

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Gulliver's Travels

by Toby Hulse

Based on the book by Jonathan Swift

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Cast

Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a Captain of several ships, by Swift's reckoning, 37 years old at the time of the voyage to Lilliput

Richard Sympson, a publisher and cousin to Gulliver

Mary, wife to Gulliver

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

ACT ONE – LILLIPUT

1702. Late evening.

The small attic room that represents a sizeable portion of Gulliver's lodgings in Redriff, that area of London now known as Rotherhithe.

The room resembles nothing less than the junk room of the Age of Reason. Shelves, cupboards, cases and chests contain at least one of everything that exists in the eighteenth century in a disconcerting variety of sizes. There is obviously some kind of organisational principle at work here, but it would be hard to say what it is. If there is a fine-line drawn between eccentricity and insanity this room balances precariously upon it.

*In the middle of the room is a table with the remains of a hearty supper, numerous empty wine bottles. Seated at the table is the publisher **Richard Sympson**, Gulliver's cousin. **Mary**, Gulliver's wife, clears the dishes.*

Mary He will not be long. He keeps the papers shut up in a trunk under our bed. The trunk is locked. He is most particular about that. Always locked. He will not let me see what else is hidden inside. I am surprised he is so eager for you to read what he has written.

Sympson He must have had a change of mind. I believe he wishes me to publish his tale.

Mary Do not call it a tale. Please. It is not a tale; it is true. He assures me it is true. He will not be questioned on that.

Sympson You have read it?

Mary He will not let me read it, but I have heard what happened many times.

Sympson And you believe it to be true?

A slight pause.

Mary He is a man of science, a physician. He has dedicated his life to the pursuit of truth, to the understanding of what we are. And he has always been most careful to observe faithfully the manners and dispositions of the people with whom he meets on his several voyages. Besides, our narrow portion in this life does not allow us the luxury of fancy.

Another slight pause.

How did you find my husband, your cousin, after all these months?

Sympson He was rather excitable over dinner. Look, he has hardly touched his chop.

Mary His appetite is not what it once was. *[Pause.]* He has... he faints.

Sympson And...

Mary He does not sleep easily.

Sympson You are worried.

Mary I have known him, sir, some twelve years now. If you understood... Sir, I
—

She is cut off by Gulliver's entry. He is clutching a sheaf of papers.

Gulliver As I promised, 'A Voyage to Lilliput'. Read cousin, pray.

He hands the papers to Sympson, who skims the first few pages.

Gulliver watches expectantly.

Sympson looks up from the pages.

Sympson This story of yours is a shipwreck narrative then, like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*? Or travels, in the manner of Dampier?

Gulliver I believe that it is something more than that.

Sympson You have not chosen to write of your travels before this.

Gulliver Many have been into the Levant, to the East and West Indies. I know I am the first to travel in these lands.

Sympson Shipwrecks and foreign travels are popular reading now.

Another look at the first few pages.

This opening section has a ring of authenticity...

Gulliver It is true.

Sympson Quite right.

Gulliver A summary of how I got to be surgeon on the *Antelope*.

Sympson But I am not yet caught in it, and that's the thing... If I am to publish this, dear cousin, if people are to buy it –

Gulliver Is it a little dull?

Sympson No, I –

Gulliver Too factual?

Sympson Perhaps –

Gulliver Mary here has heard it many times and she does not tire.

Sympson Perhaps, as your wife, she –

Gulliver How else then?

Sympson I'm sure if I were to read...

Gulliver It would be best for us to show you.

Sympson Pardon?

Gulliver We will show you. You should experience it, even as I did.

Sympson How?

Mary Lemuel, I think perhaps –

Gulliver Help me, Mary.

Mary My dear husband...

Gulliver You do not believe me.

Mary I do.

Gulliver My own wife.

Mary I do.

Gulliver Please help me, Mary.

Mary I will.

Gulliver But you do not believe me.

Mary I do.

Gulliver Good. It is true. [*To **Sympson.***] Lie on your back.

Sympson Sir?

***Gulliver** sweeps the remains of supper from the table.*

Gulliver [*Perhaps we see a hint of the mania which is later to grip **Gulliver.***] Lie on your back, and we will show you.

Mary It is perhaps best to do as says, then you will understand.

*Reluctantly **Sympson** lies on the table. **Gulliver** begins to tie him down with whatever comes to hand.*

Sympson Good lord!

Mary It is best you understand.

Gulliver I was indeed shipwrecked. When I came to land, I was extremely tired and lay down on the grass. On waking I found I was not able to stir. You see, my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; likewise several slender ligatures lay across my body. My hair was tied down also.

***Gulliver** shines a lantern directly into **Sympson's** eyes.*

I could only look upwards, the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended mine eyes.

Sympson I cannot see.

Gulliver Neither could I.

Sympson Please stop. I fear I will be blinded.

***Gulliver** does not stop.*

Lemuel, if this is some elaborate revenge for one of those tricks I played on you when you were a boy then I apologise, wholeheartedly.

No answer.

Lemuel, I say again that I apologise. Your brothers and I were fooling with you merely. Boys can be very cruel, but we intended no malice.

No answer.

I admit we were wrong to make a target of you, but is it not the way of boys to pick on those lesser than themselves?

Gulliver begins to do something by **Sympson's** feet.

There's something moving on my left leg. I can feel it. What is it?

Still no answer.

I say, what is it?

Gulliver climbs a pepper pot on to **Sympson's** chest.

Gulliver It is a human creature, not six inches high, no larger than this pepper pot, with a bow and arrow in his hands.

[As Lilliputian.] Hekinah degul! Hekinah degul! Hekinah degul!

Sympson *[Managing to free one hand.]* Lemuel, stop this nonsense. Get it away from me.

Gulliver There are at least forty more of the same kind. *[To Mary.]* Help me, Mary.

Mary *[To Sympson.]* Sorry. I would like that you understand.

Mary helps dance an array of condiment pots upon **Sympson's** body.

Sympson Stop it now!

Gulliver I too thought to scare them away, but they were exceeding powerful.

[As Lilliputian.] Tolgo phonac!

Gulliver begins to stab **Sympson** all over with the carving fork.

Sympson What are you doing?

Gulliver Arrows. A whole flight, shot into the air at once, as we do bombs in Europe.

Mary At this point I have learned that the most prudent method is to lie still and see what happens next.

*The stabbing suddenly stops. **Gulliver** begins building a tower from books.*

Sympson Release me! Please!

***Gulliver** stands back to admire the work.*

Gulliver Look at that – nearly a foot and a half from the ground. These little fellows are practical geniuses. Now listen...

***Gulliver** climbs to the top. **Mary** steadies the rather wobbly construction.*

*[As **Emperor.**] Langro dehul san.*

Sympson I am sorry?

Gulliver *[As **Emperor.**] Langro dehul san.*

Sympson I understand not one syllable of what you say.

Gulliver No, for I am speaking in Lilliputian, the language of Lilliput.

Sympson Lilliput?

Gulliver The land at which I was arrived. Now be quiet and listen, for you are in the presence of the Emperor.

*The **Emperor's** oration continues – a mixture of threats, promises, pity and kindness, all in gibberish.*

Sympson May I have a drink?

Gulliver *[As **Emperor.**] Address me with the deference due an Emperor.*

Sympson Mary, I appeal to you, as my hostess –

Mary Wait - you are nearly freed.

Gulliver *[As **Emperor.**] Address me with the deference due an Emperor.*

Sympson Your Highness –

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] And I shall call you Man Mountain.

Sympson Your Highness –

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] Lofty...

Sympson Your lofty Highness –

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] And tall...

Sympson Tall?

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] And tall...

Sympson You said he was but six inches high.

Gulliver And therefore taller than the others by at least the width of my little fingernail.

Sympson Your lofty and tall Highness, I am thirsty. May I have a drink?

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] I am sorry, but I understand not one syllable of what you say.

Mary Perhaps you might use signs and gestures.

Sympson *does so.*

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] I see. Why did you not say so?

Gulliver scrambles down from his tower of books and goes to a sideboard groaning with vast quantities of bottles and drinking vessels, some of prodigious size. He returns with a thimbleful of wine.

You must be thirsty. Drink up!

Sympson I was anticipating something a little larger...

Gulliver [As **Emperor.**] Larger than that? No such vessel exists in my Empire. Drink up!

Sympson *drinks.*

The Man Mountain can drink a whole barrel in one draught! What a marvel! Hekinah degul!

At **Gulliver's** urging **Mary** makes the Lilliputians dance up and down on **Sympson's** chest, chanting 'Hekinah degul!'

Sympson Thank you, but that was not sufficient. I need more.

Gulliver [*As Emperor.*] I am sorry, but I understand not one syllable of what you say. Perhaps you might use signs and gestures.

Sympson Gulliver!

No response.

Sympson gestures for another drink.

Gulliver [*As Emperor.*] I see.

He fetches another thimbleful of wine.

That is all we have. There is no more.

Sympson Then I must thank you for your gracious hospitality...

Gulliver [*As Emperor.*] It is simply the respect we Lilliputians afford a welcome guest. Besides, it contains a sleepy potion. It would be unwise to drink too much.

Sympson A sleepy potion! What nature of hospitality is this? When am I to be released?

Gulliver [*As Emperor.*] You are to remain my captive until we have taken you, drugged and senseless, to our capital city. There you will be placed in the ancient temple and chained, giving you the liberty to walk up to some two yards and to crawl inside to sleep. Then we can loosen these bonds. Great indeed is my mercy!

Gulliver releases **Sympson** from the table.

Sympson And this is the story contained in the papers you wish me to publish? I cannot imagine –

Gulliver It is not dull?

Sympson No, but –

Gulliver This is but the beginning of that narrative, my dear cousin.