

CHAPTER NINETEEN Flying Saucers

The Modern Phenomena

On June 24, 1947 Kenneth Arnold, a businessman from Boise, Idaho, was flying a private airplane near Mt. Rainier, Washington. He observed a formation of objects flying along in a line, which he said looked “like pie plates skipping over water.” He reported this incident to the press, which dubbed the objects “flying saucers.” With that report the phenomenon was upon us here in the United States.

The term was not original. On January 25, 1878 the *Denison Daily News* of Denison, Texas reported that the preceding day a farmer named John Martin had observed a dark flying object in the shape of a disk cruising across the sky *at a wonderful speed*; he used the word saucer to describe it.

Reports of strange objects in the sky have occurred throughout history. These have been described in various ways, always according to the understanding and vocabulary of the individuals making the reports. They may be flying chariots, flying fire, fireballs, or numerous other assorted designations. During World War II many military pilots reported strange lights in the skies they dubbed “foo fighters” but the phenomenon was so elusive and so irregular that little official notice was given to it.

Then in 1945 human beings on this planet performed an act that raised them to a level of danger never before seen on any world. They exploded the first atomic bombs, and used them destructively to terminate one of their recurrent wars. That year marked a demarcation point in world destiny. We were headed for racial suicide unless action was taken to limit that awesome and horrendous power.

The year 1946 saw numerous reports of strange flying objects, many of them centered in Europe. But it was not until a year later that the United States became conscious of them on a large scale. The observational activity by our celestial Visitors was now in full swing. And a program was underway to enlighten the people of this planet.

The term El Disco is used prevalently in South America. Other geographical regions may use other terms, but the term Flying Saucer is now recognized worldwide. Although it is not always descriptive of observed objects it became a universal term for strange objects in the sky. During the mid-1950's the term UFOs was coined for these Unidentified Flying Objects and is now used by official agencies and serious investigators. But the term Flying Saucer is still held in popular conception.

Swift's Flying Saucer

Swift, in a sense, predicted this phrase in his description of the Flying Island, which he also called a Floating Island.

I desired leave of this Prince to see the curiosities of the island, which he was graciously pleased to grant, and ordered my tutor to attend me. I chiefly wanted to know to what cause in art or in nature it owed its several motions, whereof I will now give a philosophical account to the reader.

The Flying or Floating Island is exactly circular, its diameter 7,837 yards, or about four miles and a half, and consequently contains ten thousand acres. It is three hundred yards thick. The bottom or under surface, which appears to those who view it from below, is one even regular plate of adamant, shooting up to the height of about two hundred yards. Above it lie the several minerals in their usual order, and over all is a coat of rich mould ten or twelve foot deep. The declivity of the upper surface, from the circumference to the centre, is the natural cause why all the dews and rains which fall upon the island, are conveyed in small rivulets towards the middle, where they are emptied into four large basins, each of about half a mile circuit, and two hundred yards distant from the centre.

We could hardly call this a philosophical account. Swift gave exact dimensions.

If we take Swift's dimensions and sketch them to scale we get the object shown in the figure on the opposite page. It has these unique features:

- 1) It is exactly circular.
- 2) It is 7,387 yards in diameter.
- 3) It is 300 yards thick.
- 4) The bottom is flat and smooth, one even regular plate.
- 5) The underside shoots up to a height of 200 yards.
- 6) The upper surface has a declivity from the circumference to the center.

This constitutes a perfect saucer shape.

However, it is truly prodigious in size, containing some 10,000 acres. Hovering over New York City it would span one-third the length of Manhattan Island, and extend from New Jersey west of the Hudson across the East River to Brooklyn. What did Swift intend by these immense dimensions? Nothing in our skies today is reported so large. No one has reported a flying saucer, a flying cloud, a flying cigar or any other object with comparable size. Of course, if he were to describe an island floating in the air, and not offend the sensibilities of his contemporaries, the size should be appropriate to that satirical image.



SWIFT'S FLYING ISLAND



Why did no one recognize Swift's description until now? What is the meaning behind this story written nearly three hundred years ago?

The answer lies in our expectation of the purpose of Swift's story. If we think he was offering satire, we will see only satirical purpose. Then we will interpret according to that mental framework. But if our Planetary Supervisors knew the day would arrive when flying saucers would populate our skies, they then used Swift to provide verification of such descriptions.

Obviously we have a major problem. There must be significance behind Swift's story that has escaped the attention of readers since it was first published in 1726. But even more, this strange story has not come to the eye of modern readers who are acquainted with the saucer phenomenon. It has remained obscure and unknown.

Open to interpretation is the point at which the bottom surface begins to shoot up to a height of 200 yards, or exactly what Swift meant by that statement. He said that the bottom was flat and smooth, one even regular plate of adamant. For the bottom to be one flat, smooth, even, and regular plate Swift may have meant merely that it was without irregularities, protuberances or cavities, without contradicting the slightly convex shape in the proportionally small upward slope.

If the collecting basins for the dews and the rains are on a flat portion of the top surface how far out from the center would that flat portion extend? If the basins were a half-mile in circuit their radii would be approximately 140 yards. If we assume the centers of the basins are 200 yards from the center of the island, the edges of the basins outermost toward the circumference of the island are 340 yards ($200 + 140$) distant from the center of the island. However, if we assume the inner edges of the basins are 200 yards from the center of the island, rather than their centers, the outer edges would be 200 yards plus the diameter of the basins, another 280 yards, or a total of 480 yards, from the center.

Regardless of which approach we use, the distance from the outer edges of the basins to the circumference is still proportionally great. The radial distance from the center of the island to the circumference is approximately 3920 yards. Therefore, the distance from the outer edges of the basins to the circumference would be about 3580 yards in the first case, and 3440 yards in the second. In either case this provides adequate distance for the declivity of the upper surface to catch all the dews and rains, as Swift so aptly put it. Maintaining his requirement of a thickness of 300 yards, with the bottom surface shooting up to match the upper declivity, we obtain the saucer shape.

Swift does not say how the four basins are located with respect to one another on the top surface, but it seems reasonable to place them at the four quadrants, as shown in the drawing.

What did Swift mean by dews and rains? This appears to be a description of a technique for collecting water for the inhabitants of this unusual flying island, certainly a necessity if inhabited by human mortals for extended periods. Or is this part of a satirical context, to be deciphered by some understanding of allusion? Or perhaps merely part of a fantasy invented to satisfy the context?

As I shall show in a following discussion, there is more than mere imagination to Swift's basins, the dews, and the rains.

Was he also satisfying the satirical context when he described the *several minerals in their usual order*? This tells us nothing, since we do not know what those minerals might be, nor their "usual" order, nor their thickness. Swift used the term "mould," a contemporary term to mean the soil in and upon which plants grow.

It may help to summarize the items that agree with modern reports.

- 1) A strange object in the air, not ordinary to our experience.
- 2) The object hovers, or floats, according to the will of its operators. It defies the laws of gravity as we understand them. The object also can ascend or descend, and move horizontally according to intelligent desire.
- 3) The object is disk shaped.
- 4) The object is saucer shaped.
- 5) The object has a central dome.
- 6) The object sparkles brightly, either from the sea below or from its inherent properties, as in many modern reports.
- 7) The object is occupied by creatures that look and act like human beings.

I shall now go on to the opinions expressed by our modern scholarly world on the meaning and purpose of Swift's satire.

Scholarly Opinion

We have a choice of two possibilities:

Either Swift had an experience that led to the flying saucer description, or he invented it from his imagination.

If he invented it we must ask how he came to describe details which so closely parallel modern reports.

Conversely, if the description came from actual experience we must ask why he framed it as he did, as a satire.

That Swift's invention was strange has not gone unnoticed in the scholarly world. In 1937 two professors at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts published two articles which dealt with Swift's voyage to Laputa. Both articles appeared in the Oct 1937, Volume II issue of *Annals of Science*. The first article was entitled *The Scientific Background of the Voyage to Laputa*. The second was entitled *Swift's 'Flying Island' in the Voyage to Laputa*.

Marjorie Nicolson was a professor of English; Nora M. Mohler was an associate professor of Physics. They collaborated to probe the sources of Swift's scientific satire, and its influence on English literature. The first article concentrated on the scientific background of Gulliver's visit to the Academies at Lagado, while the second dealt exclusively with the Flying Island.

I shall postpone consideration of the first article because it deals with the larger context of *Gulliver's Travels*. Here I shall examine their study of the Flying Island.

From their research Nicolson and Mohler concluded that previous critics of *Gulliver's Travels* were wrong in arguing no literary source or analogy for the Flying Island. They felt critics previously were at a loss to explain its mechanism and its symbolism because of inadequate investigation of the sources available to Swift. They rejected the view that it was purely imaginary. In their eyes it was not a particularly successful creation of fancy. They believed the Flying Island was dependent upon other sources, more so than other sections of the Travels, and that this was not a haphazard or fortuitous piece of fancy but that every detail of its structure and mechanism was drawn carefully and thoughtfully from contemporary science.

However, the two professors were not entirely consistent in their viewpoint. It may be helpful to quote their words from introductory comments:

He (Swift) was a setter of riddles, who knew that full appreciation of his cleverness would appear only when the riddles were solved. "A critic who seeks to explain the . . . significance of *Gulliver's Travels* may be guilty of too much ingenuity, but he cannot fairly be charged with exaggerated curiosity", writes one of the most acute commentators, (Sir Charles Firth, "The Political Significance of *Gulliver's Travels*" from the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 9, 1919, page 1), who continues: "He is searching for a secret which Swift tells us is hidden there, and endeavoring to solve riddles which were intended to exercise his wits". Swift expressed the hope that posterity would be curious enough "to consult annals and compare dates", in order to detect the double meaning in his work; he might have gone further, and urged his readers to scrutinize with care his mathematics, to be vigilant whenever figures were introduced, to be on guard, indeed, at every phrase if they would finally succeed in "untwisting all the chains that tie the hidden sound of harmony" of his pattern.

Such analysis is particularly important in solving the puzzle of the complex Flying Island, for magnetism and loadstones, Gilbert and Newton, "flying chariots" and the world in the moon are here welded into a new whole which takes its place as one of the most remarkable pseudo-scientific passages in the literature of the eighteenth century.

These remarks by the two professors are highly curious; they state exactly the thesis of this present analysis. But the conclusions drawn by the two professors are diametrically opposite to mine. They believe Swift drew upon historic or contemporary sources to develop this exceptional work of satire. I propose that he produced the account from actual experience and used those sources to provide a vehicle to hide his true purpose.

Did I not search *for a secret which Swift tells us is hidden there, and endeavor to solve riddles which were intended to exercise our wits?*

We cannot be accused of being *a critic who seeks to explain the . . . significance of Gulliver's Travels* and also *guilty of too much ingenuity, while unfairly charged with exaggerated curiosity.*

We cannot engage in exaggerated curiosity for one of the most impressive secrets of all time.

Indeed, *Swift expressed the hope that posterity would be curious enough 'to consult annals and compare dates', exactly as I have done, . . . in order to detect the double meaning in his work.*

Furthermore, I have *gone further, and scrutinized with care his mathematics*, an exercise that no human mortal apparently has published since Swift made known to the world his remarkable, brilliant, and succinct, mathematical description.

I have been *vigilant whenever figures were introduced*, and have been *on guard, indeed, at every phrase if I would finally succeed in 'untwisting all the chains that tie the hidden sound of harmony' of his pattern.*

But this ability is not unrelated to unfolding world events. The world might have drawn up Swift's precise numbers for the Flying Saucer over the past three hundred years, but how would anyone have been able to determine the ingenuity of his description without the modern context of flying saucers? Nicolson and Mohler could not possibly have been able to understand Swift's purpose until flying saucers burst upon our dazzled world. In other words, Swift was used by our Planetary Supervisors to provide information on the contemporary phenomena in our skies.

Nicolson and Mohler had more difficulty in identifying Swift's sources than their remarks imply. That difficulty is emphasized by their very words. In the introductory paragraph they state that:

"Every detail of its structure and mechanism was drawn carefully and thoughtfully from contemporary science"

but in the next paragraph they state that

"The sudden appearance upon this accepted scene of an extra-terrestrial inhabited world is as startling to the reader as to Gulliver. The ultimate source of Swift's imagination of his floating adamantine island will probably never be defined . . ."

That was a dramatic failure in scholarly prophecy. Only the hand of God, unfolding revelation today, has permitted us to demonstrate Swift's ultimate source.

It is curious that these words should have been written such a short time before the current phenomenon broke loose upon our world. Had the two professors waited they may never have written their paper. With celestial visitations reported prevalently in the press the *sudden appearance upon this accepted scene*

of an extra-terrestrial inhabited world may have struck too strong a chord with them. Indeed, Swift's story would have been even more startling with such background.

Nicolson and Mohler mention two possible sources of inspiration for Swift's *flying* or *floating* island.

1) Sir William Temple wrote a series of Essays in which he spoke of England as *this floating island*. At another time Temple made the remark that *Our counsels and conduct were like those of a floating island*, driven one way or *the other according to the winds and tides*. Swift spent several years with Temple and was his literary executor. He would have been familiar with the terms invented by Temple.

2) Swift was the product of classical training, able to read and write in Latin. He could have been familiar with passages from ancient Latin sources. Perhaps he remembered another adamantine island — the floating island of Delos, *by the blessed gods of Olympus known as the far-seen star of the dark-blue earth*, as it was stated in a fragment from Pindar. Or as Pliny said, *Delos was an island that suddenly sprang up and appeared*. According to legend Delos was an island which strayed about the deep, until the time of the birth of Apollo and Artemis, when it was chained upon *four pillars resting on adamant, rising perpendicular from the roots of the earth*.

However, Nicolson and Mohler admit that the Floating Island of Laputa does not emerge from the deep; it descends from the heavens, an idea not suggested in the classics.

They then discuss other features of this strange flying apparition. They believed that mention of minerals *in their usual order* would not surprise modern readers, since we now have detailed knowledge of earth crustal structure. In Swift's day this knowledge was just beginning to be formulated and did not have the degree of sophistication we now take for granted. But several papers had been published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society which could have suggested the phrase to Swift. In 1718-19 John Strachey reported observations on strata in coalmines in Somersetshire from which he suggested the general conclusion that the folds of the earth seem to follow regular patterns in the strata of their bowels. In 1725 he expanded on his theory with evidence from other areas, generalizing on the patterns he had found. This material would have been available to Swift in time for him to include such a remark in the description of the flying island. Strachey mentions the layers of the minerals *in their usual order* and covered with *Malt or Loom, and Soil*. The phrasing is strikingly like that used by Swift. The similarity suggests that Swift may have borrowed the phrases for his story.

Before continuing with this story we must next consider additional details of Swift's remarkable Flying Saucer.