

Swift's Alberti? The Geometrical Comedy of *Gulliver's Travels*

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Abstract: This article propounds that Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* develops a geometrical comedy in the Albertinian fashion. Starting with a specific reference to Momus in *Puppet-Show*, it will be maintained that Swift refers to an earlier tradition of criticism and transfers it to his prose writing. To explore this point, the article will draw on the Italian Renaissance humanist, satirist, and architect Leon Battista Alberti's *Momus* and *De Pictura*. It will be suggested that there is a corollary between the exilic vision of the picaresque anti-hero and the definitive quality of the centric ray which establishes the centre of meaning in painting in Alberti. In accordance, it will be maintained that Swift adapts Alberti's critical rendition of the Momus story as a geometrical metaphor for linear perspective. Although Momus does not directly appear as part of the *dramatis personae* in *Gulliver's Travels*, Lemuel Gulliver emerges as an eighteenth-century successor to Alberti's geometrical designs since Swift adapts the Renaissance humanist's method of geometrical optics which reveres ocularcentrism. By these standards, it will be propounded that this method informs the comedic programme of *Gulliver's Travels*. In accordance, the conclusion draws on the point that Swiftian comedy owes a considerable debt to the mimetic concerns of Renaissance humanism which signals the birth of a posthumanist comedy through a re-mapping of Albertinian perspectivism.

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Swift'in Alberti'si? *Gulliver'in Gezileri'nin Geometrik Komedisini*

Öz: Bu makale, Jonathan Swift'in *Gulliver'in Gezileri* isimli eserinde Albertinyen tarzda bir geometrik komedi geliştirdiği tezini savunmaktadır. *Puppet-Show* (Kukla Gösterisi) şiirinde Momus'a yapılan özel bir referansta başlanarak, yazarın erken bir eleştiri geleneğine referansta bulunduğu ve bunu düz yazılarına aktardığı ortaya konulacaktır. Bu noktayı araştırmak amacıyla, makale İtalyan Rönesans hümanisti, hicivcisi ve mimarı Leon Battista Alberti'nin *Momus* ve *De Pictura* eserlerine dikkat çekecektir. Alberti'nin pikaresk anti-kahramanının sürgünel bakışı ile resim sanatında anlamın merkezini oluşturan merkezî ışının belirleyici niteliği arasında bir ilişki olduğu düşüncesi öne sürülecektir. Bununla ilişkili olarak, Swift'in, Alberti'nin eleştirel biçimde ele aldığı Momus öyküsünü doğrusal perspektifin geometrik bir metaforu olarak uyarladığı düşüncesi savunulacaktır. Her ne kadar Momus *Gulliver'in Gezileri'nin dramatis personae'sinde* bir yer edinmese de, Swift'in Rönesans hümanistinin okülsantrizmi yücelten geometrik optiğinin yöntemlerini kullanmasından dolayı, Lemuel

Anahtar Sözcükler:

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Gulliver'ın Alberti'nin geometrik tasarımının on sekizinci yüzyıldaki mirasçısı olduğu savunulacaktır. Bu standartlar altında, bu yöntemin *Gulliver'in Gezileri*'nin komedik programını beslediği öne sürülecektir. Bu konuyla bağlantılı olarak, sonuç kısmı Swiftyen komedinin Rönesans hümanizminin mimetik ilgilerine ne denli borçlu olduğu ve buradan hareketle Swift'in Albertinyen doğrusallığı yeniden konumlandırma yoluyla posthümanist bir komedinin doğuşunu müjdelediği sonucuna ulaşacaktır.

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Introduction: A 'Punch' in the Face

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), the “English Rabelais” as Voltaire (1694–1778) once declared, who “has the honour of being a clergyman though he makes fun of everything” (74), conceals throughout his oeuvre a highly puritanical sentiment towards theatre. In 1709, when he composed *A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners* addressing Louisa, Countess of Berkeley (1694–1716), he was not only imitating Horace's (65–8 BCE) defence of pure virtue, an asset he thought would re-flourish under the authoritative example of Queen Anne (r. 1702–1714), but also he was looking forward to proposing a moral programme for the reformation of the English stage. In a manner which suits his moralistic dedication, he berates “the undecent and prophane Passages” which have consequences upon “the Minds of younger People” (*Bickerstaff Papers* 55) and continues:

I do not remember that our *English* Poets ever suffered a criminal Amour to succeed upon the Stage, until the Reign of King *Charles* the Second. Ever since that Time, the Alderman is made a Cuckold, the deluded Virgin is debauched; and Adultery and Fornication are supposed to be committed behind the Scenes, as Part of the Action. These and many more Corruptions of the Theatre, peculiar to our Age and Nation, need continue no longer than while the Court is content to connive at, or neglect them. . . . By which, and otherwise Regulations, the Theatre might become a very innocent and useful Diversion, instead of being a Scandal and Reproach of our Religion and Country. (56)

Despite the *Project's* fervent attack on theatre as a corruptive spectacle, Joseph McMinn suggests that Swift was ready to abandon his anti-theatrical emotions and “the dull, paranoid mentality behind them” (37) due to the friendly acquaintances he made over the years which might suggest a conceptual difference in Swift's imagination between theatre and drama. As McMinn implies, since theatre is a practical endeavour whereas drama is characterised by its intellectual vigour, “Swift knew little about theatre, but a great deal of drama” (38), which could explain his hostility towards theatre but his love for drama.

However, and whatever the extent of Swift's acquaintance with theatre or his dramatic reconciliation with it might have been, his fascination with a fairly new dramatic form of entertainment appears to be almost inescapably present in his writings. As much as he detests the practicality of theatre, he professes the enjoyment he derives from the staging of a puppet theatre in *Puppet-Show* (1729) and praises it as the invention of "wit":

The life of man to represent,
And turn it all to ridicule,
Wit did a puppet-show invent,
Where the chief actor is a fool. (*Poems* 169)

The English puppet-theatre, which was the Neapolitan acting companies' gift to the British Isles (Speaight 18–19) and largely flourished during the eighteenth century, already maintained a widespread circle of influence even a generation earlier during the age of Ben Jonson (1572–1637). Although in the following decades it caught the eye of the defenders of morality during the Interregnum and occasionally suffered from false images of notoriety, it seems to have retained its public reputation. Since this "impersonal theatre" of the puppet-show which "has always been the theatre of the people" (Speaight 11) had drawn the attention of London society away from the bawdiness of Restoration comedy and replaced it with dramatic elegance, it was developed into "the talk of the town" (Speaight 92). When considered in conjunction with Swift's Anglicanism, it is only natural that the traditionally religious but currently moralistic function of the English puppet-theatre in the eighteenth century would readily appeal to Swift's sensibility to virtue. In the same poem, he makes an implicit reference to Dr Thomas Sheridan's (1687–1738) parody of the famous puppeteer, Stretch of Dublin's performance and decides that Sheridan judges him unjustly since "Puns cannot form a witty scene, / Nor pedantry for humour pass" (*Poems* 171).¹ The puppet-show for Swift stood for a non-theatrical drama, a "mimic-race" which brought "all to view" (*Poems* 171) as it did for Ben Jonson in his plays *Volpone* (c. 1605/6) or *Every Man* (1598/9).²

In bringing everything to view, there is an interesting moment in *Puppet-Show*, which is telling and more integral to our inductive method here, of the long literary heritage that nourished Swiftian imagination. For his benevolent relationship with the dramatic substitution the cultural scene of eighteenth-century England had to offer not only reflects Swift's conservatist ideals but also brings to view his fascination with the English Punch who was both a central character of the puppet-shows and a direct descendant of the hook-nosed Pulcinella (Speaight 16–18). He defends the satirical and morally corrective tone which Punch generates within the confines of a puppet-booth

¹ On Dr Thomas Sheridan's personal relationship with theatre and Swift and the development of his son, the famous actor Thomas Sheridan's stage career, see Sheldon.

² Perhaps this also explains the enduring allure of the Swiftian 'drama' which is being produced in the form of puppet theatre in the twenty-first century. One of the very recent versions staged in the form of puppet-theatre belongs to Valérie Lesort and Christian Hecq, staged at the Athénée Théâtre Louis-Jouvet, Paris. It is advertised as a "free adaptation", but how free is it? See "Le Voyage de Gulliver."

since he believes that his jests will “stand confest the greater fool” (*Poems* 171). But also, he makes two specific references to two literary personalities as cultural synonyms for Punch. He continues:

What *Momus* was of old to Jove,
The same a *Harlequin* is now;
The former was buffoon above,
The latter is a Punch below. (170; italics added)

As a stock-character of the *Commedia dell'arte*, Arlecchino is quickly identifiable as a fellow *zanni* of Punch. However, his reference to Momus does not appear to be equally familiar to the reader by common standards. And yet we cannot help ourselves asking: Why would Swift choose to mention a certain Momus in proximity to Punch's satirical powers?

In the context of Swift's drama of wit, a reference to Momus immediately makes the very first impression of a mythological persona who is amusingly quick and clever in perception in contrast to Jove, and literary evidence certifies our first impression. The first mention of Momus in the Antiquity appears in Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 8th century BCE) where Nyx bears several children such as Death, Doom, Sleep, Distress, and finally Blame “although she had slept with none of the gods” (21). Hesiod does not offer much on Momian blame but simply makes a passing reference to him as one of the offspring of the dreadful night. A more elaborate treatment is to be found in the Aesopian compilation of Babrius where Momus is a “fault-finder” (75) who mocks and criticises the beautiful creations of Zeus, Poseidon, and Pallas. The moral of the story, it is implied, draws on the point that Momus's mockery is a making of his envy which aims at beauty and nothing can be “entirely pleasing to the fault-finder” (77) although as George McClure observes, “Momus' criticisms are all legitimate or at least plausible” (4). Having been treated as a dark force in Hesiod and an envious creature in Babrius, however, Lucian (c. 125–after 180) offers a rather well-rounded argument with regard to his behaviour. He is not simply a minor Olympian force of evil or an Aesopian model of grudge, but rather a *parrhesiastes* (a speaker of truth) and sceptic (McClure 13). In *Zeus Rants*, he holds Apollo responsible for ambiguity in his oracles and, in an accusative tone, puts it to him that the “hearers need another Apollo to interpret them” (131), reducing the Apollonian discourse to *mythos* and elevating his artless diction to the level of *logos*. Condemning the Apollonian divination as a hermetic cryptogram, he establishes his linguistic plainness as a prerequisite for semantic intelligibility. In *Icaromenippus, or The Sky-Man* where Menippus narrates his travel to the moon to reflect on the human condition, Lucian utilises the ‘critical’ image of Momus as a symbol for the “impudent and reckless” (319) philosopher who looks scornfully upon fellow human beings. Even though he is uncomplimentary towards Momus in *Icaromenippus*, he uses the mocking-god to unveil the ‘sublime’ objective that lies behind the philosopher's sense of superiority at Momus' expense. In other words, Momus's critical powers also help debunk a ‘myth’ of criticism. Thus, as different from the preceding tradition, in Lucian's hands Momus becomes “the most iconoclastic god of the

ancient world" (McClure 33) so much so that his literary example would later inform the culture of criticism in the Western literary canon.

The Lucianesque influence on Swift's treatment of Momus will only surprise the neophyte. After all, a 1718 portrait of Swift depicts a volume of Lucian, Horace, and Aesop present by the side of the 'jovial' clergyman (Jervas). But it seems difficult to decide which ancient writer had the overwhelming effect. Little scholarly ink has been spilt on the Aesopian intervention in Augustan literature let alone in Swiftian satire and yet the orientation of the existing literature allows us the inference that by referring to Momus, it is possible that Swift spotted an Aesopian corollary between Punch, as motioned by Martin Powell and Stretch in his own day, and the fault-finder god. Under this standard, Swift's Momus would become a moral 'puppet' and an extension of the newly burgeoning "symbolic form" (Lewis 9) of the seventeenth century where the post-Civil War fabulists looked for innovative ways of cultivating forms of second-order thinking through fiction. While this point remains an ever-powerful one, this would also mean that we would be forced to take Swiftian satire and comedy as a byword for figurative zeal that feeds on an Aesopian heritage. However, Swift's Momus is hardly a fabulistic symbol since he crowns the political gadfly as the one who can confess "the greater fool" whose jest "will ever be" (*Poems* 171). Thus, to insist on the Lucianesque vein allows us to see him beyond the confines of the eighteenth-century literary climate's moral, linguistic, and textual conservatism. If understood in this manner, Swift's Momus will rather emerge as an ardent observer of the truth itself, a *rara avis* with a potential for homonymy rather than being simply emblematic of an eighteenth-century Everyman. For he is not the "buffoon above" but the "Punch below" (*Poems* 170) who is part of a perceptive scheme. To demonstrate this point, the following part will try to explore the post-Lucianesque treatment of the Momus story. Drawing on that point, the third part will suggest that Swift furthers a geometrical mission in the non-theatrical drama of his prose writing by taking his example from the intellectual climate of the Quattrocento. It will be concluded that it is the Albertinian vision which eventually informs the character of the *comédie humaine* of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Albertinian Resolutions

Leon Battista Alberti was born into the wealthy Alberti family of Florentine origin where their public career prospered through the study and practice of law, earning them the name "del Giudice" (Pearson, *Leon* 18). Later, they became owners of a large international financial network but fell from favour once they had been sent into exile due to the political conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines (Pearson, *Leon* 20). Born in exile in 1404, Battista Alberti did not only suffer from homesickness but also started off his career in life as the illegitimate offspring of his father. However, the following years proved him to be a prolific writer with a holistic interest in liberal arts such as geometry, mathematics, rhetoric, grammar, architecture, and literature due to the influence and mentorship of Gasparino Barzizza (c. 1360–1461) at Padua who was raised in the

Petrarchan style (Pearson, *Leon* 37). Barzizza's humanist curriculum which was characterised by "an age of literary discovery in which intrepid book hunters unearthed a wealth of ancient manuscripts that had languished for centuries in monastic libraries" (Pearson, *Leon* 37) led Alberti to compose treatises such as *De re aedificatoria* (*On the Art of Building*, 1452), *Della famiglia* (*On Family*, 1462), *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* (*On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Letters*, 1429), *De Pictura* (*On Painting*, 1435), and *Intercenales* (*Table Talk*, c. 1429) and pieces of fiction such as *Philodoxeos* (*Lover of Glory*, c. 1424) and *Momus* (1450).

Since Alberti was an exile by birth, his writing is usually concerned with his unfortunate origins; a feature of his life which he later found much to his own advantage since "he was aware that a long Tuscan tradition connected exile with the making of literary meaning" (Pearson, *Leon* 27). In this sense, he was both an integral component of Florentine culture and not, allowing him to view it from both the periphery and the centre. Understandably enough, in his comic masterpiece *Momus*, Alberti looks up to the model of Lucian more than any other ancient authority since the protagonist continues to refuse to show respect for Jupiter's creation and presents the world instead "with bugs, moths, wasps, hornets, cockroaches and other nasty little creatures, similar to himself" (15). But also, since Alberti "had to construct his identity on precarious foundations," *Momus* is rife with "the theme of exclusion" which "runs like a leitmotif through all of his literary works" (Marsh 123–124). He preserves the Lucianesque literary image of Momus as a picaresque anti-hero and his career as an outspoken Olympian. But also, it is inescapably semi-autobiographical in the sense that the exilic pattern speaks for the author's ebbs and flows throughout his career. Thus, Alberti conjoins his personal *tristia* with Momus's intellectual unorthodoxy and exilic vision. In accordance, the narrative builds a non-conformist tone and an exilic mood which define his relationship with the centre as one that is constantly threatened by his *logos*. Under planetary terms, the text becomes a calendrical record of Momus's motions through which he reaches his perihelion and aphelion and consequently, the exilic mobility of Momus becomes a prerequisite for attaining truth. First, his adventure starts with a Promethean fall from favour and continues with his banishment from the heavenly court which results in the loss of his sacred flame (*Momus* 31). But later, he is summoned since the Olympians believe "it would be the worst form of exile to live among his own kind where he was a universal object of scorn and hatred" (39). He dreams of bettering his position and seeks help for his cause from Virtue, thinking that "a wise man adapts to the time he's living in" (45) and yet after being expelled from Virtue's temple he does not shy away from speaking against the gods and "the sacrilege, the ruin, that attends the corruption and collapse of our common liberty!" (51). He is both an Ovidian (or anti-Ovidian?) rapist of Praise, one of the daughters of Virtue, and he also suffers the fate of a castrate at the hands of Juno and her company by going "from manly to unmanly" (241). Even his daughter, Rumour, complains to the immortals that she has been unjustly displaced from her homeland "before even seeing it" (87), and yet her gossip holds the power to "prove a serious obstacle to the

reputation of the gods among men" (77). Finally, he strives to become a dear councillor to Jupiter by offering his notebooks including his observations on the principles that make a good and just ruler out of "loyalty and love" (209). But his 'mirrors for princes' is rejected by its addressee only to his own grievance since in Book IV, Jupiter finally recognises that "through his own negligence he had deprived himself for so long of such fine teachings" (353). This, in return, should not necessarily mean that he is depicted as a binarist who contrasts wisdom with inanity, manhood with femalehood, political toleration with social avoidance. Instead, he emerges from the text as a perspectivist who needs to take a step back to observe various realms and reach a truthful observation from a certain distance.

There seems to be in Alberti's Momus a certain degree of pictorialism. Despite the rather sombre mood of the narrative, it would be hardly just to assume that Momus is characterised by his despondency in Alberti's version. Instead, the exilic element and the sense of mobility that accompany the protagonist become metaphors for visual power. Or, to put it more correctly, Momus's exilic adventure and his intricate relationship with figures of authority hide an almost unsuspected talent for vision. In fact, the rhetorical manoeuvre that the narrator employs only seemingly veils Momus's capacity for powerful political, social, and empirical vision. Far from being a despondent character, due to his mobility Momus becomes an acute observer of the deities' and humans' habits in his respective visits to the world of the humans and the world of the Olympians. His adventurousness and love for mischief which lay bare the picaresque element in his character equals to his capacity for powerful sight. Thus, he represents the centre of the story not because he is the title character but because he is the source of the centric ray which determines the vision of the reader. From this aspect, he represents Alberti's obsession with sight and perspective throughout his writings,³ as connected to the author's geometrical interests. For, in his treatise on painting, *De Pictura*, Alberti contends:

Furthermore, I wish that the painter be expert, as far as possible, in all liberal arts, but above all I desire in him the knowledge of geometry. I certainly agree with Pamphilus, a very ancient and famous painter, from whom the young nobles learned painting for the first time. His opinion, in fact, was that no one by ignoring geometry would have been a good painter. Certainly, our rudiments, from which one extracts a whole, complete, and precise technique of painting, are easily assimilable by a geometrician. (75)

In opening the treatise with the basic principles of Euclidean geometry, he makes the promise of a painter and not a mathematician in explaining these principles since he believes that mathematicians "measure figures and shapes of things with the mind only,

³ Alberti's famous winged eye which is found on the last page of *Della famiglia* as accompanied by the motto "Quid tum?" has been subject to much analysis. For a detailed reading of the winged eye in relation to Renaissance visual culture, see Carman 55-82.

without considering the materiality of the object” (22).⁴ In connection with this point, he establishes verisimilitude to nature in art a prime virtue and contemplates on points, lines, and surfaces, producing an introduction to linear perspective in Renaissance art which involves the re-creation of three-dimensional spaces on two-dimensional surfaces. In doing so, he divides rays into three categories: the extreme, the median, and the centric ray. The extreme ray touches the edges of a surface, the median ray touches the inside of the surface, and the centric ray aims at the centre of the surface. These rays which emanate from a monocular source, that is the observant human eye, form a triangle which he uses to explain his perspectival theory (Pearson, *Leon* 74). But, out of these variations, *De Pictura* labels the centric ray a champion since its position “and the distance contribute very much, then, to the determination of vision” (30). It even defines it as “the prince of rays” (30) as—along with distance—it defines our human way of perceiving objects. Later, the centric ray is shown to be a defining element in determining the centric point and the centric line which will later force the illusion of monocularism in a painting on the audience’s part. This not only convinces the reader that the treatise signals a vindication of a new perspectival geometry that comes with a Ciceronian force (Spencer 39) but it also convinces us that Albertinian vision inaugurates centrality “as a kind of anchor of meaning” (Pearson, *Leon* 91) as it crowns the human agent as the instigator of vision and perspective. In other words, it develops an oculo-centrism which geometrically venerates the perception of the individual according to which perspective in painting is adapted. In Erwin Panofsky’s words, Alberti’s geometricised vision of the human eye unfolds “a concrete expression of a contemporary advance in epistemology or natural philosophy” which results in “a translation of psychophysiological space into mathematical space” (65–66).

To turn back to the forerunning discussion, the geometrical superiority with which Alberti graces the centric ray particularly relates to our discussion concerning the exilic self of Momus. For Momus is modelled as an observant eye which acts in the capacity of a centric ray, determining the geometrical standards of a perspectival construct. His delicate but also intricate relationship with the ideological centre which leads to a to-and-fro relationship with it, allows him to become a Protagorean measure of value. Retaining the critical powers of Momus which are to be found in Lucian’s *Zeus Rants* and *Icaromenippus*, Alberti offers a development of his story and character where his gift for criticism and truth complements his all-observing geometric vision; a characteristic which is lost upon other members of the heavenly sphere and the members of the human society. In the following part, I will try to establish a discursive overlap between Alberti’s geometric visionary and Swift’s surgeon-explorer, arguing that the latter borrows from the former’s oculo-centrism to re-create a comic semblance of the geometrical critic of the Quattrocento in a renewed eighteenth-century context.

⁴ Not only mathematicians but also philosophers are under attack in Alberti’s writings. Caspar Pearson rightfully considers this a “defeat”. For this point, see Pearson, “Philosophy Defeated.”

The Geometrical Comedy of *Gulliver's Travels*

As much as it is important to understand that Alberti's *Momus* is part of a larger humanist project, it is equally vital to detect the narrative ways in which he bends the Momian tradition to his own geometric will as suggested earlier. However, it is hard to suggest an affinity between Alberti and Swift due to the lack of evidence. First, the Dean's bibliographical interests and records of his library suggest that he was on par with Aristophanes (c. 446–386 BCE), Terence (c. 195/185–159 BCE), Ovid (43 BCE–17/18 CE), François Rabelais (c. 1483/94–1553), Ben Jonson, Molière (c. 1622–1673), and William Wycherley (c. 1641–1716) (Williams 42–73), although these records do not make a single mention of Alberti. Not only that but also his readings of vision as a geometrical and physical phenomenon seem to be limited to George Berkeley's (1685–1753) *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), where the philosopher develops an anti-abstractionist argument against geometry (173), a position which, to a certain extent, conflicts with Albertinian geometry. On top of it, it seems hard to reconcile the Renaissance fascination with mathematical and geometrical ideals with the experientialism of Enlightenment thought. However, it seems hard not to notice the paradigmatic continuity between them (Panofsky 66). Alberti's Renaissance theory of vision is in direct conversation, although not in perfect agreement, with the Enlightenment's conception of vision, geometry, and knowledge. To explore this point of intersection between Alberti's geometrical vision and Swift's geometrical comedy, I will now turn to the argument that Swift's comedic imagination relates itself to the humanist geometry of the Italian Renaissance through the image of Momus.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Momus is not mentioned as part of the *dramatis personae*. Nor is the exilic tone which adorns the geometric perspectivism of Momus seems to be present at first glance as Lemuel Gulliver does not particularly strike the reader as an excluded member of the English society. In an Albertinian fashion, however, he reminds us of Momus since he has a fragile relationship with England. After his return from Houyhnhnmland, he is disgusted by the fact that he fathered an issue “by copulating with one of the Yahoo species” (289), and yet he cannot omit the natural inclination to define the overseas worlds and his personal habits in proximity to England and English manners. He likens Lilliputian yeomen to the “Dray-men in *England*,” (37), draws his hanger in “the Manner of Fencers in *England*” (98) during a public performance of puppetry at Brobdingnag, and at the end of his visit to the Lagadonian Academy he concludes that nothing “could invite me to a longer Continuance” and considers “returning home to *England*” (192). Although not explicitly banished from England, his picaresque voyage corresponds to Swift's “conservative psychology of the deprived younger son” which led to “political and social deprivation in terms of aimless mobility and exile” (McKeon 339). As a result, the narration is disturbed by fears of exilic exclusion as haunted by a “distressing spectacle of unrecognised merit” (McKeon 339). While describing the rope-dancers in Lilliput, he produces a great innuendo of personal talent that went unrecognised since they are “trained in this Art from their Youth, and are not always of

noble Birth, or liberal Education” (38). He is not an exile in the primal sense of the word and yet he acknowledges his banishment from the cultural centre. During his stay at Brobdingnag, he confesses:

I had a strong Hope which never left me, that I should one Day recover my Liberty; and as to the Ignominy of being carried about for a Monster, I considered my self to be a perfect Stranger in the Country; and that such a Misfortune could never be charged upon me as a Reproach if ever I should return to *England*; since the King of *Great Britain* himself, in my Condition, must have undergone the same Distress. (97)

However, much like Alberti’s Momus, Gulliver is determined to make the most of his exilic condition. By constantly taking a step backwards, adjusting his distance from the object that is England, and exposing himself as a travel enthusiast, he accepts the role of a mobile explorer of unknown worlds who cannot resist the desire to inspect. But this desire for inspection carries, as Philippe Hamou puts it, a “normativité esthétique” (33). For, throughout these travels, he produces himself as the perceptive focal point, the centric ray that determines our vision of the picaresque adventure. To put it more correctly, under the standards of Albertinian geometry, he becomes the linear perspectivist whose metaphorical exile contributes to the development of the rational eye according to which he measures the material world. He is “a great Admirer of Projects, and a Person of much Curiosity and easy Belief” as he thinks to himself before he is taken to the Laputan Academy for a visit, but it is only because “I had my self been a Sort of Projector in my younger Days” (178).

If the architectural image seems irrelevant here, it is only because Swift skilfully hides his optic concerns under a constructional edifice. For, there also lies the possibility to consider Gulliverian ‘projection’ as a spectacle through which the narration itself becomes an extension of Gulliver’s sight aside from an attack on modern science. Sight is of central significance to his vision as he is not only a prime seer but also someone who is always being looked at. The Emperor of Lilliput, for instance, rushes into the scene “to have an Opportunity of viewing me” (28). And yet, he derives considerable delight from looking at himself once he is unshackled and is able to stand on his feet (29). Similarly, if the stoic horses of Houyhnhnm encourage the practice of virtue and hold a rational mirror up to the world, Gulliver uses it as a means of enlarging his understanding (240) to investigate the condition of himself and his own species more than anything else. However, seeing as a metaphor for ocularcentric power is reserved for Gulliver himself. In other words, seeing for Gulliver is a form of rationalisation, the sign of an empirical intervention which assists the human agent to carve a personal meaning out of the physical world, producing a “quasi-objectivity” (Rogers 187). In accordance, having been searched for his personal belongings by two Lilliputian officers at the request of the Emperor, Gulliver praises their visual diligence since he believes that “their Sight is much more acute than ours,” but later finds delight in the fact that “a Pair of Spectacles” which delivers him a “Pocket Perspective” (37) has escaped their attention and holds unto it

since "My greatest Apprehension was for mine Eyes" (52). Alternatively, later in Brobdingnag, while he is being taken to a visit to the town along with Glumdalclitch, he observes the beggars on the street who give him "the most horrible Spectacles that ever an *European Eye* beheld," (112) and on another occasion where he observes a public execution, he confides in the reader that "I abhorred such Kind of Spectacles; yet my Curiosity tempted me to see something that I thought must be extraordinary" (119). He denies the same privilege of centric vision to a friend of his master at Brobdingnag who "put on his Spectacles to behold me better" and cannot help himself laughing at the sight of his eyes which appear "like the Full-Moon shining into a Chamber at two Windows" (96). Even when he is tutored by his master at Houyhnhnmland concerning "a thousand Faults in my self" (258), it is Gulliver's own truth-bearing vision which distances himself from his Yahoo-'ness' and the vices and faults that follow from it. Under Albertinian standards, Gulliver's prospective eye re-produces a Momian centrism and physical distance that determine the humanist value of vision.

Closely allied with this ocularcentrism is the point that Gulliver displays an almost unhealthy engagement with truth. Since the ratiocination of vision implies that truth is in the eye of the beholder, he strives for a truthful construct. He pushes his sense of truthfulness to its extremes when he introduces himself as a once-upon-a-time student at Emanuel College in Cambridge and yet, due to the financial distress of his father, he starts off his career as a Mr James Bates's, a surgeon's apprentice (19). Upon the death of his master, however, his business begins to fail since he refuses "to imitate the bad Practice of too many among my Brethren" (20) for fear of abusing the excellent practice of his master as an undertalented novice. Since he cannot indulge in untruthful business—a "bad Practice"—and must be a loyal accountant of veracity, he must resign wilfully. Elsewhere, and suitably enough, the fact that he expresses his wish, writing in the aftermath of his return from Houyhnhnmland, to "*strictly adhere to Truth,*" not finding in himself "the least Temptation to vary from it" (292) is in direct conversation with his Cousin Sympson, the publisher's letter to the reader where he styles the Author as a truth-sayer since he "was so distinguished for his Veracity," whose "Style is very plain and simple" (9). The reader is left with a certain paradox here and the argument that he has a plain style is countered by the particularities he wishes to convey to the reader. Upon his arrival at Brobdingnag, he asks his reader to excuse him for occupying their mind with unnecessary details since he has been "chiefly studious of Truth" (94). He constantly produces apologies and yet continues to devour the page with almost obscene particularities for the sake of maintaining an obsessive realism. In seeking to maintain his position of a reliable narrator, he constantly engages with a "dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life" (Watt 6) which generates factuality, descriptiveness, and an adamantly encouraged sense of mimetic precision. But narrating the particular, in return, serves the truthful end of Gulliver's vision. It is so definitive an aspect of the geometrical construct of the novel that it even passes for a source of despair when he puts it to the English captain who listens to Gulliver's extraordinary journey much to his disbelief and asks him

to publish a memorabilium that truth is no longer considered a virtue. He grins at the prospect of publication, claiming that “nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary” since “Authors less consulted Truth than their own Vanity and Interest” (147). The only means of curability lies in proclaiming his bodily cleanliness to his Houyhnhnm master and the linguistic cleanliness to the reader by not saying “*the Thing which was not*” (240) as the centric ray of truth.

Although it could be counter-argued that an Albertinian investigation of the perspectival matter in *Gulliver’s Travels* might risk overlooking the satirical element in it and force us to find the Renaissance humanist in Swift, the critical pang is easily delectable once it is realised that Swift hides the joke under our nose. For as much as the ratiocinated vision of Gulliver exposes the humanist in Swift, it exposes the Dean’s comedic commentary of it. For the human comedy of the novel rests upon the fact that the geometrical perspective is never lost upon Gulliver who claims that he “should be a living Treasury of Knowledge and Wisdom, and certainly become the Oracle of the Nation” (209). The narrator is not particularly fond of mathematicians as he considers them prime representatives of modern science—one only needs to remember his disdain for the Laputans who are “dextrous enough upon a Piece of Paper in the Management of the Rule, the Pencil, and the Divider” and yet talentless “and perplexed in their Conceptions upon all other Subjects” (163)—but also it is the very geometric centrism that secures our laughter. For he retains a sense of perspectivism which does not necessarily sacrifice his self-centred epistemology at the high altar of relativity since “Gulliver himself is the supreme instance of a creature smitten with pride” (Monk 70). Thus, as Edith Sitwell had put it once in her semi-biographical novel of Swift, “it had been his need to inhabit another being, conquer the will of another, remake the world of another personality, seeing in this victory a symbol of destiny overcome, the universe moulded to his will” (13). In the end, it is the perspectival pride that metaphorically chains him to a rock in the sea as is the case with Momus. Swiftian comedy makes sure that his geometrical punishment lasts forever but with a humanist wish in mind of the correction of a gullible perspectivism that is implicative of a reformatory optics which almost sits on the verge of posthuman comedy (McGurl 549).

Conclusion

The Momian inheritance in the Swiftian canon, let alone in *Gulliver’s Travels*, might strike the critical eye as a rather bleak one. However, upon close inspection, it appears that Swift draws upon a rich literary tradition which could be traced back to Lucian where the doubtful Olympian is used as a symbol for truthful speech. Drawing on this heritage, in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift puts to display his wide range of dependence on the Renaissance reception of the Momian story due to the degree of perspectivism he chooses to employ. From this perspective, he is in constant conversation with Alberti’s geometrical optics whose passion for ocularcentrism is evidenced in the observant eye of the exilic Momus. In this sense, since in Ian Watt’s words, “from the Renaissance onwards, there was a

growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality" (9), Lemuel Gulliver shares with Alberti's abrasive commentator a linear perspectivism. As a self-proclaimed man of science and a lover of experiential adventure, Gulliver strikes the reader as an eighteenth-century Momus with a claim to an all-seeing truth and self-centred vision. He is a testament to Swift's mimetic debt to Renaissance humanism in a context which transcends the points of intersection between Swift's Christian humanism and the civic humanisms of Erasmus and Rabelais (Hammond 192) since in adapting the perspectival eye of Alberti, Swift rekindles the early modern fire of geometricised vision. And yet, he resorts to the ancient comfort of comedic irredeemableness. Gulliver is no 'puppet,' but he is the Momian Punch who brings all to view. But, the punchline of the joke eventually strikes a neo-Latin pose and asks: *Quid tum?*

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