

The politics and process of abridgment*

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Resumen

Este trabajo examina el arriesgado proceso de la adaptación y, en particular, el de la edición abreviada de las obras canónicas de la literatura para público infantil; utilizo mis propios esfuerzos para adaptar *Los viajes de Gulliver* como punto de partida para este análisis. En última instancia, la historia de Gulliver, como cualquier cuento canónico, va más allá de un texto fijado, pues existe en gran medida a través de la memoria y de la oralidad, un proceso colectivo que, en vez de fijar la historia, la libera, asegurando tanto su fluidez como su estabilidad mediante la adaptación y la readaptación. El proceso de reescribir *Los viajes de Gulliver* se convierte, de esta manera, en problemático —aunque inevitable— y su análisis nos permite hacer un rico comentario sobre la creación y el consumo de literatura “clásica”, prestando una especial atención a las construcciones del niño lector.

Palabras clave: adaptación, simplificación, edición abreviada, clásico, niño lector, sátira, ironía, intemporal.

Abstract

This paper examines the fraught process of adapting, specifically through the process of abridgment, canonical works of literature for children, and it uses my own efforts at abridging *Gulliver's Travels* as a starting point for that analysis. Ultimately, Gulliver's story, like any canonized tale moves beyond the fixed location of the text to exist largely via memory and recitation, a collective process that frees rather than fixes the story, ensuring both fluidity and stability through adaptation and re-adaptation. The process of rewriting *Gulliver's Travels* becomes, in this way problematic but unavoidable, and this analysis of that process offers a rich commentary on the creation and consumption of “classic” literature, with specific attention paid to constructions of the child reader.

Keywords: adaptation, abridgement, dumbing down, classic, child reader, satire, irony, timeless.

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I find likewise that the writers of those bundles are not agreed among themselves; for some of them will not allow me to be the author of my own words; and others make me Author of Books to which I am wholly a stranger.

Lemuel Gulliver

Gulliver's Travels was first published in 1726 and immediately became a great success. All of England was buzzing about the book, its scandalous satire, and its mysterious author Lemuel Gulliver. Gulliver was the book's protagonist and credited author, though he wasn't a real person. Jonathan Swift was a real person, of course, and many people recognized Gulliver as his handiwork while many others didn't. At any rate, Swift was unhappy with the 1726 manuscript, which contained several omissions and alterations of his original text. In 1734, a new version of the text came out with all of Swift's corrections —along with a repudiation of the original printer. This is the Faulkner text, which has become the definitive or the *real* text of *Gulliver's Travels*. Of course, the original Faulkner text was also incomplete. Dublin publisher George Faulkner restored the text to Swift's specifications, but he still omitted several paragraphs at the end of the third chapter of Part III for fear of political reprisal. Finally, in 1896, the *real, real* manuscript of *Gulliver's Travels*, just as Swift had originally intended, and later to become a classic work of literature, was released into the world (Swift & Asimov, 1980: xii-xxi).

By that time, *Gulliver's Travels* had been published a dozen times over, translated into at least that many languages, and been read much of the world over. Swift was a memory, but Gulliver continued to be brought to life in new editions of the book, featuring the work of a host of different authors as well as illustrators. The first illustrated version of the book came out in 1727, the same year as the first abridged version of the text (not counting the first edition that is). In subsequent years, certain passages and illustrations were censored —Gulliver urinating on the Lilliputian Emperor's palace to put out a fire— only to be later restored (and in some cases later to be taken out again). In 1896, the same year the authentic text was first published, Andrew Lang included "A Voyage To Lilliput" excised and abridged from Swift's text, in his *Blue Fairy Book*, and over the next hundred years *Gulliver's Travels*, or at least its first two voyages, began to be read by some as a children's book —though it's hard to imagine this as the intent of the author. This paper focuses on *Gulliver's Travels* both as classic and children's book, paying heed to the interaction between these genres that's highlighted through the ongoing processes of translating and transforming Swift's text for new audiences.

Would it be too much to suggest that there is no definitive *Gulliver's Travels*, no essential text? Perhaps. There clearly is an original text. It exists, exactly in the form that Swift wrote it and has been available to readers as such for over a century. What's more, while the act of reading takes place between the text and the reader, it remains a bit audacious to take the author out of that equation completely. Gulliver has become a literary classic, though, and there's nothing

simple or transparent about that process. It's well worth asking what happens to a work of literature through this kind of canonization. The text can be fixed and dated, but Gulliver's story has taken on a life beyond the page, becoming a story that, while not universal, purports to move beyond cultural and generational boundaries. To throw out another dust jacket word, *Gulliver's Travels* becomes "timeless". Of course, in both the practical and theoretical sense of things, that's a very tricky word.

Nonetheless, Gulliver's longstanding presence in the western literary canon, along with his continuing appeal to new generations of readers, demonstrates sustainability if not immortality. Since its first publication, the original text has gone through countless adaptations, abridgements, and interpretations and travelled through the hands of scores of authors and illustrators (not to mention film makers, dramatists, dancers, and puppeteers). What remains beneath those changes? Is there a primacy to the text, weathering all of these storms, or does the story of *Gulliver's Travels* become more like a template, whose timeless quality is fabricated less from its intrinsic textual qualities and more from its ability to be packaged and re-packaged in thousands of different forms? And what are the implications for Gulliver's original text? Is Swift's story enhanced or diminished through this constant revisiting and revising? And what of the interpreters of that story, what responsibilities do and should they bear? Must, as John Stott asks, "modern retellers remain faithful to the original context in which the stories were probably presented and received", presuming such fidelity is even possible? Can they fulfill "the double requirements of accurately reflecting the culture of" source narratives, while also addressing the needs, abilities and expectations of a modern audience? And, critically, do "they have the right to attempt the re-creation of such stories, particularly, when those come from cultures of which they are not members?" (Stott, 1996: 193).

I have the dubious privilege of being able to look at some of these issues from the inside, having abridged *Gulliver's Travels* for Sterling Publishing and their Classic Starts series—one of four such abridgements I published with Sterling. I approached these projects with no small degree of skepticism, the sort of questions John Stott asks looming very much at the front of my mind. The general rationale for the Classic Starts series is that it introduces young readers to classic works of literature, giving them the confidence that they can read difficult books (once, that it is, they've been rendered less difficult). Once emboldened, these readers will become more proficient and eventually have the desire and ability to take on the originals, along with other challenging works. On the back of each book in the series it reads:

With Classic Starts, young readers can experience the wonder of timeless stories from an earlier age. Abridged for easier reading and carefully rewritten, each classic novel is filled with all the magic and excitement that made the original story a beloved favourite.

That's probably enough to make any literature professor cringe. I've done my share of cringing while thinking about the process of abridgement, about the mechanics of rewriting someone else's book, and about the elusive idea of magic —that there is, in fact some unnamable, uncontainable energy that lives inside of a classic work, a magic that can be preserved even when the text itself hasn't been. Of course, this has long been an issue in the study of translation; how concerned must the translator be with literal accuracy? How much creative leeway does he or she have in interpreting the text? Walter Benjamin suggests the translator's job requires more than simple fidelity "when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame" (Benjamin, 1992: 73). This is inevitable with canonical texts, so their sustainability over time and across cultures requires not just translation but adaptation as well.

Adaptation, by its nature, is relational, connoting an effort to put discrete social, political, and/or cultural moments in conversation. Context, then, is critical. In my *Gulliver's Travels*, a white, 20th century American male reworked the language and content of a white 19th century Anglo-Irish male for an audience of (mostly) American children —and some would argue that second cultural gap, between adult and child, to be the more daunting. In the course of abridgement, the text was reduced by about 20,000 words or by more than half. Unlike other abridgements I'd undertaken, this project actually did involve substantial re-writing on the sentence level as well; Swift's style and syntax would prove challenging to the average college student, much less a fifth grader. Language was changed to meet the needs of economy, and my editors' discretion, while some content was removed. For example, there's no mention in my text of the Lilliputian army's procession between Gulliver's legs, in which the tattered condition of our hero's breeches inspired "some Opportunities for Laughter and Admiration" (Swift & Asimov, 1980: 32). Likewise, when Gulliver visits the Academy of Projectors during his third voyage there's no mention of the intrepid Projector who tries to "reduce human Excrement to its original food" (Swift & Asimov, 1980: 171). There's simply no way to avoid it; Swift's text was reduced and re-crafted into a more easily comprehensible, and to my editor's taste, "appropriate" form for its young audience. As such, the whole process raises the issue of the "dumbing down" of literature for children.

That's certainly not the most charitable phrase, but it gets thrown around a lot in discussions of children's literature, referring to abridgements, movie interpretations (Disney's a frequent target), and even to some original stories; one need look no further than the beloved Harry Potter series, which Anthony Holden calls "Disney cartoons written in words" (Holden: 2000). In terms of literary adaptation, a hard line can be drawn, claiming that any kind of abridgement, any shortening or changing of a text constitutes a dumbing down, and too many critics seem comfortable drawing that line. Amy McClure even suggests that the act of abridgment, or as she calls it "expurgation", can be read as an act of censorship. She notes that censors have long reacted harshly to *Gulliver's Travels*, pointing out that the Victorians, "acting under the urge of

maintaining the innocence of young readers and the romantic belief in the idealized race”, went so far as to cut any references to the human torso from the book. For McClure, shortened retellings, including those that limit Swift’s text to the first two voyages, constitute a form of “prior restraint”. Even if “censorship may not be their primary aim”, she argues, that remains “their effect on the vigor of Swift’s prose” (McClure, 1983: 23). Judith Kellogg offers a counter perspective that’s a bit less exacting —if, ultimately, no less harsh. Building off Bruno Bettelheim’s claim that, as “soon as a child begins to move about and explore, he begins to ponder the problem of identity” (Bettelheim, qtd in Kellogg, 1993: 47), Kellogg explains that “retellings of traditional stories have always been an important type of children’s literature”, and that these retellings “are fundamental to creating a child’s personal and social identity, as well as a sense of continuity with the past” (Kellogg, 1993: 57).

Leaving aside the thorny issue of identity, Kellogg’s argument emphasizes the importance not only of stories but story-telling itself in linking, creating, and reproducing culture. Classic stories become classic through being told and retold, by traveling beyond the fixed location of the text and entering into cross-cultural conversation. As Roderick McGillis points out, context doesn’t just affect how a story’s written but also how the story is read. “Each reading of the story takes place in a context different from the last reading”, so that each new context must “affect both the story as performance and our performance as readers” (McGillis, 1992: 147). An abridged *Gulliver’s Travels* participates in this cycle or performance, engaging a process that comes with considerable baggage. As Jack Zipes, a staunch critic of Bettelheim’s ahistorical approach to the fairy tale, explains, the “symbolic act of writing a fairy tale or producing a fairy tale as a play or film is problematized by the asking of questions that link the fairy tale to society and our political unconsciousness” (Zipes, 2006: 5). The literary abridgement involves the parallel processes of reproducing the source material while appearing to replace the original text with a new one, making the process, for reader and writer alike, potentially more problematic.

In her essay, Kellogg addresses this difficulty and seeks to “explore the implications of dumbing-down children’s literature” (Kellogg, 1993: 57) through a consideration of four different re-creations of the Merlin character from the King Arthur legend. In the process, she claims an easy authority in judging good and bad representations of the Merlin character, concluding, “when these potentially powerful stories are retold badly or shallowly to a generation of children, they lose their power to transform” (Kellogg, 1993: 57). From a critical perspective, that’s not very helpful. Merlin tales that are told “badly” are simply tales that don’t fit Kellogg’s vision of personal growth and communal responsibility. It’s clear from her examples that every new version of the Merlin story is re-told with a different agenda depending on the conscious and unconscious biases of the author who wrote the book and the market forces that facilitated its release and distribution into the world, but for Kellogg the question of

dumbing down becomes an issue of subjective taste rather than any nuanced consideration of fidelity of source material. What's more, in deciding which texts are appropriate ones, Kellogg makes a number of blanket conclusions about the potential child readers of those texts, conclusions that threaten to discount actual children in favor of a universalized notion of the child. As Sue Walsh makes clear, in analyzing children's literature, any "assumption of a critical position that implies 'appropriateness' or 'suitability' necessarily involves the critic in bringing to bear an assumed knowledge of the 'child': of its needs, its likes, and its linguistic or narrative competence" (Walsh, 2003: 26).

Robert and Julie Brown have engaged directly in the abridgement process, rewriting science and history books for consumption by 5th-7th graders, and they prove both more concise and more flexible than Kellogg in confronting the various connotations of this murky process. In discussing their abridgement of a book on famous inventors, "a story that begins with the wheel and ends with the space shuttle" (Brown & Brown, 1993: 34), they lamentably recount the lack of a single female inventor in the source material along with their failed attempts to convince their editors to do something about this. On the other hand, when abridging a book on energy and fuel, they recall shaping the content to reflect their "admittedly liberal bias" (Brown & Brown, 1993: 35). These small battles are won or lost, but the implications are the same either way: "Ultimately the dumbing down process is a politicized action. Every decision we make must surely be driven by motivations other than ones we are consciously aware of" (Brown & Brown, 1993: 34). The Browns try to measure the effects of their actions, agonizing over impossibly restrictive word counts and editorial decisions that sacrifice thorough, encompassing presentations of the subject matter to an inflexible bottom line. Word counts have to be met, and, as the Browns realize, market forces are driving the publication of these books, not literary or academic ones. From this vantage point, the dumbing down of literature is revealed as a pervasive reality that can't be ignored.

Of course, it isn't that easy; reduction isn't tantamount to simplification, and there's a wariness attached to the act of literary adaptation that isn't always justified. Linda Hutcheon deals with this extensively in *A Theory of Adaptation*, wherein she argues against the idea that "proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis" (Hutcheon, 2006: 6). Hutcheon admits that adapters are driven by a wide variety of motives; nevertheless, "from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon, 2006: 20).

My abridgement of Swift's novel was largely a negotiation between the desire for fidelity, and the unshakable reality that I was, in fact, creating something new. Each abridgement involves a distinctive marriage of interpretation and creation, and each occurs in a distinctly politicized environment, and I found trimming content for Sterling to be less a question of the political than

the politically correct. By that I mean, while my editors made no attempt to impose any kind of explicit political ideology on my text, they clearly did answer to an idea of what material was “suitable” or “appropriate” for their target audience of 7-9 year olds, and I worked with an implicit understanding of those limitations. I didn’t try including the humorous episode where Gulliver quells the fire raging in the Lilliputian palace through micturation, or the randy scene where the Brobdignian ladies explore Gulliver’s miniature human anatomy. Company policy clearly advocated a (literally) sanitized view of childhood, free from fart jokes and other kinds of toilet humor (which, of course, many children find irresistible). I was surprised when my editors asked me to omit “killing” from the list of pirate’s vices (theft, robbery, forgery, and treason were all approved). By and large though, the focus at Sterling was on “cleaning up” the text, attempting to create safe, and protected places for the child’s imagination. My editors’ choices seemed to fall very much in line with the constructions of “suitability” Sue Walsh describes, efforts that act, if unconsciously, to render an “appropriate” text but, also, to inscribe an “appropriate” child and a desired vision of childhood. This is a facile concept, and not a benign one, but a concept that reflects a preoccupation with surface sterility as opposed to any kind of deep moral or cultural agenda. For instance, Sterling proved insistent at keeping the reader away from Gulliver’s privations but not from his frank and grim indictment of human society, coming after his stay with the Houyhnhnms, or the open revulsion he feels for his family at the end of the book.

As a point of comparison, I still grind my teeth thinking about a small change—one of the only changes actually—I had to make in my abridgement of *Tom Sawyer*. At the end of the book, Huck Finn flees his new, elevated life and returns to his beloved hog stalls. Tom finds him here, merry as can be, puffing on his familiar corn cob pipe. Or so I thought. Smoking remains a big taboo these days, especially for guardians of western childhood, and readers of my abridgement will (sadly) be greeted by the image of Huck in his hog stall with candy instead of tobacco. Overall, I made far fewer changes to *Tom Sawyer* than I did to *Gulliver’s Travels*. Still, this single change holds more weight than anything I altered in Swift’s novel; it affects not only Huck’s actions but his character, muting his defiance and uncompromising autonomy, clearly subjugating Huck, and Mark Twain as well, to a reductive universalized vision of “suitable” childhood.

Despite the hacking and goading, despite some lamentable omissions, *Gulliver’s Travels* holds up better through the “double process” of abridgement, due less to any aptitude on my part than to certain qualities of the novel itself. After all, *Gulliver’s Travels* has been abridged hundreds of times, usually geared towards a juvenile audience, and many of those editions are even shorter than the one I did for the *Classic Starts* series. Lang, for instance, includes only the voyage to Lilliput, which continues to be common practice, and reduces even this section to a few pages. In fact, the majority of abridgements reduce Swift’s text to either the first or the first two

voyages, and the novel's malleability can largely be traced to Gulliver himself; he's simply not a full-fledged character and doesn't have the dominating persona of Huck or Tom. He has character traits, of course. Gulliver displays plenty of petty pride and a ready willingness to conform to societal standards. He takes an unusually strong stand in refusing to conquer and destroy the Blefuscan people as urged by the Lilliputian emperor, saying he "would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery" (Swift & Asimov, 1980: 46). Even here, though, Gulliver acts more as a mouthpiece for Swift than a fully imagined character, and this is by design; Gulliver is a vehicle for the author's satire. His main role is to reflect on the human condition, and to that purpose, Swift leaves him as largely an empty vessel. He's an observer and the reader needs to be able to fill that character, to see the world through his eyes. Swift's emphasis in *Gulliver's Travels* is on plot not character, and he uses Gulliver's adventures as a vehicle for his acerbic commentary on human nature and society. Paul Hazard wonders, "How did the children happen to get hold of Swift?" (Hazard & Mitchell, 1947: 62). Writing in 1932, Hazard tends to fetishize links between imagination and the child, but he adroitly discerns that children are drawn to the "tales of voyages, to movement, to adventure, to the enchantment of the unknown" (Hazard & Mitchell, 1947: 68). The action dominates Swift's text. Even if the book is only posing as an adventure story, it's that adventure story that continues to thrive in the popular imagination, and that makes the book easily adaptable to the genrification of children's literature, where adventure takes precedence over fulmination. As such, Gulliver's adventures have become a sustaining mythology, and it's easy for contemporary readers to distill the text to a series of memorable episodes. In fact, certain images have become so dominant that they've almost come to represent the text as a whole. The drawing on the cover of my abridgment of *Gulliver's Travels* portrays the same scene that graces almost every version of the text I've come across; Gulliver lies on the beach tied down by several small strings, with scores of Lilliputians scurrying over and around him. To many, the story of Gulliver and the Lilliputians is *Gulliver's Travels*. Lang determined as much when adapting the novel, and a hundred years later Holiday House capitalized on the same sentiment with its 1995 book *Gulliver in Lilliput*, adapted by Margaret Hodges, which faithfully represents only the first of the four parts of Swift's book. Hodges's book disrupts the unity of Swift's text but there's limited harm in this kind of omission. The other three voyages don't cease to exist. Rather, books like *Gulliver in Lilliput* breathe new life into the story, continuing the tradition of telling and re-telling of Gulliver's most popular adventures. Still, Swift's main accomplishment, and the true explanation for Gulliver's staying power, comes from creating a book that weds these wildly imaginative adventures with biting social commentary, and the greatest danger to Swift's original text lies in losing sight of that second strain. Satire represents a central appeal of *Gulliver's Travels*, and it's a mistake to think that appeal doesn't hold for child readers—a mistake that too often gets

made. Paul Hazard himself claims the ironical as “a turn of mind that children do not understand” (1947: 62), and Sue Walsh argues that this sentiment continues to hold currency with writers and publishers —along with a number of children’s literature scholars— who deem irony, and ironic language, too difficult for children.

John Traugott’s essay, “The Yahoo in the Doll’s House: *Gulliver’s Travels* the Children’s Classic”, demonstrates the troubling and paradoxical nature of this approach. Traugott draws a line between the satiric and non-satiric content of Swift’s novel, arguing that in the latter case, Swift indulges in a kind of narrative play, which Traugott refers to as “child’s play”. Appraising these scenes of “child’s play”, scenes from which no clear satiric content can be divined, Traugott concludes there is no point in analyzing them: “They are what they are” (1984: 130). At the same time, he argues that our adult ability to read Swift’s satire “depends upon our memory of childhood games”, and that the “satire begins just where the non-satiric or pointless tableaux of doll play” takes root, “in the nostalgia for childhood play” (1984: 130).

In this way, Traugott makes the figure of the child essential to the effectiveness of Swift’s satire, for only through memories of childhood can the adult appreciate the satire, while he simultaneously positions actual children outside of this exchange. The child, Traugott claims, who knows “nothing of philosophies and systems”, who “knows the signifier” but “nothing of the signified”, can only “imitate the form of things” in play and becomes “a refined satirist unawares” (1984: 138-9). As such, “the child’s mimicry of adult formulas in play with models is a naïve version of the process of irony” (1984: 145), a process only the adult reader can understand.

As Sue Walsh points out, in this constellation the child functions “as that which remains constant, universal, and is not subject to cultural and historical change” (Walsh, 2003: 30). Satire and irony are placed in a complex, if not paradoxical, relationship to childhood. On one hand, “‘satire’ and ‘childhood’ occupy opposite poles”, completely distinct from one another, while on the other, satire is configured as itself a kind of “childhood play”, just not play any actual child can engage in. In this reading, Jonathan Swift may employ “childhood play” to create a sense on intentional irony, but the actual child, incapable of (adult) authorial intentionality “must be repositioned as innocent and ignorant of meaning” (Walsh, 2003: 31). Any writer adapting Swift by Traugott’s model will likely excise or downplay the satirical elements of Swift’s text, sacrificing his or her child reader to a banal vision of universalized childhood and reproducing the equally banal vision of child innocence Jacqueline Rose finds dominant in contemporary children’s literature, the idea that the child “is innocent and can restore that innocence to us” (Rose, 1994: 44).

Gulliver’s adventures may be easily retold, then, but it’s a serious mistake to ignore the commentary or context of those adventures, to use Swift’s one-dimensional protagonist as a blank slate. Brad Strickland’s *Wishbone* comes to mind in this vein. In Strickland’s *Wishbone*

series, put out by Red Chair Books, that lovable mutt Wishbone imagines himself in the role of great figures from literature as he attempts to deal with the travails of everyday dogdom. Hence, we have such titles as *The Mutt in the Iron Muzzle*, *Hunchdog of Notre Dame*, and, of course, *Gullifur's Travels*. This is a true dumbing down. Here, Gulliver has been removed, not just from the original text, but from the story itself, from the very fabric of the world Swift imagined and the cultural narrative he so carefully constructed, and this kind of repositioning not only changes the text, it threatens to render any relationship to the source material meaningless.

Even the most careful, well-considered adaptation can fall into this trap, as Alan Chalmers shows in his discussion of Charles Sturridge's 1996 film version of *Gulliver's Travels*. The lavish production features Ted Danson as Gulliver and was produced as a two-part television mini-series. Chalmers lauds the film for its attention to detail, and the film does include graphic moments, such as the Lilliputian procession between Gulliver's legs and his impromptu foray into urinary fire fighting. While Chalmers applauds these inclusions, he calls the film to task for its compression of the four voyages into one and the addition of a framed narrative, claiming that "in this un-Swiftian material... the theme of censorship arrives" (Chalmers, 2002: 74). Paraphrasing Michael Holquist, Chalmers suggests that all original works run the risk of such censorship of "being held 'hostage' later, not only in translations but in other forms of adaptation that knowingly or unknowingly censor the original, usurping its textual authority" (Chalmers, 2002: 76).

Claims of censorship may be a bit strong, but Sturridge clearly undermines Swift's authority by including all four of Gulliver's voyages in a radically re-contextualized form. The film begins with Gulliver discovered in the family stables, trying to talk to the horses. We find out that he's been gone for years and, in that time, a rival has taken over his medical practice, seeking to replace him as husband and father. The film follows this narrative line as the rival doctor has Gulliver locked in his asylum where he struggles to prove his sanity. His fantastic journeys are revealed in flashback, all interwoven into the present day narrative. Chalmers argues that, "a fundamental strategy of Swift's book is to offer readers liberty through imaginative fantasy, and then to return them abruptly to themselves through satire" (2002: 77). This delicate balance is lost through the film's rewriting of Gulliver's voyages and the happy ending slapped on to the tale, showing a reunited family with "Gulliver and his wife kissing passionately amid a beautiful Dorset landscape" (Chalmers, 2002: 78).

For my abridgement, I focused on preserving the structural integrity of the book and, through that process, attempted to preserve Swift's ultimate authority. I was able to keep all four parts of Swift's book, the narrative framework containing them, and, surprisingly, all of his lengthy chapter titles. While the content is abbreviated, the plot is fundamentally intact. Swift's critiques of politics and society, and his ultimate condemnation of mankind are all represented if not fully explored.

Most young readers probably won't be too impressed by structural integrity. The immediate appeal of the story remains in adventure and escape, alternate realities, and hidden worlds, but preserving the structure of the story preserves the brutal force of the satire. In my abridgement, young readers still get the pleasure of deciding whether or not Gulliver loses his mind in the fourth part of the book, and one way or the other, they have to reconcile themselves to Gulliver's withdrawal from human society. There's simply no way to remove these scenes without fundamentally altering the text's conclusion. At the end of my version, as with Swift's original, Gulliver spends his days conversing with his horses, only with great effort being able to remain in the same room with his wife and children (and forsaking all other humans completely).

There's no easy way to bleed this out of the text and my editors, for that matter, showed no inclination to do so. Large portions of Swift's book were cut out in my abridgement, just as smaller portions were cut out of Swift's 1726 edition, and I didn't agree with or have control of every change that was made. Since the 1726 publication, however, the text of *Gulliver's Travels* has been reconfigured and reintroduced in hundreds of forms, and each of those editions surely involved their own kind of politics. Beyond all of that, there's obviously an original text, and that text is the source of Gulliver's story. Hutcheon explains that "adaptation is a form of intertextuality; we experience adaptation (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (2006: 8).

Gulliver's story exists largely through memory and recitation, moving through performance beyond the fixed location of the text. That's what happens to a canonized work, and that's the only thing that can happen if it's going to survive long enough to be canonized. In the 1973 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures, Frank Kermode argues for a new understanding of the literary classic. He distinguishes between what he calls the "imperial classic" and the "modern classic", with the latter, rather than being timeless, proving capable of moving through time. For Kermode, what makes a literary work a classic is precisely the fact that it cannot be fully understood in its time—or any other—; the book's seeming timelessness stems from "the coexistence in a single text of a plurality of significances from which, in the nature of human attentiveness, every reader misses some—and in the nature of human individuality, prefers one" (Kermode, 1975: 133). As such, in each of these texts, "there is a substance that prevails, however powerful the agents of change", and the classic subsists by "being patient of interpretation" (1975: 134). For Kermode, a classic must always mean too much and too little, its survival dependent upon the "possession of a surplus of signifier" (1975: 140).

By this light, the act of adaptation is indispensable to any literary canonization, and the act of abridgement reads, as Hutcheon claims, as an act of interpretation and expansion, not reduction. The history of a text is fixed and preserved while the history of the story remains fluid, continuously rewritten and retold. By its nature, the abridgement process alters the text of

Gulliver's Travels, and this is not a neutral act, carrying heavy implications that need to be dutifully examined and reflected on. That abridgement process doesn't have to be a detrimental one, though, and, in fact, it can be a dynamic enterprise that energizes and reinforces the vitality of a source text such as *Gulliver's Travels*, while ensuring its continued eminence. Such an act of literary adaptation revitalizes the story through the involvement of new writers and readers. It shows the story to be alive and resonant, and that's about as close to timeless as it gets.

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