

# Utopian views in literature and cinema: Laputa as depicted in Jonathan Swift and Hayao Miyazaki

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## Abstract

*The Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki is renowned for his ability to build up imaginary worlds bound to make us fly by the seat of our pants, often based on existing books. These are the cases of "Howl's moving castle" (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones and "Gulliver's Travels" (1726) by Jonathan Swift: the former gave rise to the film bearing the same name dated from 2004 and the latter is entitled "Laputa: Castle in the sky" from 1986. Our attention will be focused on Laputa, the flying island that was first devised by Swift in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and an icon in utopian studies. Following Plato and his republic of philosophers, as well as Thomas More's "Utopia" (1516), the search for the 'no place' or 'paradise on earth', as some authors uphold, is the underlying background for Swift's book, whose main character encounters several fictional societies in the course of his travels. Swift set a society of scientists and social planners in Laputa, who end up disregarding the needs of those who lived underneath, on firm land, and setting out the model for dystopia, i.e. the 'bad place'. Our aim is to compare Laputa as it was depicted by Swift (literature) and Miyazaki (cinema), bearing in mind this dialectic interaction between utopia and dystopia, so as to attempt to reach tentative conclusions.*

## Keywords:

Utopia, Dystopia, Laputa, Jonathan Swift, Hayao Miyazaki.

## Introduction

Utopianism maintains a long tradition in western literature, having started with Plato's "Republic" (c. 370-360 BC). Another hallmark is Thomas More's "Utopia" (1516), whose author created the term utopia. Since then, writers, philosophers and social-political thinkers developed different strands of utopianism, as Sargent (1994) upholds (and will be shown below), and with them different words to represent distinct features of the search for a better place.

In this paper, we shall focus our attention on utopian literature alone, with a special emphasis on Swift's utopia from 1726 which provided inspiration for Hayao Miyazaki's creative appropriation of Laputa in his film "Castle in the sky" (1986). Miyazaki (1996 cit. Akimoto, 2014: 1) himself acknowledged the connection between

Swift's third part of his book and the film: "the Laputa Empire, which ruled over the nations of the earth".

Our aim is to gather the main characteristics of both constructions – literary and filmic – and compare them, so as to attempt to draw conclusions about the presence of utopian and dystopian elements.

Therefore, this paper will be organised in the following manner: the first part will be devoted to understanding the extent of utopianism and utopian studies from the perspective of a variety of authors; followed by an in-depth interpretation and description of Swift's Gulliver's 3<sup>rd</sup> trip to Laputa, and then of Miyazaki's castle in the sky, in order to pinpoint differences and similarities. In the course of this contrastive approach, we will attempt to identify other important ideas that Miyazaki might have intended to convey in this film. As last, we present some final assumptions about these two homonymous artistic creations.

## From utopianism to utopias

*A map of the world that does not include  
Utopia is not worth even glancing at (...)  
Progress is the realization of utopias  
Oscar Wilde (1891)*

Utopianism has various manifestations and some authors use it to refer to almost anything, whereas others restrict it to literature only. As Sargent puts forth:

I define the broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live. (1994: 3)

It thus consists of an umbrella term that refers to these dreams and nightmares (and thus include elements of fantasy) driving ideology and political action. The fact that utopianism is driven by dreaming does not necessarily imply that they bring about perfection: very few societies are believed to be perfect by their authors (ibid: 9).

The conundrum in the area of utopian studies lies, according to Sargent (idem), in the fact that various authors attempt to use a single dimension to explain a phenomenon which is by nature multidimensional. This author considers utopianism a universal human phenomenon, contrary to Levitas (1990), that is "the result of the human propensity to dream while both

asleep and awake” (Sargent, 1994: 4). Vieira (2010: 20-21) follows in Sargent’s footsteps by stating the following:

utopia is innate to men and has a perennial and immeasurable nature (...) utopia may well be nourished by a project, but its strength is not totally exhausted by it; it has an energy of its own, which outlives the blueprint.

Consequently, utopianism encompasses three different dimensions or “faces” as Sargent (*idem*: 4) names them: utopian literature (subdivided into body utopias/ utopias of sensual gratification and city utopias/ utopias of human contrivance); communitarianism; and utopian social theory.

Utopias then come forth as a manifestation of utopianism and may present themselves as positive or eutopian or as negative or dystopian. For Sargent (1994: 5), utopias “are historical artifacts that are brought into being at particular times and places and usually by identifiable people whose reasons for doing so are in principle knowable”. This author quotes Suvin, who puts forth his definition of utopia as being:

The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis. (1973: 132)

Nevertheless, not all utopias need to be written down; they came into being in myths, oral tradition and folk songs, as Sargent (1994: 10-11) suggests. The first personify utopias in the shape of golden ages, arcadias, earthly paradises, fortunate isles and isles of the blest. These are examples of body utopias that comprehend features, such as simplicity, unity, security, immortality (or easy death), unity with the gods, abundance without labour and no enmity. City utopias come into being when these places are under human control without divine intervention.

In line with myths, Sargent (*ibid*: 11-12) mentions also fiction and non-fiction. Fictional utopias encompass utopias (eutopia, dystopia, satirical and critical utopia, and anti-utopia), Cockaigne (i.e. a fabled land of luxury and idleness), science fiction (Atlantis legends, fantasy and tales of the future), utopias of the mind (e.g. Daumal and Hesse), imaginary or extraordinary voyages, Robinsonaden, Gulliveriana, fairy tales, romance and oriental tales. On the other hand, non-fiction comprehend instructions to princes, political philosophy, ideal cities, urban planning, utopian social theory, film, painting and music.

From the abovementioned, when discussing utopianism, we are confronted with various expressions

apart from utopia. As far as *utopia* is concerned, the word was coined by Thomas More in 1516 when he designated the island described in the book bearing the same name. It was then a neologism that acquired various meanings throughout the centuries. According to Vieira (2010: 3), utopia enabled the creation of new words, such as eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia, alotopia, euchronia, heterotopia, ecotopia and hyperutopia. However, Vieira (*ibid*: 4) draws attention to the fact that that the word *utopia* came to represent two different realities: first “to allude to imaginary paradisiacal places” and then to “refer to a particular kind of literature”. It is interesting to note that More’s first name for his island was *Nusquama*, from the Latin *Nusquam*, meaning ‘nowhere’, ‘in no place’ or ‘on no occasion’. Because More wished to convey a new idea as that contained in *Nusquam*, he came up with *utopia* which resounds the political ideas of the time and highlights the belief in mankind’s abilities. He then resorted to Greek: *ouk* > *u* that means ‘not’, along with *topos* or place, to which he added the suffix *-ia*, signifying a non-place. Therefore, utopia literally means “a place which is a no place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of affirmation and denial” (*idem*).

Vieira (*idem*) identifies this neological creation as “a product of the Renaissance, a period when the ancient world (namely Greece and Rome) was considered the peak of mankind’s intellectual achievement, and taken as a model by Europeans”. Inspired in humanist logic, mankind is expected to move beyond the mere acceptance of their fate and to use their reasoning so as to build a different future. One must not forget that the 16<sup>th</sup> century was also the time of unprecedented expansion with the discovery of new worlds mainly led by the Spanish and the Portuguese, thus “More used the awareness of otherness to legitimize the invention of other places, with other people and different forms of organization” (*idem*). As Manea & Manea (2009: 2) put it, Swift was the first to use the motif of the foreigner in the literary English tradition.

Vieira (*idem*: 6) points out that More was preceded by a tradition of putting forth alternative ways of organising society through fiction, in line with Plato’s “Republic” and St. Augustine’s “The City of God” (early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD): the former was mere speculation, whereas the latter was an alotopia, i.e. the promise of a happy afterlife.

Consequently, utopianism emerges as the desire for a better life or Sargent’s “social dreaming”. For Vieira (2010: 6), the concept of utopia encompasses the following features: it puts forward an imagined society; it consists of a literary form, a narrative model that flourished in England, Italy, France and the US, which gives shape to utopia; it performs a function, aims at having an impact, which is to urge people to take action; and conveys the desire for better life, which is connected with hope (an idea inspired in Ernst Bloch

and supported by Levitas) – “a kind of reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives” (ibid: 7). Concomitantly, utopia is also defined as a speculative discourse about a non-existent society which is better than reality, a human-centred construction by mankind and for mankind and it usually possesses a rigid set of rules and laws, because people are not to be trusted in their individualist interests (cf. idem). Literarily speaking, there is a game, a pact that is established between readers and the author.

In this concern, utopia has been likened to sci-fi, since the latter has been permeated by social concerns and become committed to politics. Vieira (2010: 8) elicits that this resemblance has brought about two main positions: one that considers sci-fi subordinated to utopia and another that supports the idea that utopia is a sub-genre of sci-fi. This author states that there is a rupture between the history of the real place and the imagined one, since they are normally static and allow no progress, thus putting forth a distinction between eternity, which implies that there is no anteriority or posteriority in the utopia, such as that of St. Augustine, and perpetuity that has a beginning but no end. Vieira (ibid: 9) upholds that perpetuity is typical of Renaissance utopias as expressions of wishes, confined to remote islands and unknown places, whilst the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the Enlightenment, witness a shift to utopias or good places placed in the future, that is euchronia.

In Vieira’s words (ibid: 12-14), from the Enlightenment onwards, literary utopias mushroomed, supported on the revolution that took place in science and on an optimistic view of evolution, thus conducive to the betterment of social organisation and to progress. Examples of such are Anne-Robert Turgot, Marquis de Condorcet and Louis-Sébastien Mercier, the latter who wrote the first euchronia set in the year 2440. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, utopian socialism gains visibility with Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and, last but not least, Marx and Engels who inspired William Morris’s “News from Nowhere” (1890). As a result, from utopias that led to hope, due to the unquestionable faith in humankind’s capabilities, we move to utopias that bring about disbelief and despair, utopias that also have a dark side, because, after all, “man was aspiring too high, which would inevitably lead to his fall” (idem: 15).

John Stuart Mill is reputed to have first used the word *dystopia* in an 1869 speech, an alternative to *cacotopia* presented by Jeremy Bentham. The prefix *dus* > *dys* comes from Greek and means bad, abnormal and diseased, a similar significance to *kako* > *caco* that alluded to something unpleasant or incorrect. Vieira (ibid: 16-17) argues that the aim of this sub-genre is to be didactic and moralistic, since dystopias are to be

taken as a menace by readers, but if those leave no place for hope, then they fail in their mission.

Parker, Fournier & Reedy (2007: 80-81) sustain that there are authors that distinguish between dystopia and anti-utopia, since the first allows for the possibility of progressive change, whereas the second offer no way out.

Nonetheless, 19<sup>th</sup> century optimism ends with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, as Vieira (2010: 18) argues, sets the tone for the whole century. Parker, Fournier & Reedy (2007: 81) suggest that it is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that dystopia comes of age, especially due to the rise of a bureaucratic society and social planning. Despite the awareness of mankind’s flaws as being positive and as a means to keep looking for alternatives, it was also flagrant their disappointment and incredulity before events such as the two world wars. Thus, dystopias fed both on totalitarianism and on progress, regarded as a tool for dictatorships. These occurrences are, for Parker, Fournier & Reedy (idem), the food for this sub-genre: “the problems of human freedom ployed against the backdrop of a strong state, technological matrix or military, industrial complex”. Writers as Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell are examples of this sub-genre. Michel Foucault proposes the term of heterotopia to refer to a place that presents a different order from the real one, usually found in dreams or memories and out of reach of invigilation systems.

To sum up, we shall present Sargent’s (1994: 9) definitions for key terms in utopianism:

- utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space;
- eutopia or positive utopia – a non-existent society described considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the author lived;
- dystopia or negative utopia – a non-existent society described considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the author lived;
- utopian satire – a non-existent society described considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of that contemporary society;
- anti-utopia – a non-existent society described considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia;
- critical utopia – a non-existent society described considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous

reader to view as considerably better but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre.

## Jonathan Swift's Laputa

According to Quintana (cf. Britannica Encyclopaedia, 2017), Jonathan Swift is a pseudonym of Isaac Bickerstaff, the Anglo-Irish writer and clergyman who was born in Dublin in 1667 and deceased in 1745. He was a satirist, a political journalist and a churchman.

"Gulliver's Travels" is regarded as Swift's masterpiece, first published under the name of "Travels into several remote nations of the world" in 1726. Throughout the book, "Swift certainly seems to use the various races and societies Gulliver encounters in his travels to satirize many of the errors, follies, and frailties that human beings are prone to" (cf. Britannica Encyclopaedia).

The main character of the book, Lemuel Gulliver, embarks on a voyage around the world stumbling upon Lilliput and his tiny inhabitants, the Lilliputians, who are then followed by their antipodes, the giants who live in Brobdingnag.

At one moment we are aware of Gulliver as a tiny animalcule, above whom towers a race of giants, who by a careless step or gesture may destroy life of which they are unaware; at another moment we see him, gross giant, among a race of pygmies, who yet may bind him by the hair, overcoming his physical greatness by their tiny pins and arrows. (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 418)

In his third book, Gulliver comes across the flying island of Laputa, as well as Luggnagg where he meets the Struldbrugs, "absent-minded inhabitants [who] are so preoccupied with higher speculations that they are in constant danger of accidental collisions" (cf. Britannica Encyclopaedia) and, in Gulliver's words, "the most mortifying sight I ever beheld". Finally, in book four, Gulliver encounters the Houyhnhnms, the virtuous and rational horses who use the services provided by the Yahoos, later identified by Gulliver as being less advanced human beings.

The passage that follows describes Gulliver's discovery of the island and figure 1 illustrates its shape.

a vast opaque body between me and the sun, moving forwards towards the island: it seemed to be about two miles high, and hid the sun six or seven minutes, but I did not observe the air to be much colder, or the sky more darkened, than if I had stood under the shade of a mountain. As it approached nearer over the place where I was, it appeared to be a firm substance, the bottom flat, smooth, and shining very bright from the reflection of the sea below. (Swift, 1728: 195-196)

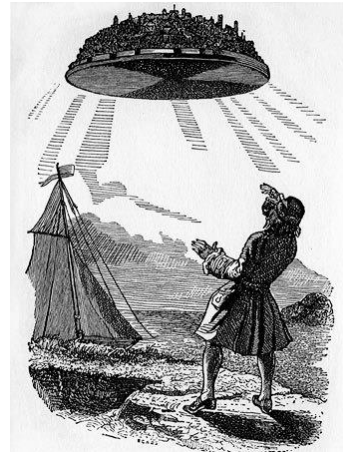


Figure 1. Gulliver perceives Laputa (Illustration of J. J. Grandville)

According to Nicolson & Mohler (1937b: 406), this island is a reminiscence of Delos, a classical island where the gods lived, which arises from the depths, whereas Laputa descends from the heavens, being able to raise or sink.

Gulliver's encounter with Laputa seems to follow the same outline of his previous voyages and "past misfortunes" (Swift, 1728: 192): there's "a great storm arising", he is "chased by two pirates", sails on "a small canoe, with paddles and a sail and four days' provisions" (ibid: 192, 194) and finds an island. However, Nicolson & Mohler uphold there is "a conspicuous departure from the other adventures", because Gulliver is confronted with "an extra-terrestrial inhabited world" (1937b: 406).

Swift ponders less the relation of man to the new universe than the relationships exhibited in that universe itself – the physical laws by which the planets and the stars in their courses are bound in mutual interdependence, great and small equally obeying these inevitable laws. (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 419)

In Swift's new universe, after the disproportion of men in the previous voyages, Laputa turned out to be the place where:

Swift had shown man as he found himself, in pessimistic moods, "placed on this isthmus of a middle state", between the vastness of the cosmic universe, discovered by the telescope, and the new universe of minute life, which the microscope had disclosed (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 418)

Many criticisms have been made to Laputians' love for mathematics and music, Swift's flying island, "a piece of magical apparatus", regarded as "gratuitous violation of natural laws" (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937a: 299, 300). However, one must not neglect the fact that the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were defined by a widespread interest in

scientific discovery among the English men of letters, which included the attendance at meetings of Royal Society and the access to "Miscellanea Curiosa", i.e. reports of discoveries, inventions and experiments (cf. idem: 302). This fact might explain numerous of Swift's references throughout the book.

Laputa is a circular island with about 7,900 yards in diameter "or about four miles and a half" (Swift, 1728: 209), an area of 10,000 acres and 300 yards (i.e. 270 metres) thick, the measures of which seem to match those of the diameter of the terrestrial globe, as understood at the time of Swift (cf. Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 416). Out of the 270-m thickness, 200 make up the bottom plate, upon which the usual mineral layers are laid "in their usual order" (idem), according to latest theories of stratification, then only at their outset. The plate, where the island stands, "appeared to be a firm substance, the bottom flat, smooth and shining very brightly" (Swift, 1728: 195-196), i.e. it is made up of adamantine, a fictional mineral that is thought to be indestructible and the hardest material, as well as magnetic.

The upper surface is sloped down, which allows for rain to form rivulets that flow into four basins running in circuit around the island. On top and at the centre of the island, there is "a chasm of fifty yards in diameter", where one finds a dome for astronomical observation and where the lodestone (the modern spelling of loadstone, i.e. a magnetised piece of mineral magnetite) is kept, which enables the island to fly and move around. Without the Chinese discovery of the lodestone, there would be no compass and Swift must have used the Royal Society's early conclusions on magnetism for his mechanism that made the island move and float. The great dipping needle Swift inserted inside the lodestone is what enables Laputa to change direction (idem: 417-418)

Laputa's observatory is called *Flandona Gagnole* (or Astronomer's Cave) which is said to be based on the architecture of the Royal Observatory in Paris. To access it, Gulliver had to descend to "the depth of a hundred yards beneath the upper surface of the adamant (...) twenty lamps continuing burning" (Swift, 1728: 210).

Nicolson & Mohler (1937b: 416) argue that Swift's inspiration for Laputa might have been the earliest catalogues of the Royal Society in London, where a *terella* was on exhibition, and similarities were surely not accidental. From the authors' viewpoint: "[e]very detail of its structure and mechanism was drawn carefully and thoughtfully from contemporary science" (ibid: 405). Readers are urged by Swift himself to analyse his work fraught with riddles so as to solve them, i.e.

the puzzle of the complex Flying Island, for magnetism and loadstones, Gilbert and Newton, "flying chariots" and the

world in the moon arc 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 (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 406)

As for Laputians, "a race of mortals so singular in their shapes, habits and countenances", they are educated people who are keen on mathematics, astronomy and technology, but seem to be unable to make use of their knowledge in practicality. They mastered levitation of the island: "By means of this loadstone, the island is made to rise and fall, and move from one place to another. Their astronomical knowledge included "a catalogue of ten thousand fixed stars", the observation of "ninety-three different comets" and the discovery of "two lesser stars, or satellites, which revolve about Mars" (Swift, 1728: 213), a breakthrough only achieved 150 years later.

Despite the apparent civilisational advancement, Laputians have servants or pages, and are a patriarchal society, where women are obliged to ask for permission to go down below, a request rarely met with consent, since women seldom came back to the island. They are said to be naturally adulterous – "The women of the island have abundance of vivacity (...) and are exceedingly fond of strangers" (Swift, 1728: 207) – thus preferring the men from Barnibarbi, the land below controlled by Laputians.

Gulliver describes Laputians as having inappropriate clothes, not correctly measured as he illustrates with his own example when he was provided with clothing – "took my altitude by a quadrant (...) with a ruler and compasses, described the dimensions and outlines of the whole body (...) in six days brought my clothes very ill made, and quite out of shape" (idem: 202), decorated with astronomical symbols and musical instruments: "adorned with the figures of suns, moons, and stars; interwoven with those of fiddles, flutes, harps, trumpets, guitars, harpsichords, and many other instruments of music, unknown to us in Europe" (idem: 198). The same disproportionality seems to affect their houses: "Their houses are very ill built, the walls bevil, without one right angle in any apartment; and this defect arises from the contempt they bear to practical geometry" (idem: 204).

The men on the flying island have "their heads all reclined, either to the right, or the left" and suffer from strabismus on one eye – "one of their eyes turned inwards" –, while the other stares "up to the zenith" (idem: 198), a parody of the microscope and the telescope, according to Nicolson & Mohler (1937b: 421). These authors also argue that:

like the voyagers to the moon, he [Gulliver] comments upon the strangeness of the costumes and the customs of Laputa, and finds in the other world a race of men differing in important respects from terrestrial human beings (idem)

The control held over Balnibarbi is based on:

two methods of reducing them to obedience (...) by keeping the island hovering over such a town (...) whereby he can deprive them of the benefit of the sun and the rain, and consequently afflict the inhabitants with dearth and diseases (...) and the if the crime deserves it, they are at the same time pelted from above with great stones (...) if they continue to obstinate, or offer to raise insurrections, he proceeds to the last remedy; by letting the island drop directly upon their heads, which makes a universal destruction both of the houses and men. (Swift, 1728: 214)

However, this last resort would also equal to Laputa's doom, since the island would also be crushed together with the debris of Balnibarbi. Laputians' strategies were not successful with Lindalino, and scholars have pointed out that this rebellion was an allegory of Ireland's revolt against Great Britain. The reason for Lindalinians' success was due to the fact that they discovered the principle of the floating island and erected four towers at each corner of the city, where they placed a lodestone (Nicolson & Mohler, 1937b: 411-412) which made Laputa lose balance.

Considering the relationship between Laputa and Balnibarbi, Nicolson & Mohler uphold that:

The Floating Island is, in turn, a macrocosm when compared to the loadstone, yet a microcosm when contrasted with the greater world of Balnibarbi, which yet in its turn it governs. Each world must inevitably respond to the physical laws of magnetism and attraction. (1937b: 418)

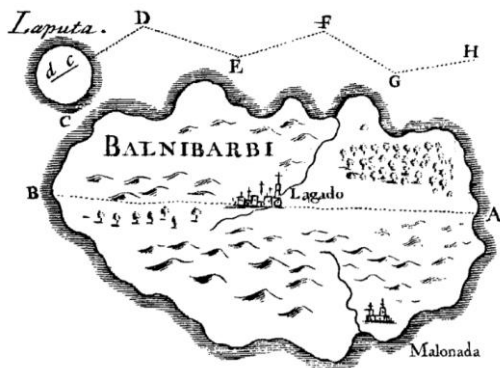


Figure 2. Laputa and the island of Balnibarbi

Added to the plausible scientific background in "Gulliver's travels", Wyrich (1988) also delves into the languages that Swift uses through his book, either to refer to the several peoples met, but also to the words they utter. For this author, these languages are "impenetrable, unanalysable objects" (idem: 80) that have no meaning, but appear rather as "arbitrary alphabetic nonsense" (idem: 82). However, the nonsensical languages "contribute to the book-long, and

to Swift's life-long, satiric assault upon man's intellectual pride" (idem: 81).

The inhabitants of both Laputa and Balnibarbi are said to speak a language similar to Italian – "a clear, polite, smooth dialect, not unlike in sound to the Italian" (Swift, 1728: 197) –, a trait that has been put forth as a possible explanation for the name of the island: 'la puta' or 'the whore'. Notwithstanding, Swift himself presents an explanation for the etymology of the name, with which Gulliver does not agree: "Lap, in the old obsolete language, signifies high; and untuh, a governor; from which they say, by corruption, was derived Laputa, from Lapuntuh" (ibid: 202). The other account of the island's name is the following: "Laputa was quasi lap outed; lap signifying properly, the dancing of the sunbeams in the sea, and outed, a wing" (idem).

Another aspect worth presenting consists of, from Nicolson & Mohler's (1937b: 420) perspective, the fact that the "flying island" was also a subtle variation of the topic of a voyage to the moon and an increasing interest in the "flying chariot", prophesied by John Wilkins in 1640. A long-standing tradition of travelling to the moon preceded Swift, especially after the telescopic observations of Galileo, which allowed for the idea of an inhabited moon, reflected also in the literature. They seemed to share a set of features, such as the means of flight, the sphere of gravity that was necessary to overcome and the sensation of no motion and yet rapid movement. Once confronted with the moon, there would be an amazement by its sizes, "an opaque body" that did not emit light but reflected it.

The 17th century had been particularly fertile in these voyages and "flying chariots", as are the cases of Kepler's daemons, Godwin's gansas and Cyrano's vials of dew. As a case in point, we refer to Bartholomeu Lourenço de Gusmão, the Portuguese who was sponsored by D. João V, and presented, in 1709, the royal audience with his "passarola". In 1755, Father Joseph Galien discussed the principle of heavier-than-air principle and the air machine and various experiments were carried out and reported (cf. Nicolson & Mohler's, 1937b: 422).

All in all, in being both an example of utopian literature and a precursor of sci-fi, Swift introduces us to the most recent scientific discoveries of his time from a satirical viewpoint, as well as to the literary tradition around voyages to the moon and flying machines. Nonetheless, his stories are not to be considered naïve, since the author meant to question mankind's limitations at the social, political and scientific levels. Nicolson and Mohler corroborate this idea, since "Laputans learned both the greatness and the ironic limitations of man's supposed conquest of nature" (1937b: 430). Politically speaking, Swift's "Flying Island has created such "disturbances in the civil and political governments of mankind" as Lana had foreseen" (ibid: 429). In line with

these ideas, Affentranger (2000: 5) highlights that Swift “attacks all unreasonable forms of thought and behaviour both religious and scientific”. By exhibiting anti-utopian or dystopian traits, Swift is “distorting and perverting pro-humanitarian, optimist views” (Manea & Manea, 2009: 5). For these authors, rather than presenting a single utopia, Swift puts forth “a series of brief, concentrated Utopias (...) [which] can also be Dystopias / “negative Utopias” ” (idem).

Last but not least, despite criticisms from several walks of life, Manea & Manea (ibid: 3) presents Swift as:

the forerunner of several trends and modes in England (and world) literature, e.g. the ‘black sarcasm’, the drama of the absurd, the ‘satirical anatomy’ (...) a remarkable precursor of 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-utopia as a literary genre dealing with very general ideas and conditioning human existence.

### Hayo Miyazaki’s Castle in the sky

Miyazaki is an influential Japanese director and animator who was born in Tokyo in 1941, at a time of “rotunda turbulencia en la que Japón tuvo que resistir un fatídico golpe atómico” (Martínez Zuluaga, 2015: 7), elements of which he has integrated in his animation films. According to Ray (cf. Britannica Encyclopaedia, 2016), Miyazaki’s father’s job was related to planes, thus his love for flying and flying apparatus, including islands – “cada uno de sus trabajos [impregnado] de escenas de amplio impacto visual, donde el aire y las aeronaves se roban el show” (Martínez Zuluaga, 2015: 10).

In fact, as Martínez Zuluaga puts it:

Miyazaki es un director que gusta imprimir experiencias de vida en su trabajo; de ahí que todas sus historias estén salpicadas de sus ideologías y maneras de entender la vida. (2015: 8)

Miyazaki’s features not only encompass his fascination for airplanes, but also include machines designed to soar the skies which can be the representation of “libertad, belleza, arte, vida, infancia, añoranza, soledad, felicidad, entre otras más” (Martínez Zuluaga, 2015: 11), as well as the mechanical chimeras of different shapes that can recodify particular elements of the reality, providing them with the ability to fly.

In the director’s mindset, humanity is its own and greatest enemy:

Es su intolerancia, su falta de conciencia ambiental, su proclividad natural a la autodestrucción la que pueden conllevar a la extinción de las especies y de la tierra. (ibid: 12)

After the completion of his studies in economics, Miyazaki began working in Tōei studio as an animator in 1963, which he later abandoned to found Studio Ghibli with Takahata in 1985. Among his many films, he received the top prize at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival and international acknowledgement for “Spirited Away” (2001), as well as a nomination for an Academy Award in 2006 with “Howl’s moving castle” (2004).

The first film created and released by Studio Ghibli was “Laputa: Castle in the sky” (Tenkū no Shiro Rapyuta) from 1986, which won Animage Anime Grand Prix in the same year. The year of the release of the film represents the year in which “the number of global warheads reached as many as 70,000” (Akimoto, 2014).

According to Martínez Zuluaga (2015: 11), “Castle in the sky”:

es una perfecta ejemplificación [del vuelo]: así como la bóveda celeste es penetrada por dirigibles o aeroplanos de hierro; también existen instrumentos que se asemejan a la complexión de animales o a barcos que impertérritos rompen las nubes, como si se tratase de las olas del mar.

In Akimoto’s (2014) words, “[t]he historical background of the movie dates to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century or the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” and the scenery is set in Wales.

In Miyazaki’s film, a young miner boy named Pazu stumbles upon Sheeta, a young girl who appeared to him floating from the sky thanks to a pendant with a magical crystal. The young girl falls from the government’s ship named Goliath, whose agents, namely Muska, wish to discover the way to Laputa in order to man the Laputians’ lost and highly advanced technology.

One should notice the feminine presence which is an unquestionable characteristic of Miyazaki’s films: “la presencia de féminas valientes, aguerridas y habilidosas que se distancian de la percepción machista tradicional” (Martínez Zuluaga, ibid: 9), a clear shift from the patriarchal paradigm, even though in this particular film Sheeta performs most domestic chores.

We come across Sheeta’s stone again in Uncle Pom’s mine, where the children hide away from the pirates and the government agents. In here, Uncle Pom takes them to an underground lake and there are aetherium crystals (the long-forgotten element) all around them that start shining and speaking to him rather sadly. Actually, he goes even further to state that the earth speaks to us all and that we only need to learn how to listen.

Uncle Pom also recognises that the crystals get restless when Laputa soars over the mine. This scene resounds Swifts’ lodestone, the stone that enables the island to move around, and also its effect over Balnibarbi, which can be covered or stoned by Laputa, along with the

victory of Lindalino over the controlling island. The first are affected by the island and its materials, whereas the second mastered the lodestone and inverted its magnetism to their own advantage.

Viewers first encounter this island when Pazu left his house to protect Sheeta, glancing through Laputa's pictures and maps on the wall and retrieving his father's diary. We are informed that, despite his various attempts, Pazu's father was never able to find the island again and died of a broken heart for being mocked and called a liar.



Figure 3. Pazu's father's photo of Laputa

Sheeta later acknowledged the existence of the island as well, unravelling the fact that her family had lived there; in effect, her parents had been part of Laputa's royal family, echoing the monarch that ruled Swift's island. Her grandmother had given her the crystal and had taught her chants (which we later discover to be spells) that would play a relevant role in the film. An example is the one that upholds harmony with nature: "Take root in the ground, live in harmony with the wind, plant your seeds in the winter and rejoice with the birds in the coming of spring" (Mumcu & Yilmaz 2016: 1079). Therefore, Miyazaki produced a flying city built around a massive central tree, where nature and high technology supposedly live together in peace. Mumcu & Yolmaz (2016: 1077) quote Lioi (2010) to describe the island "as an ecological utopia where the biosphere and the technosphere live in harmony". In addition, the city arises "as an ideal combination of science and nature a series of tranquil gardens unfolding round a hidden core" (idem), which are thought to have been inspired from Greek architecture and European urbanistic templates.

Swift's observation dome is replaced by the tree's crown, which prevails at the top of the island. The whole setting is made to look "like unbelievably natural even though it is completely man-made" (Mumcu & Yilmaz, 2016: 1078) and the power of the camphor tree derives from a Japanese belief that this species "protects from diseases, is a dispenser of vital power and a never failing source of energy" (Yoshimura, 2007 cit. Mumcu & Yilmaz, ibid: 1079).

Instead of the 200-meter flat adamant surface, we have a succession of three stone fortresses, underneath which there is an inverted circular dome that protects the lodestone and shall break into pieces at the end of the film to reveal the crystal.

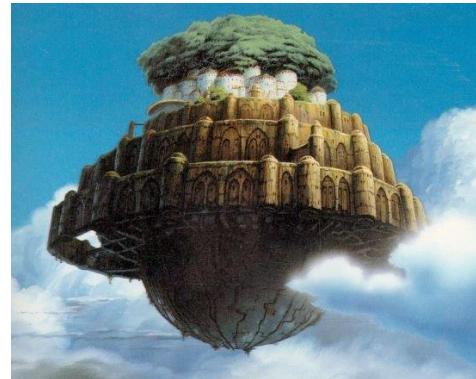


Figure 4. Miyazaki's Laputa

After leaving Uncle Pom's mine, the children end up being caught by Muska and, ultimately saved by the pink-haired Dola, the head of the sky pirates:

who first appears as a greedy antagonist but is later shown to be more complex, helpful and sympathetic, even becoming a grandmotherly figure to the two orphaned protagonists. (Shad, 2015: 42)

Through Dola, Cavallaro (2006 cit. Shad, 2015: 42) argues that Miyazaki emphasises the fact that there are "no simplistic view that people are entirely good or evil"; changes can occur and people are able to bring forward their best traits given the right conditions. As such, they are invited into the pirates' flying ship, the Tiger Moth, and end up helping with the crew's chores: Sheeta at the kitchen and Pazu at the machine room – a rather traditional labour division. It is during one of Pazu's watches at night, who's placed on the bridge, that Sheeta joins him. They are both caught by a storm and they must embark on a kite, in order to try to envision the island and then to attempt to survive. They cut the rope that binds them to the ship and are sucked into the eye of the storm that would lead them to the inside of the flying island. As far as this atmospheric turbulence is concerned, there is no correspondence in Swift's descriptions. Gulliver watches the island without any disturbance in the sky either in the shape of fog or clouds.

Pazu and Sheeta wake up on the floor of the island and are welcomed by a giant machine, a former military robot, which places flowers on the graves of fallen robots and protects the eggs of flycatchers (cf. Akimoto, 2014). The kind robot takes them around the castle, permanently accompanied by animals and the children

realise that the island is deserted: no one is to be found anywhere.

The destruction of the island's society and civilisation was hinted when Sheeta had been under Muska's custody, who intended to take control of the island and carry on the use of this society's technology that ultimately had led to their own annihilation. In the film, we are given photograph-like frames of "the crater-marked landscape, showing the devastation caused by weapons, an incidental detail inspired by the battlefields of World War" (Shad, 2015: 39).

This same author presents a possible explanation for the island's obliteration:

how the creators of the flying cities in Laputa abandoned their connection to the natural world by taking to the skies, leading to their civilisation's eventual downfall when they began to view the world below as composed merely of objects to be dominated by their vast machines, which ultimately proved too powerful to control. (idem)

Sheeta and Pazu are eventually followed to the island by the sky pirates, now their friends and protectors, and by Muska. Amidst a scenery of armed conflict, they have to fight back Muska's blind ambition and thirst for power which implies the partial destruction and abandonment of their coveted island. The island is doomed to drift away forever through the skies as a means to prevent this tempting technology to fall on the wrong hands. This technology is thought to represent nuclear energy by Akimoto, especially in the scene when Muska "takes her to the central chamber of the castle where a gigantic levitation stone is enshrined as a metaphorical image of a "nuclear reactor" " (2014). In here, Muska experiments with "the thunder of Laputa" creating "a huge mushroom cloud on the surface of the ocean, closely similar to a nuclear test" (idem). After this experimentation, Sheeta and Pazu manage to retrieve the stone and they sing the spell of destruction together, which, for Akimoto (ibid), stands as "a symbol of the abolition of nuclear weapons".

The destruction of Laputa's civilisation had been brought about by the incorrect use of this power, an aspect which is not totally present in Swift's representation of Laputa, since Swift's Laputa is not known to be destroyed in the story. However, one could mention Laputians' irrational fear of comets or of the death of the sun which could eventually lead to their doom. Sheeta states in the film that "Laputa was abandoned despite its military technology and economic prosperity, because the people who lived there became arrogant and forgot the significance of nature" (Akimoto, 2014).

At the end of "Castle in the sky", we witness the materialisation of:

the hope that ethical people can disrupt the destruction of the world by techno-culture, and, moreover, the machine intelligence itself can teach human intelligence what a just relationship to nature might be like. (Mumcu & Yilmaz 2016: 1079)

"Castle in the sky" can be understood as a utopia or rather an ecological, where the presence of hope is fundamental: there is a way out for doom-laden future of humanity. In line with Swift's work, Miyazaki intends to be hopeful towards the future, regardless of past and present harmful events. As a result, he strongly defends the protection and preservation of the environment and the abolition of nuclear power.

## Conclusion

The underlying principle in utopianism is social dreaming. This ability to dream for a better life is considered a universal or innate human phenomenon (cf. Sargent, 1994; Vieira, 2010) and it usually entails an element of hope (Bloch; Levitas, 1990). According to Sargent (1994), utopianism presents three faces: utopian literature, communitarianism and utopian social theory and, in this paper, we focussed on a classical example of utopian literature, that is Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels". Utopianism is not merely found in literature, but also in myths, oral tradition and folk songs. The meaning of utopia, word coined by Thomas More, consists of a place that is a non-place and arises as a speculative discourse about a non-existent society. Swift's book was the outcome of Renaissance's philosophy, which was based on an unprecedented belief in humanity's abilities to go beyond the imaginable. Notwithstanding, there are cases when utopias contain both eutopian and dystopian visions of the future, even if all utopias spring out of the discontentment towards the present and intend to address issues, such as social hierarchy, property, gender relations or governance. The need to criticise current situations may serve different functions, namely didactic, catalytic or heuristic.

As for the comparison between Swift and Miyazaki's Laputas, the first rises from the depths (as Delos), whereas the second descends from the heavens. The inhabitants of both Laputas share the same violent approaches to the peoples below: Swift with the use of the island itself and its thick adamant surface, while Miyazaki by means of an advanced technology, likened to nuclear energy by various authors (e.g. Akimoto, 2014). We never get to know Miyazaki's Laputians, whilst being provided lengthy details about Swift's society. Both groups speak unknown languages, whether described as old or nonsensical, and are monarchic and patriarchal.

Both artistic creations show off numerous flying objects, explained, on the one hand, by the tradition of “flying chariots” and “voyages to the moon” typical of Swift’s time and, on the other, by Miyazaki’s renowned passion for flying machines with allusions to the II World War or the Cold War, and nuclear disasters.

The two Laputas hold a special power that after being mastered allows their societies to move around and take control over the societies below: in Swift, it is the lodestone, whereas Miyazaki presents aetherium, both connected with the idea of magnetism. Swift’s astronomical observatory dome is replaced by a camphor tree in Miyazaki, a tree that bears a positive connotation in Japanese culture.

All in all, the two works under comparison come forth as utopias: Swift includes eutopian and dystopian elements, particularly for his satirical intention (or “black sarcasm”), whereas Miyazaki designs an ecological utopia defined by a balance between the biosphere and the technosphere.

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Figure 1. Gulliver perceives Laputa: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laputa>

Figure 2. Laputa and the island of Balnibarbi: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laputa>

Figure 3. Miyazaki’s Laputa: <https://entropymag.org/30-years-of-ghibli-laputa-castle-in-the-sky/>

Figure 4. Pazu’s father’s photo of Laputa: <http://robsimdb250challenge.blogspot.pt/2013/01/248-castle-in-sky-1986.html>