

*A Voyage to Cacklogallinia*  
*by Captain Samuel Brunt:*  
Investing in (or against) the Empire

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## *A Voyage to Cacklogallinia by Captain Samuel Brunt:* Investing in (or against) the Empire

**A** *Voyage to Cacklogallinia with a Description of the Religion, Policy, Customs and Manners, of that Country* got into print in 1727, in London, and was authored by a certain “Captain Samuel Brunt”, a pseudonym of a writer whose identity, either willingly or not, is still a mystery. Some have attributed its authorship to Daniel Defoe, others, a wider number of contemporaneous readers and reviewers, to Jonathan Swift (Nicolson 2). However, the crudity of the literary devices used to produce a humoristic effect seem to fall short of Swift’s expertise when compared to his well-known *Gulliver’s Travels*, published just a year before the *Voyage to Cacklogallinia*. As a matter of fact, Jeanne Welcher and George E. Bush included *A Voyage to Cacklogallinia* in their *Gulliveriana* (1970) due to its lack of originality, and its indebtedness and/or similarity to Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. It describes a hazardous voyage at sea, very much in tune with the usual descriptions found in travel writing of the beauties and perils that awaited the seamen in their Atlantic crossings. As usual in this kind of fictional works, there is an encounter with another community made up of an intelligent species. Their bodily features, though, turn out to be rather distinct from the human form: they look like huge *Gallinaceae*. Hence, their name: the *Cacklogallians*.

The relativist notion of man’s position in God’s creation explored by means of several debates between the human visitor and his hosts is quite usual in fictitious travel writing. Nonetheless, the narrative further expands to a flight to the moon with the help of powerful birds, a trait that allows the reader to envisage the work as a kind of primeval science-fiction, in line with Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (1638) or Kepler’s *Somnium sive opus posthumum de astronomia lunaris* (1634), or Bergerac’s *Voyage*

*to the Moon* (1899).<sup>1</sup> All these works illustrate, one way or the other, the influence of the so called “new astronomy” brought to light by Kepler and Galileo, to name but the most famous astronomers at the time. The educated men of the seventeenth century were enthused with the possibility of reaching the moon and wondered what would be there for them to learn, conquer, or seize. Of course this fascination with travelling to the moon and probable findings thereof has continued ever since and well into our days, for instance, with the twentieth-century Armstrong’s travels inspiring science-fiction works focused, precisely, on space travelling.

It may seem that Captain Brunt’s literary contribution was far from reaching the standards of his renowned fellow writers. However, he managed to put together a science-fiction narrative about fantastic travel devices, intertwined with the utopian description of a prosperous and orderly society outside the known world. These aspects are developed by the protagonists of his work, the dullest creatures one could think about: roosters and hens. The result was indeed a success, and several editions were printed after the first one in 1727, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,<sup>2</sup> for during the nineteenth century tales mocking societies seemed to have become unpopular.

The intermingling of such popular themes, as is the case with moon travelling and utopias, with the ridiculous chickens definitely causes a comic effect. This perfectly enhances the satiric side of the work, namely, the critique of both human greed and British society’s financial manoeuvres inspired by imperial ideology.

After the narration of some dangerous voyages during which Captain Samuel Brunt had to deal with pirates and stormy weather, the reader is

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nicolson.

<sup>2</sup> First edition: London: Printed by J. Watson, and sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, 1727.

Some twenty and twenty-first century editions: Marjorie Hope Nicolson, ed. New York, Pub. for the Facsimile Text Society by Columbia University Press, 1940; Marjorie Hope Nicolson, ed. Ann Arbor: Reproduced from the original edition, 1727 London: University Microfilms International, 1979; Woodbridge, Conn.: Research Publications, 1981 and 1982; Farmington Hills, Mich: Thomson Gale, 2005; Hamburg tredition 2012 [online edition].

introduced to a somewhat controversial theme: the relationship between white men and Negroes, and the practice of the slave trade by the European Empires. In the wake of a shipwreck, the captain found himself at the mercy of a community of runaway Negro slaves who treated him with civility and trust, in marked contrast with what was their common lot when serving in white men's households. These Negroes also turned out to feel exactly the same way as white men regarding the most cherished values of European culture: liberty and justice, and, of course, the value of life. When under attack, the chief of the Negroes' community made the following appeal:

*For were any among us of so poor a Spirit, to prefer Slavery to Death, Experience shews us, all Hopes of Life, even in such vile Terms, are entirely vain. It is then certainly more eligible to die bravely in Defence of our Liberty, than to end our Lives in lingering and exquisite Torments by the Hands of an Executioner. (Brunt 11)*

Meanwhile, slave trade meant an immensely profitable investment, especially as far as the intensive sugar cultivation in Jamaica was concerned. However, it was fraught with dangers: the death of a considerable part of the cargoes occurred frequently due both to shipwrecks or, more often than not, to the extremely bad transportation conditions. Thus, in tandem with those who defended this kind of commerce, as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, some were already claiming against the moral contradiction of a country that considered itself a liberty and justice champion, having chosen to deprive part of humankind of these very rights. Lawrence Sterne, the author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), was one of the contesters of this slave trade. However, only some decades later would it be possible to abolish it with the efforts of parliamentarians such as Wilberforce, and the foundation of the Society for the Abolition of Slave Trade in 1787, gathering a significant number of supporters who eventually succeeded in achieving the Abolition Act issued in 1807.

Captain Brunt seems to be drawing his reader's attention to such inhuman conduct when he further tells it was, once more, because of the kindness of a Negro, that the captain was able to escape, though falling prey to new perils and tempests. He was eventually to be shipwrecked in a

strange land where he was completely isolated from his travel-mates. This isolation stresses the uniqueness of our hero's nature, but, simultaneously it paved the way to his admission into the Cacklogallinia realm and its high society. The theme of slavery is apparently forgotten, in spite of the vehement abhorrence that had previously given rise to so much arguing and protest. From now on, the reader is introduced to a satiric utopia, built on a thin allegory where the chickens stand for seventeenth-century Englishmen (and sometimes women):

The *Cacklogallinians* were, in, former Ages, a Wise and a Warlike nation, both fear'd and esteem'd by their Neighbours. Their Blood was pure, without being mix'd with the *Owls, Magpies, Eagles, Vulturs, Jays, Partridges, Hens, Hawks*, or any other Species; the Scum of which Nation, by the Fertility of the Country, and the want of Foresight in the *Cacklogallinians*, has been allured to, and permitted to settle in Cacklogallinia, and by their Intermarriages has caused the great Degeneracy those Families, which have kept their Blood untainted complain of. (Brunt 31)

The comparison with the England of past ages becomes absolutely evident, when the narrator further explains:

They were what the English now are, Wise, Modest, Brave, Human, Loyal, Publick-spirited, capable of governing their own, and conquering other Kingdoms: They encouraged Merit, and abominated Flattery. A Pimp in those Days wou'd have starv'd, and even a Concubine of a Prince not be admitted among Hens of Virtue, tho' to make the Fortune of a Husband. There were no Upstarts among the Nobility, and if any were rais'd to Titles, it was by Force of a conspicuous Merit, which gave a Lustre to the August Assembly in which he was enroll'd. Justice was impartially administer'd, and the selling of the People to a Prince or Minister, was a Villainy unknown. None bribed the People to chuse'em for their Representatives; Posts in the Government were given to Fowls capable to serve it, without being burthened with this or that Family, nor were their Revenues loaded with Pensions to worthless and vicious Persons, and given for Services which would be a Disgrace to

publish. Trade flourish'd, Money was plenty, none of their Neighbours durst encroach on their Commerce; their Taxes were inconsiderable. (Brunt: 2005, 31)

The blunt irony used here, by the prime minister of Cacklogallinia himself, clearly illustrates what English public opinion conveyed about the Hanoverian court and its way of life, which impacted so negatively on the public sphere. In fact, after Queen Anne's death, in 1714, George I left his Electorate of Hanover with his courtiers and mistresses, and upon his arrival in England the English court had to adapt to this new master. As a matter of fact, he was not interested in either learning or speaking English and seemed to mistrust everybody that was not from his homeland. The loss of power of the Tories, owing to their former loyalty to Anne and against Hanover, also brought a new generation of Whig politicians to power. Among them was Robert Walpole, the prime minister *de facto* if not *de jure*. His long political career progressed with the Whig government, nominally led by Lord Halifax, but actually dominated by Lord Townshend, Walpole's brother-in-law, together with James Stanhope. At first Walpole held the position of Privy Councillor, but he later rose to that of Paymaster of the Forces. However, with cunning and timely expertise, Walpole managed to survive the turmoil of current politics, in spite of some drawbacks on account of the struggling factions within the cabinet. Nevertheless, in no time he made himself indispensable, both to George I and his son, the Prince of Wales, later George II. He was able to reconcile father and son, who used to have a very sour relationship and had sadly been estranged from each other for quite a long time. This had led to political discontent and potential rebellion. Moreover, the South Sea Bubble, that is, the crash of a commercial and maritime chartered company, whose shareholders were members of the royal house, government personalities and many important people, also required the oratorical skills of a politician like Walpole to protect them from Parliament and public opinion. His success in shielding the royal family from this scandal, made him popularly known as "the Screen".

Notwithstanding Walpole's acknowledged skills as a statesman, the accusation of establishing a kind of oligarchy made up of members of his family and friends became common gossip and a recurrent pun in the opposition's periodicals such as *The Patriot* or *The Craftsman*. To accept

briberies and distribute pensions in order to keep his circle of crownies and thus secure his own post were common practice, in fact, considered necessary devices for the effective rule of much bigger and complex administration. For the so-called country faction this meant the decay of Great Britain and its national moral values.

The debate between the Cacklogallinia's prime minister and his visitor, and slave, concerning the ways of ruling a country while serving the people's or your own interest, is a clear pun on Walpole and his "Robinocracy":

First Lord of the Treasury, Mr. Walpole. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Walpole. Clerk of the Pells, Mr. Walpole's son. Customs of London, second son of Mr. Walpole, in Reversion [i.e., after Robert Mann]. Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Walpole's brother. Secretary to Ireland, Mr. Walpole's brother. Secretary to the Postmaster-General, Mr. Walpole's brother in law. (Plumb78)

The connections between the worlds of politics and literature had already been established by the time Walpole came to power. Swift, Gay, Pope, Thomson, or Fielding, all of them are well known examples of such a relationship. However, as H. T. Dickinson states, "these relationships have scarcely ever been closer than in the early eighteenth century" (1). During the 1720s they were particularly intense because of the already mentioned South Sea Bubble episode and the strained relationship between the King and the Prince of Wales, or else, between the courtly power and the Leicester House circle. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is, certainly, a perfect example of this kind of ethical rebuke by means of a satirical discourse. However, it does not deal with concrete episodes and its censure can be viewed as dateless, while Brunt's narrative deals with the very issues that were upsetting British life in these early decades of the eighteenth century.

No wonder, then, that the long war between England and France on account of the succession of the Spanish crown after Charles II's death, from 1701 to 1714 (although it only really ended with Louis XIV's demise), is also allegorically depicted in the text. In truth, this war aimed at keeping the balance among the European powers, and in order to do so the French and Spanish states had to be kept apart, as well as their respective colonies overseas. If they were united under the rule of the same



government, a Bourbon in this particular case, a huge continental power was bound to rise. To prevent this from happening, the British government fought along with its allies, namely, Portugal, the Dutch Republic and the savoy Duchy. It was a hard expensive war, with a double strategy both on land and at sea. Consequently, vast sums were spent from the public wealth:

I happen'd to be cast on their Coast, just after they had made a Peace with the *Magpyes*, a puissant and neighbouring Nation, after a long, sanguine, and expensive War, which had well nigh exhausted the Forces and Treasure of both Parties, occasioned by the Cacklogallinians pretending they had a Right to nominate a Successor to the Emperor *Chuctinio*, who was in advanced Age, and without issue; and the *Magpyes* pretended their King, as a Relation to that Emperor, had a Right to succeed to the Throne of the *Bubohibonians* which is the Nation of *Owls*... (Brunt 38)

Wars motivated by territorial possessions, or the Right to the throne of a kingdom do seem to be a recurrent trend during the long eighteenth-century, mainly on account of imperial interests which were part and parcel of these conflicts. As usual, all this belligerency implied enormous expenses by governments, thus draining the treasure of the countries, and this way, “every Brain was at Work to project Methods for raising Money to pay the Interest” (Brunt 39). This was the case in Cacklogallinia just as it was in Britain.

The Government established a plan whereby the recently created South Sea Company would assume the national debt of Great Britain in exchange for lucrative bonds. It was widely believed that the Company would eventually reap an enormous profit through international trade in cloth, agricultural goods, and, especially, slaves. It seemed such a promising solution that everybody tried to buy some of these bonds. The king's German mistresses, along with members of the government, and anybody who could invest in the project, bought some shares of the company. In Cacklogallinia a project that involved bringing back gold from the moon was also embraced on by the *Vultuaquilian Squabbarws*, that is, Cacklogallinia king's mistresses, and the aristocracy and all the grantees of the realm.

A Company was erected, Shares sold of the Treasure we were to bring back; and happy was he who could first subscribe. These Subscriptions were sold at 2000 per Cent. Advantage, and in less than two Months, the Time spent in preparing for our Journey, I saw at least Five Hundred Lacqueys, who had fallen into the Trade of buying and selling these Subscriptions in their gilt Palanquins, and Train of Servants after them. The Squabbaws, the Vultuaquilians, the Minister, and some of the Grand Council, shared amongst them Fifty Millions of Spasma's, ready Money, for what they sold of this chimerical Treasure. (Brunt 43)

In fact, the narrator tells us so earnestly what was happening that the thin layer of fiction almost vanishes. Speculation won and everybody was blinded to reality both in the South Sea Company and the Gold from the Moon project. In spite of several objections raised by our traveler, they flew to the moon by means of potent birds and using magnetism to fly, and the gravity of the earth and the moon to ensure the landings. This is a solution which resonates Godwin's flying machine propelled by big, strong birds, the "gansas", as well as the flying island described in Gulliver's travels third voyage, to Laputa, whose landings and raisings to the sky are carried out by means of a magnetic stone (Swift 380-382).

When they arrived at the moon, they are inevitably struck by the truth. Actually, they found the moon a ravishing place, full of natural beauty, consisting of colourful and exquisite flowers, with crystalline water, an altogether lovely landscape, well scented and where harmony ruled. Moreover, it was inhabited by a special people, the Shades or Selenites, souls without bodies who were going through a process of purification in order to gain access to and be worthy of sharing the eternal bliss. In such a world there was no room for the petty ambitions of the sublunary regions.

Cacklogallinians' investment in shares to profit from these imaginary gold mines becomes an attack on their materialistic way of living. The older use of the word "to invest" had actually a military meaning. According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, it came from the Middle French *investire*, and before from the Latin and Old Italian *investire*. Up to the seventeenth century, it signified to surround with troops or ships so as to prevent escape or entry, that is, to attack. Somehow, Brunt, with all his honest style of narration, warns his contemporaneous readers that these

speculative investments in very doubtful projects, in fact, “invest” against the cohesion of national identity and solid wealth. Furthermore, if we are to consider the eighteenth-century slave trade as “the gold from the moon”, they are investing against the moral structure of each individual, and so weakening the ethical structure of the whole society, and simultaneously destroying their national identity. The notion of both actual slavery, and economic and social slavery, that is, the subjection of an individual to someone else apparently of a superior status, pervades the work. The investment in slave trade was considered one of the most profitable financial enterprises in imperial economics. In the end, the “gold from the moon” gave rise to one of the major conflicts of the imperial ideology and its economic outcome, since it “invested against” human integrity and identity.

There is a very strong image that depicts the result of greed, speculation, and the exploitation of other people: the Cacklogallians grow in bodily seize whenever they get richer or a new honorific title, or position, but they eat the members of their own community who fell to weaker positions and lost status. Moreover, this repulsive representation of the species is anticipated by its name: “cacklo” is an obvious appropriation of the Greek prefix “Kako”, often written in the latinised form “caco” which is used to refer to something disagreeable or incorrect. The Cacklogallinians’ anthropophagy (or I should say “Gallinaceophagy”) and all the economic tools of eighteenth-century British capitalism did hamper the so-called white man’s ethical and political hegemony. As the Selenite elder advises, there are better and more solid things to invest in:

My son, I hope you will reap a solid Advantage from the perilous Journey you have made, tho’ your Expectation of finding Riches among us is frustrated. All that I have to give you, is my Advice to return to your World, place your Happiness in nothing transitory; nor imagine that any Riches, but those which are Eternal, which neither Thief can carry away, nor Rust corrupt, are worthy of your Pursuit. (Brunt 54)

Investment, as an economic action belongs to a new world view which came into being in tandem with the establishment of the empires and the commercial nets they created. Investment also challenged men to find out how far they would be willing to sail, how far would their commercial

operations reach, how much they would sacrifice to satisfy their goals, or ambitions. In brief how much was investment worth. Or, using Shylock's words, would they go after their neighbour's pound of flesh?

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### ABSTRACT

*A Voyage to Cacklogallinia with a Description of the Religion, Policy, Customs and Manners, of that Country* came to print in 1727, in London, authored by a certain “Captain Samuel Brunt”, a pseudonym of a writer whose identity, willingly or not, is still a mystery. It describes a hazardous voyage by sea, very much in tune with the usual travel writing descriptions of the beauties and perils that awaited the seamen in their cross Atlantic routes.

As usual in this kind of fictional works, the encounter with another community peopled by an intelligent species, the Cacklogallians, is here enhanced by the relativist notion of man’s position within the frame of God’s creation. The narrative further expands to a flight to the moon with the help of particularly powerful birds. However, the utopian factor here intertwined with fantastical travel devices just paves the way to a rather critical view of British society under the spell of imperial ideology. This paper plays on the double and ambiguous meaning of the verb “to invest”. According to its current sense it means to put one’s money in some industrial or commercial project. The older use of the word, up to the seventeenth century, also signified to attack. Investment, one of the main topics of Brunt’s ironic narration, makes the reader wonder how far greed, speculation, and all the economic tools of eighteenth-century British capitalism did hamper the white man’s ethos and political hegemony.

### KEYWORDS

Utopia; moon travelling; eighteenth-century capitalism; ethos; to invest

### RESUMO

*A Voyage to Cacklogallinia with a Description of the Religion, Policy, Customs and Manners, of that Country* veio a prelo em 1727, em Londres, assumindo-se como seu autor um certo “capitão Samuel Brunt”, um óbvio pseudônimo de um escritor cuja identidade permanece um mistério até aos dias de hoje.

A obra relata uma tormentosa viagem marítima seguindo o padrão habitual das narrativas de viagem pelas rotas do Atlântico, com descrições das belezas e dos perigos testemunhados e vividos pelos marinheiros. O encontro com uma comunidade de alienígenas inteligentes, os *Cacklogallians*, elemento, aliás, recorrente neste tipo de obra ficcional, ganha uma nova dimensão na medida em que dá ênfase à perspectiva relativista do homem no plano da criação divina. A narrativa prossegue com uma ida à lua, sendo os viajantes transportados pela energia de aves invulgarmente potentes. O enquadramento utópico, aliado aos recursos fantásticos da viagem espacial, destina-se, todavia, a presentear o leitor com uma visão muito crítica da sociedade britânica dominada pela ideologia do império.

O presente artigo centra-se no duplo significado e consequente ambiguidade e sentido do verbo “to invest” (investir). O seu actual significado é: aplicar dinheiro num projecto industrial ou comercial. No passado, mais precisamente até ao século XVII, o termo significava, em primeiro lugar, atacar. O leitor é levado a interrogar-se até que ponto o investimento, ou mais correctamente, o acto de investir procedente da ganância e da especulação inerente ao capitalismo britânico de Setecentos, e um dos tópicos centrais da narrativa irónica de Brunt, condiciona o *ethos* e a hegemonia política do homem branco.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Utopia; viagens à lua; capitalismo setecentista; etos; investir

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