

Book Review: “A Scholar’s Delight”—Toma Sava’s Edition of Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone*

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Once upon a time, actually not long ago, I dreamt of establishing a *Creative Writing, Translating & Editing Workshop* in order to involve my fellow scholars and my students as well in projects meant to enhance and diversify creativity resources. However, latest developments in AI technology, as recently revealed to me through an intensive interaction with some very dedicated trainers, have seriously undermined my faith in the *writing* dimension of such enterprises.

Translating then might remain a more convincing undertaking, especially when performed by scholars with a flair for rare texts, texts that some people would snobbishly deem as worth falling into oblivion. Such scholars/translators are, in my opinion, akin to deep divers, as they explore (historical) depths to see if life and substantial meaning are still present (down) there. They bring to the new multicultural surface more or less monolithic layers and deconstruct them through, besides *translating*, proper and accurate *editing*.

Such an example is Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone*, published (posthumously) in 1638, and whose author lived between 1562 and 1633 and was a bishop of the Church of England. An author who himself claimed to be only a mere translator of a first-person narrative belonging to a Spanish fictional author, *A Discourse of a Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonsales*. The book, drawing from the astronomical theories of Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei & others, has been considered one of the first works of science-fiction. It did have a certain reputation in the 17th century, only to be neglected later, until recent times when scholars are re-valuating it due to its speculative/interpretative potential in what regards language, space travel, religion, otherness, etc.

Promoting such an old (post-Elizabethan) text in a 21st century society fancying post-modernism, while not exactly having reached the postmodern condition yet, could turn into a challenge. Who the addressee is and what could be its topics of interest? We have to admit that Toma Sava's work as translator and editor of Godwin's fantasy relates, first of all, to his fellow academics. A consistent introduction of almost 30 pages (Godwin's text has about 70) provides readers with very brief yet significant information on the bishop's biography, scandals included.

Still, the emphasis is laid on his anonymous productions, the most famous among them being *Nuncius Inanimatus*, apparently a mysterious treaty (Sava 2023, p. 6) on telegraphy. That was going hand in hand with the preoccupation for the development of an artificial language, and showed a peculiar interest in *communication*, a very hot topic nowadays. This work inspired the author of *Mercury, or, The secret and swift messenger*, John Wilkins, another bishop of the (a little bit later) time, from which Sava gives sample fragments. The translator/editor also points to the ideas about *communication* the two bishops had in common, placing them in the context of the 17th century openings.

The more interesting parallel is drawn by Toma Sava on the scientific concerns of both bishops in relation to astronomy and the possibility of life on other planets/celestial bodies. In 1638, John Wilkins published *The discovery of a world in the moone*, in which references were made to a text by a certain late bishop, yet claiming to have been written by a Spanish traveller, Domingo Gonsales. Again, (s)ample fragments from Wilkins' work are provided, with the just observation from the translator/editor that, while Wilkins' approach is more scientific, Godwin's is more literary, i.e embracing the perspective of both a moralist and a humorist.

Domingo, Godwin's picaresque character, whose colonial narrative is, up to a certain moment, due to its comforting and reassuring twists and details, very much like Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, manages to fly to the moon with the help of a very amusing device. He is the engineer/constructor of the device propelled by a good number of wild swans. Once on the moon, he encounters human-like creatures in a, of course, ideal society. A utopia that drew the attention of later authors and inspired, among others, Aphra Behn, Cyrano de Bergerac and even Jules Verne. Nevertheless, another just observation of the translator/editor is that Godwin's text survived due to its echoes through other works and it remains "that kind of writing which has been read without being read properly" (Sava, 2023, p. 17).

According to Toma Sava, we are presented an incredible story with a very credible internal logic/structure of the text, as the latter have been built on real events. Well informed

by the historical context of the Eighty Years' War and by the travel literature of the age, highlighting locations such as the Cape of Good Hope or the paradisiacal island of Saint Helena, Godwin's text resists over time as a crafted piece of fiction. It does have a quite innovative input, which makes it stand between Lucian of Samosata's literature and Plutarch's philosophy (Sava, 2023, p. 25).

Other works and authors are mentioned and discussed too, not only in the introduction, but in the copious footnotes, that being a distinctive mark of the scholarly endeavour. Hakluyt and Campanella, Kepler and Donne, Cavendish and Poe, and countless others have been woven in a web of references that makes the footnotes layer a parallel world in perfect resonance with the one above. A complex *editing*, offering both closures and portals to Godwin's unfinished story, what we have is in fact just a first part, and the *translating* of which brings delight to many scholars of literatures in English. We are thus kindly invited to a careful reading of a book that seems to be more than just a "literary curiosity."

References

Godwin, E. (2023). *OMUL DE PE LUNĂ sau Expozițiunea unei călătorii înspre acel loc de DOMINO GONSALES Mesagerul cel iute*. Sava, Toma (Ed.), Tracus Arte.