempting to court his wife that places him in the mental hospital, hoping to break him. Sturridge creatively made a fifth voyage for Gulliver, wherein the seafaring doctor is no longer among his own people as he knew them, and is treated as an outsider. It even retains the original satire of eighteenth-century England, albeit much more directly than in a comparison to foreign lands, as now the negative side of society is shown directly. Of course, to modern audience, we must now apply this satire of what is now another world to modern society.

The focus of the Lilliput scene in this adaptation is on Lilliput's treatment of Gulliver as an animal, which alludes back to the original novel's satire on how the

English treat “savages” brought to their country. The king’s cabinet discusses what to do with the “Man Mountain,” and they use much of the same criteria as the novel. He eats far too much, but a dead body that size could cause a plague. They use him when it is convenient, as they have Gulliver retrieve Blefuscu’s boats, and they decide to cut out his eyes when he puts out the fire with his urine. While there may not be a formal reading of a list of offenses, a reference that would be lost on most audiences, the result of punishment for a good deed is the same.

Much of the satire in this section is at the expense of former European aristocracy. The fashion of the Lilliputians is recognizably European, and there is a very definite class system in place. Two scavengers find Gulliver, and they are charged with treason in an effort by the army not to have to pay them; a bit of foreshadowing to Gulliver’s fate, since innocent men are condemned to death. A fun bit of extra satire is inserted here, as the younger of the scavengers, after convincing the king that Gulliver will only talk through him, is able to win a position at the court through the creeping and leaping contest. The positions here must be determined by creeping and leaping, and not other forms of acrobatics, because this method ensures that the king can influence the outcome. When the scavenger tries for a position, the king raises the bar far too high to leap over when the attempt is made, but the applicant then ducks under the stick to earn the position. Even though the scavenger wins, there is no mistaking the characterization of royalty and the upper classes trying to keep the lower classes in place. Though the theme was not prevalent in the original novel, it is applied to

great effect to this version of Lilliput. For modern audiences, this theme is highly relevant. It would have been relevant in the eighteenth-century as well, but the theme is of such popularity today that modern audiences almost expect this relationship between rich and poor characters.

Some of the parts of the story that are often overlooked due to being considered inappropriate are shown in this version, although they are changed to alter their satiric nature. Gulliver does stand over a procession of the army, and his trousers are still tattered, but it is more of a royal procession including the king and queen than a strictly military affair, changing from militaristic to pomp and privilege. Instead of it being a treasonable offense to look up at Gulliver's exposed privates, it is instead only a warning given by one of the scavengers to the king and queen. The scene changes from a satiric commentary on the human tendency to exhibition (the soldiers in the novel still look up out of curiosity, despite the death threat) to a satiric moment about repressed sexuality. With the popularity of the idea of repressed sexuality in this time period, this scene is a golden moment of humor for modern audiences. Despite being told not to look up at the exposed genitals, the king and queen give in to their curiosity. The king is amazed and bemused, but the queen is positively horrified at the sight, which also serves to further solidify the audience's understanding of the queen's hatred for Gulliver.

The queen's "proper" attitude is the butt of two other jokes, as well. When she first meets Gulliver, he kisses her hand, covering it in spit. When he saves her from the fire with his urine, she comes to the balcony waving at citizens

graciously until she realizes what she is soaked in, at which point she angrily storms off in embarrassment. The queen displays very diva-like traits throughout the story, and it is no surprise that a modern director caters to his audience by knocking her down several notches at every opportunity. This is, again, a re-engineering of Swift's original satire to satirize what modern audiences would bring to the experience.

The way in which Gulliver escapes Lilliput exemplifies a modern audience's expectations about aristocracy and the lower classes. Just as the scavenger has repeatedly outsmarted the royalty, he also serves as the story's hero by informing Gulliver of the plot to blind him. Modern audiences favor the underdog, and want to see a socio-economic nobody succeed. He betrays his fellow advisors, showing that he will not be a party to their underhanded tactics, changes back into his scavenger clothes to show his change of character, which is somewhat odd since time is of the essence, and saves Gulliver. Just to show that good characters must have happy endings, the director has Gulliver hand over his wedding ring, which in this case is a fortune in gold to a Lilliputian.

The key differences in the Brobdingnag scene revolve around the peasants and Glumdalclitch. Beyond the small changes and omissions to the original in the interest of time, the story follows much the same path. The peasants, however, are made into much more buffoonish characters than cruel, as at least Gulliver's original owner was. They dress Gulliver up as a spirit of the crops, which simply involves tying plant stalks to him, and having him bless dead plants for gold. Instead of the peasants being awed at Gulliver's tiny size, they

now oggle and worship him as a mystical spirit. Sturridge most likely made this change to contrast the peasants more directly with the court, but any message that could be inferred from this change seems to be cut short quickly once the setting changes to the palace.

Just as in Sher's *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver*, Glumdalclitch becomes a character that cares about Gulliver more as a person than as a living doll. Gulliver does mention that she enjoys dressing and undressing him, but the audience then receives a more sexual meaning to this, as Glumdalclitch discusses running away with Gulliver and having children. This may be an innocent eleven-year-old's idle dreaming, but it does give a new meaning to Gulliver's observation.

A few of the smaller differences made by the director in this section include an unmarried queen to discourse with Gulliver instead of a king, a substantially more malicious dwarf, and an actual demonstration of gunpowder instead of merely a description of it. The latter two changes seem more for the sake of spectacle and humor, since the dwarf fails in his attempts to kill Gulliver, and the gunpowder demonstration is made much larger than is intended, causing an explosion within the palace. Even though Sturridge places much more emphasis on faithfulness to the original novel and satire than many of the previous adaptations, he still includes enough fantastic spectacle to keep viewers entertained.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

As an overall trend, film adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* have moved from pure spectacle with references to the original, to versions which acknowledge the original much more in meaning, as well as in method. Political satire becomes much more prevalent in the later versions. This shift in focus indicates two trends: a more adult audience, and more reverence placed upon authenticity and faithfulness to the original. These two trends may not be completely correlated, but they are at least related.

The shift to an adult audience itself naturally indicates a moving away from a younger audience. Since the work was originally adapted for children because of the fantastic nature of the story, a shift away from this audience shows a shift toward the other, now much more considered, aspect of *Gulliver's Travels*: satire of what was then contemporary society. Strangely, the adaptations that focus on satire tend much more often to continue satirizing eighteenth-century England instead of modern day England or America, as the case may be. The adult themes and scenes return, and are sometimes even bolstered by new adult situations, such as Reldresal being discovered in the closet of Flimnap's wife, in Letts' *Gulliver in Lilliput*. Since the audience shifts, so too the situations change to more adult in nature, and Gulliver takes on concerns more common to an older

audience, such as love, money, and dignity. The character of Gulliver tends to stay heroic throughout the films, although the character does shift slightly to accommodate what contemporary audiences view as necessary for a protagonist. Sturridge's Gulliver, for example, is a wreck of a man who originally risked his life to provide for a family, then risks being put away in a mental institute the rest of his life by not sacrificing his principles. This is considerably different than a Gulliver who left behind a family only because of his desire to go to sea.

Critics too often decry adaptations as being poor based simply on the notion that it is not faithful enough to the original. If the trend in these adaptations is to be believed, this concern has gained in strength over the past few decades. This may account for the shift away from an audience of children, as well. The original satiric elements of *Gulliver's Travels* are much more accessible to adults; therefore, by making an adaptation more faithful to the original, if not in method than at least in function, the film will by necessity become more viewable by adults. Generally, the more animation used in the film, and consequently the younger the audience, the more the film focused on entertainment, disregarding faithfulness to the novel, although it should be noted that this is not necessarily bad. This shows the malleability of Swift's work; it can be approached by several different audiences in different ways, and can even transcend centuries of time by changing the intent, form, and function of the original story.

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