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Family Plays

Gulliver's Travels



By
Lowell Swortzell



Based on Jonathan Swift's classic novel

Gulliver's Travels

Fantasy. Adapted by Lowell Swortzell. Based on Johathan Swift's classic novel. Cast: 9m., 4w., with doubling, or up to 20 roles. A classic tale has been dramatized by Lowell Swortzell for family audiences. "Gulliver transcends barriers of age," wrote the enthusiastic reviewer of The Capital, "... this is not simply children's theatre. The play works on several levels. Swortzell's adaptation offers flash and fun for those who don't look deeper, and social commentary for those who do. This is a great show for theatres great and small." The play takes audiences on all four famous voyages, from Lilliput to Brobdingnag to outer space and to the land of the noble Houyhnhnms and the comic Yahoos. Gulliver's Travels is a joy for actors and audiences everywhere. Full directions are supplied for simple staging. Basic set for the fantasy and real worlds of the early 1700s. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: GA3.

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Based on the novel by

JONATHAN SWIFT

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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GULLIVER'S TRAVELS was first produced by the Department of Educational Theatre of Ferrum College to open the Ferrum Performing Arts Center. The play was directed by R. Rex Stephenson, with the following cast:

Jonathan Swift Richard Smith

Lemuel GulliverMatt Danielson

Voyage One

Voyage Three

The Guard David Carpenter
 The Farmer Rick Mayo
 The Wife Trilvey Albanowski
 The Emperor Kirk Cash
 Royal Advisor Billy Rea
 Royal Messenger Gretchin Tomlin

The Pirate Captain Kirk Cash
 First Laputian Billy Rea
 Second Laputian Rick Mayo
 The King of Laputa Erik Smith
 Rebecca Bier
 The Dean of the Grand Academy
 of Legado Donna Stephenson
 The Scholars Mike McCoy
 Peter Crow, Dick Jasse
 Lolene Corron, Marvin Meyer
 Jody Brown

The Governor of
 Glubbubdrig Kelly Herrick
 The Natives of
 Luggnagg Betty Neal
 Julia Burton, Brenda Bedsaul

Voyage Two

Voyage Four

The Reaper Kirk Cash
 The Reaper's Wife Julia Burton
 The Daughter Brenda Bedsaul
 Jessica Bier
 The Son Mark Johnson
 Neighbor Stacey Guillen
 The Queen Betty Neal
 The Royal Ladies Tina Estep
 in Waiting Leigh Dillon
 The Royal Expert Kelly Herrick
 David Carpenter
 The Royal Dwarf Scott Johnson

The Yahoos Billy Rea
 Kirk Cash
 Julia Burton
 Kim Johnson
 Rebecca Bier
 Gretchin Tomlin
 The Houyhnhnms:
 Dapple-Grey Lydia Robertson
 Brown Bay Scott Johnson
 Gulliver's Wife Brenda Bedsaul
 His Two Children Eric Smith
 Jessica Brier

Two additional productions followed. The Program in Educational Theatre at New York University produced a revised version in October 1988, directed by Nancy Swortzell with setting designed by Marion Kolsby, costumes by Paul Tazewell and Masks, Puppets and Creatures designed by Ralph Lee.

In 1989 Gulliver's Travels was produced by Anne Arundel Community College at the Pascal Center for Performing Arts, Anne Arundel, Maryland, under the direction of Robert E. Kauffman.



Courtesy NYU/L. Pellettieri Photo

For the casts, crews, and artistic staffs of the first three productions of Gulliver's Travels, and particularly to the directors, R. Rex Stephenson, Nancy Swortzell, and Robert E. Kauffman. My thanks to each of you for keeping Gulliver on course in his travels from theatre to theatre to theatre.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

Production Notes

Setting

One basic set is required.

A writing desk stands at left side of stage, on top of which rests several manuscripts, an ink well and quill pen. A chair resides behind the desk; at its side can be seen a large globe, showing the world as it was known in the early 1700s. Swift must be able to spin this globe at the end of Act One.

The rest of the stage consists of platforms or wagons offering a variety of heights and playing levels. These are placed in different arrangements, as required by each voyage. They move easily and can be arranged by members of the cast in full view of the audience.

Maps

Each voyage is introduced by a map (readily reproduced from any standard edition of Gulliver's Travels). Maps may be projected from slides onto panels or painted and flown in from above. Or they can be carried by members of the cast and held aloft as each voyage is introduced.

Projections or Set Pieces

Projections of seas, storms, meadows, fields, ships, palaces, or skies may further suggest locations. These may be realistic or stylized as determined by the director and designer.

Similar impressions can be conveyed through lighting effects

and/or minimal pieces of scenery. If desired, free-standing cut-outs suggesting various locations may be carried on by actors and placed on platforms as needed.

Whether the production is simple or elaborate, the action should not be slowed by visual detail or encumbered by heavy traffic. Scene changes should be staged as part of the action, so that the stage is never left in total darkness or the story allowed to halt.

Differences in Size

A number of possibilities exist to indicate the changes in size in the first and second voyages.

1. **Suggestion and imagination:**
The audience is led to imagine differences through contrasts in playing, in the attitudes and movements of the character. This method results in a theatrical style which rather than literally depicting differences in size, requires audiences to imagine them. Characters through their relationships with Gulliver can create a reality that playgoers will accept as their own.
2. **Film:**
In the first voyage, the figure of Gulliver may appear on film and be projected as a giant hovering about the heads of the Lilliputians. If film is employed, we should see close-ups of Gulliver's face from time-to-time, along with full-length shots. Film projection should avoid as much as possible a flat, two-dimensional look. Instead of a conventional screen, curved surfaces, panels, and a scrim will prove more effective. These may be moved by the cast to suggest Gulliver in different places and poses.
3. **Puppets:**
A large puppet or doll can play Gulliver in the first voyage and a small puppet in the second. Because the tiny Gulliver plays

most scenes on the top of a table, a puppet may be operated from underneath as long as the table is covered to the floor. If puppets are used in either voyage, an actor should also play Gulliver and remain in full view near or next to the puppet in order to render facial expressions and innuendos essential to the character. An übermaionette, 16 ft. high, played Gulliver at New York University, operated on long poles or rods by four actors. The human Gulliver stood beside this huge figure, speaking his lines.

4. Dolls:

A small doll may be used in the second voyage to portray the tiny Gulliver. This doll can be passed about, thrown into and rescued from the bowl of cream, placed in the miniature canoe, and so on. If a doll is selected, an actor should play Gulliver and remain in full view, in front of the table or at the side. The actor should play each scene as if the action is happening to him (and not to the doll), with full facial and physical expressions. All other characters, however, should react and respond only to the doll. A doll with movable arms and legs proved particularly effective in the New York University production.

5. Shadows:

In the first voyage, the giant Gulliver can be created by casting an enormous shadow on a scrim or screen. If this option is chosen, the human actor still should be seen but the Lilliputians play entirely to the shadow.

Properties

Properties may be imagined and suggested in mime. When this is the case, the actors must convey the weight, shape and size of each property entirely through nuance of gesture and movement.

If real properties are employed, they may be the actual items indicated in the text, or they may be two-dimensional objects cut out of board and painted in an animated or stylized depiction.

The objects the Lilliputians pass to Gulliver are life-sized until he

reaches for them. As he touches them they become small or miniature versions of the same properties. This effect is achieved by making the large item disappear into a hidden space as Gulliver withdraws the smaller property, also from a hidden space. Timing must be exact so that the large object disappears just as the tiny one emerges in Gulliver's hand.

Costumes

The action of the play covers twenty-eight years in the beginning of the 18th Century. Jonathan Swift should appear in a suit and wig of the time he wrote Gulliver's Travels--the late 1720s when he was in his mid-to-late fifties.

Since much of the play is fantasy, other styles should also be considered. These may be quite modern. Gulliver's Travels has been called the first serious work of science fiction in the English language, and certainly the Floating Island that appears in the third voyage should reflect this in costumes and staging. Other possibilities for stylization abound throughout the play.

The two horses in the fourth voyage are elegantly costumed, with their faces seen at all times. They should not wear heavy hooves or burdensome outfits. Their graceful movement must convince us they represent the "perfection of nature."

Sound

Much of the atmosphere of the play and the mood of the characters may be created through sound effects of storms, waves, battles, crowds, and the like. These effects may be made by the actors themselves in performance rather than through use of recordings and tapes. Audiences will respond far more to an actor-made "live storm" than to one emerging on tapes from speakers placed throughout the auditorium.

The play runs under two hours with one ten-minute intermission between Act One and Two. If a shorter version is required, one or more of the scenes that make up the third voyage may be omitted.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

ACT ONE

Voyage One: To Lilliput

Voyage Two: To Brobdingnag

ACT TWO

Voyage Three: To Laputa, Legado, Glubbubdrig and
Luggnagg

Voyage Four: To the Country of the Houyhnhnms

Time

The time of the play covers the years between 1699 and 1727.

Place

Lands known and unknown, as discovered by Lemuel Gulliver and
described by Jonathan Swift.

ACT ONE

From the aisles of the theatre, the entire cast approaches the stage singing "To Portsmouth, To Portsmouth" or a similar traditional round. As the actors gather on stage, they shake hands, exchange greetings and warmly welcome one another, and the audience as well.

EVERYONE: *(Singing)* To Portsmouth! To Portsmouth!
It is a gallant town.
And there we will have a quart of wine
With a nutmeg brown.
Diddle down!!

The gallant ship, the Mermaid,
The Lion, hanging stout,
Did make us spend there
Our sixteen pence all out.
Diddle down!!

(Standing in dominant position is JONATHAN SWIFT who addresses the audience. As he speaks, he moves among the members of the company who now represent the people of Ireland.)

SWIFT: The best and greatest part of my life I spent in England.
There I made my friendships, and there I left my desires.
(Smiling at the thought:) What a figure, I, Jonathan
Swift, should make in London now!

No, not while my friends here in Ireland are in poverty,
distress, and imprisonment. *(Indicates the company
assembled around him.)* Not while their enemies carry
rods of iron! No!

(Shakes his head, despairingly.) The people, the poor Irish people!

But while my loyalties keep me here, my mind is free to travel—great distances. So I write a history of my journeys throughout the world. *(Goes to his writing desk at side and picks up a loose, bulky manuscript.)* A large volume telling of countries discovered by me, sitting here. A splendid way to travel when you're needed at home.

(Reads title page:) Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver.

Being Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and a defender of the Irish people, Jonathan Swift is in trouble enough already. So I write as another: Lemuel Gulliver. *(Arriving at the actor playing GULLIVER, he slaps him on the back and introduces him to the audience.)* Meet Lemuel Gulliver.

GULLIVER: Happy to meet you. *(Waves to audience.)*

SWIFT: *(To audience)* Do not join us on these travels unless you're willing to discover among the mysteries of strange lands, seas and skies, the strangest mystery of all. . .

GULLIVER: What is that ?

SWIFT: You may be in for a surprise when you find the answer.

GULLIVER: Tell us now.

SWIFT: No. You *(Indicating GULLIVER)*, and you *(Indicating the players)*, and you *(Indicating the audience)* must discover that mystery for yourselves. Ready to start?

GULLIVER: *(With a smile at the audience)* I should say we are.

SWIFT: Come along then. Our first voyage begins. *(He reads from the manuscript.)* "On the fifth of November, 1699, with a sudden flurry from the north, the weather being hazy, and the wind strong, we are driven directly upon a rock. Our ship immediately splits.

(The entire company enacts a storm at sea, first by making sounds of low howling wind, which quickly increases, then is followed by thunder. Several sailors are tossed by waves and driven furiously about the stage, and soon altogether disappear.)

(Cries of crew.)

SWIFT: *(Heard above the storm)* "What became of my companions I cannot tell. . ."

(GULLIVER swirls about, helplessly as if in foamy waters.)

GULLIVER'S VOICE: *(Replaces Swift's)* Pushed by wind and tide, I swim as fortune directs me.

(Storm abates.)

My legs drop. Nothing underneath me. *(Panics.)* I'm gone. *(Continues to drift.)* No, now I can stand. *(Excited.)* Within my depth. And safe once I get to shore. *(Drags himself to high level, then collapses, exhausted.)* I'll sleep sounder than ever I've done in my life. . .*(And so he does, almost at once.)*

(A GUARD, seeing GULLIVER, advances, carrying bow and arrow. When GULLIVER stirs, GUARD withdraws frightened, to call others to join him.)

GUARD: Here, I say. Have a look at this! *(Met by the FARMER and his WIFE, who pull a cart filled with provisions, they approach the sleeping figure with great curiosity.)*

FARMER: A monster, surely!

GUARD: It's alive, that much I know.

FARMER: But not a human being, can't be.

WIFE: Then what is it?

GUARD: Some "mountain" blocking our way.

WIFE: A "mountain" with arms and legs? That explains it nicely, that does.

(GULLIVER yawns and turns in his sleep.)

FARMER: A "mountain" that moves!

GUARD: I'll shoot it. *(Aims bow.)*

WIFE: *(Stopping him.)* Your arrows will be like flies buzzing about, nothing more, to that!

FARMER: The Emperor must hear of this.

WIFE: And see for himself. He'd never believe us. *(As if addressing the Emperor)* "Your Majesty, guess what I found as I went to market this morning? A man-mountain!! That's what I said, Your Majesty. A man that is a mountain. A mountain that's a man." He'd have me in the madhouse in two seconds.

FARMER: Sound the alarm. *(GUARD rings bell.)*

WIFE: *(Curiosity has led her closer to GULLIVER.)* Look! A foot larger than my entire house.

GUARD: Let's secure the man-mountain! Quickly!

FARMER: *(Producing rope.)* Take this and tie its arms. Strongly now.

GUARD: And its legs. *(They tie GULLIVER, staking ends of rope into the ground around him.)*

FARMER: Fasten his hair. *(They run rope around hair, which is long and thick.)* There. He's ours. Thank goodness!
(GULLIVER stirs and suddenly awakens.)

GULLIVER: What's this? *(The three stop dead in their tracks.)*

WIFE: How he roars! *(Covers her ears.)*

GULLIVER: *(Realizing his condition)* Tied down? Who does this?

WIFE: Please don't ask.

GULLIVER: My arms bound in string?

GUARD: *(Correcting him)* Ropes. Our heaviest ropes!

FARMER: He's breaking loose.

GULLIVER: *(Moving leg)* More strings?

GUARD: Rope, I say. Our best rope!

GULLIVER: All over me. Strings everywhere.

GUARD: Rope!!!! Strong enough to fasten ships.

GULLIVER: *(Lifting legs)* There. Free!

WIFE: *(Dodging his movements)* Watch that foot, please! Keep it over there!

GULLIVER: Oh, no! Not my head, too. More strings!

GUARD: ROPE! ROPE! ROPE!

GULLIVER: I'll wrench loose. *(Pulls hair free.)* Ouch! That hurts!

FARMER: He's sitting up.

WIFE: He's going to see us.

GUARD: *(Reluctantly assuming authority)* Let me speak!

FARMER: Gladly!

GUARD: *(To GULLIVER)* Hello, up there! I say, HELLO!

GULLIVER: I hear distant voices. *(Looking about.)*

GUARD: We're here. Down here.

GULLIVER: *(Spots them)* There you are.

GUARD: *(Proudly)* We're your captors.

GULLIVER: My what? *(Laughs.)*

GUARD: The ones who bound you.

GULLIVER: In strings?

GUARD: ROPES!

GULLIVER: *(Still shaking them off)* More like threads to me.

GUARD: *(Insulted)* Not threads! Not strings! Heavy, heavy ROPES!

GULLIVER: If you insist. Ropes. I say, who are you?

GUARD: A guard. This is a farmer.

WIFE: And I'm his wife. *(Curtsies.)*

GULLIVER: *(Puzzled)* But you're no taller than my finger.

GUARD: I'm the tallest of my countrymen, and proud of it! *(Snaps to attention.)*

GULLIVER: *(Bending closer)* Diminutive mortals! All three of you!

WIFE: What sort of creature are you? With feet like that?

GULLIVER: Not even the tallest of my countrymen. Pleased to meet you, little captors. *(Roars with laughter.)*

WIFE: *(Hands over ears)* Don't do that!

GUARD: Stop laughing at us. You're in our power.

GULLIVER: I am? How's that?

GUARD: See this. *(Holds up bow and arrow.)*

GULLIVER: With fear and trembling. *(Laughs again.)*

GUARD: Let's show him. *(Discharges an arrow.)*

GULLIVER: Your arrow feels like a tiny needle. *(Easily brushes it off.)*

GUARD: And again. *(Another arrow.)*

GULLIVER: Stop, that tickles!

GUARD: *(To his comrades)* What can we do to keep him here until the Emperor arrives?

GULLIVER: Get some food and drink, if you'd be so kind. I'm famished.

WIFE: Certainly. We're headed to market to sell this food which we'll gladly share with you. *(She secures food from the cart.)*

FARMER: Let me lean a ladder against you. We'll bring up a meal. *(He places ladder against GULLIVER.)*

GULLIVER: Much appreciated, I assure you.

WIFE: A platter of roasts, turkeys and chickens. *(She hands an enormous plate to GUARD who inches up ladder with great effort, and hoists it to GULLIVER.)*

GULLIVER: *(Reaching down and taking plate, which is now the size of a doll-house dish)* Thank you!

WIFE: Enjoy it!

GULLIVER: I did. *(In an instant, the food is gone, and he's as hungry as before.)* Some bread, perhaps?

WIFE: My week's baking. Right here. You'll have a fresh slice.

GULLIVER: A loaf would be nice.

WIFE: All you like. All you like. *(Presents a tray filled with large loaves. GUARD hauls them up the ladder.)*

GULLIVER: Don't they look good! *(Reaching down, he takes tray, now bearing loaves no larger than petit fours. He devours them in a mouthful.)*

WIFE: Did you see that? My week's baking gone in a gulp!

GULLIVER: Delicious! Thank you. And something to drink, please.

WIFE: *(To herself)* Serve him the ocean, why don't you?

FARMER: *(Rolls a hogshead to ladder)* This should quench his thirst. *(With GUARD, they lift barrel up the ladder.)*

GULLIVER: You're the kindest captors. *(Takes barrel, now the size of a tumbler and drinks it eagerly.)* Refreshing. As a cup of tea.

WIFE: Cup of tea! That's enough ale to stagger a shipful of sailors.

GULLIVER: *(Pointing off)* Is this your leader who approaches, scurrying across the countryside?

GUARD: I hope so.

FARMER: He'll know what to do with this monster.

WIFE: Let him feed the man-mountain. One meal and our supplies are gone.

(Responding to the emergency call, THE EMPEROR arrives, followed by members of the ROYAL RETINUE. He rushes up to GUARD, not seeing GULLIVER.)

EMPEROR: Who sounded the alarm?

GUARD: I did, Sire. *(Salutes.)*

EMPEROR: Have these two committed some offense?

GUARD: No, Your Majesty.

WIFE: We're honest farmers. *(They bow and curtsy.)*

EMPEROR: What's wrong then?

GUARD: We have a visitor!

EMPEROR: I receive visitors on Thursday afternoons. You know that. In the garden.

GUARD: Your Highness, if this visitor moves, you may have no garden.

WIFE: His foot is bigger than the entire palace. You've never seen such feet!

EMPEROR: Where is he?

GUARD: Turn around, Sire. And look up.

WIFE: Way up!

FARMER: And up and up!

(In looking up, THE EMPEROR leans so far backward that he topples to the ground.)

EMPEROR: *(Awed)* I see what you mean. *(Members of the ROYAL RETINUE rush to help him to his feet.)* Who are you?

GULLIVER: Lemuel Gulliver, until this morning Surgeon on board the Antelope. Pleased to meet you.

EMPEROR: I am the Emperor of Lilliput. This is my chief advisor. *(ADVISOR bows.)*

GULLIVER: These good people have welcomed me and won my everlasting gratitude.

EMPEROR: *(To GUARD, FARMER and WIFE)* Well done.

WIFE: *(Whispering)* Your Majesty, he'll eat you out of house and home. Court and palace, I mean. You've never seen such an appetite. My week's baking gone in a gulp.

EMPEROR: *(To GULLIVER)* We must think of your comfort. *(To WIFE)* Prepare him a bed.

WIFE: A bed, Your Majesty! Six hundred beds sewn together, and his feet will stick out.

EMPEROR: Provide him sheets, blankets and coverlets.

WIFE: Are there so many in the kingdom?