

The film and the book

Main differences between the film and the book:

1. The structure: the film uses "flashbacks" to tell the story of Gulliver's travels. In the book, there is an account of the travels and then of Gulliver's return home.
2. The ending: the film has a happy ending whereas the book ends with Gulliver being unable to tolerate his family.

Reviews:

Based on the classic 1726 novel by Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels is grand fantasy with much more serious and dramatic undertones. Swift penned the original novel as a sharp-tongued political satire that poked fun at the ridiculousness of human behavior, and director Charles Sturridge has captured Swift's intent, and translated that to create a fantasy that tosses out some not so subtle barbs at man's frailties and problems.

Director Sturridge has jazzed up Swift's novel in a way that works very well visually and really engages the viewer. As Gulliver is relaying his adventures to whomever is present, his current surroundings slowly give way to that of his narrative, and at times are quite surreal in their appearance. This technique, which is used throughout the film, is cleverly done and serves as an unusual transition device that prevents the 187 minute feature from becoming simply a series of narrated pieces.

Like all good fantasies, it's the special effects that can make or break it. My 10-year-old daughter Sam, who is a voracious reader, had never heard of, read, or seen any incarnation of Gulliver's Travels, and I insisted she take part in watching this disc with me. She was completely hooked from the beginning, and was beside herself when we had to split the viewing into two nights. I guess that's as good of an endorsement of this enjoyable tale as you're likely to get.

Rating : A-.....My central objection is what showed up on the tube wasn't Swift's book. I'm not complaining about differences in the way Swift told his story in a book and how it might be presented on television 250 years later. If they had changed the structure yet presented some of Swift's ideas and words within that framework, they might have done something worthwhile. Unfortunately, they weren't that clever. In the book, the focus is Swift's finely honed social criticism and satire. What little social commentary the TV crew worked into their story was their own and it was toothless. Swift's writing had teeth: he changed government policies and turned the tide of public opinion with his writings. If the screenwriters had respected that and showed a little courage, they would have used more of Swift's ideas and words and less of their own.

The most aggravating change of all was Gulliver riding a Houyhnhnm, a scene so antithetical to the sense of the story it feels like a betrayal. I'm very concerned that these ill-conceived images will hold the popular imagination and displace the better work.

If there is a single point to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* it is that humans have no right to be proud about being rational creatures: our lives, our institutions, and our world are corrupt and degenerated: our very nature runs contrary to the qualities we call rational. I'm less clear about the message of the TV version. One theme seems to be that no one is hurt by telling the truth. I wish the producers had heeded their own message. Gulliver's O

Other comments

"What's sad is that Jonathan Swift didn't get the joke, in my mind," says Danson, who costars with his new wife, Mary Steenburgen..... 'He saw the greed, the stupidity, the ignorance, the ego, the pride -- all of the foibles of mankind. What he didn't do is turn the corner and say, 'That's what it is to be human.'

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I don't understand anything about the recent movie version. The insanity business was one of the more annoying aspects of the story, since one of the pivotal points of the story is Gulliver's veracity, he is clear-headed, reasonable and believable. And, in fact, Swift depended a lot on the fact that travellers were returning from remote parts of the world and writing books about the weird things they saw all the time. Making Gulliver insane or delusional robbed the story of one of its main foundational structures. If Gulliver isn't believable, what have you got?
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A popular TV version dares not confront the audience with the really dark elements of the Travels: Yahoos as slaves, the Houyhnhnm Council and the debate about exterminating Yahoos and Gulliver's constructing his canoe from Yahoo skins. The Yahoos of the TV version are unambiguously human beings, Gulliver's kinfolk.

The happy ending was saccharine with honey sweetened with plain old sugar, but oddly there allusions to the misanthropic real Gulliver living in the stable and refusing to eat with wife and children.

Swift would not like this sanitized version.

I was disappointed when I began reading the story and realised it was nothing like the movie. After 20 pages, I was more upset with Hollywood for ruining another great work of Literature. It's bad enough they refuse to stop butchering Shakespeare - now they kill Swift.
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