LONDON 1638 · COMPLETE IN MODERN ENGLISH

The Man in the Moone

The First Voyage to the Moon

FRANCIS GODWIN · 1638

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The Man in the Moone

The First Voyage to the Moon (1638)

Francis Godwin’s tale of Domingo Gonsales, carried to the Moon by an Engine drawn by wild swans, who meets the Lunars and comes back to Earth in China. Complete in modern English

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Source: Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moone: or a Discourse of a Voyage thither by Domingo Gonsales, the Speedy Messenger* (London, 1638). Rendered into modern English from images of the pages of this edition; engravings from the same edition.

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PREFACE

A Spaniard carried to the Moon by swans. Imagine a Spanish gentleman of very small stature who flees to the East Indies after a duel, makes his fortune there with precious stones, and falls ill on the voyage home. He is put ashore on the remote island of St Helena in the South Atlantic, and there he notices some strange wild birds — gansas, a kind of wild swan. He trains them to carry loads, builds a light wooden Engine drawn by twenty-five of them, and becomes the first flying man. When his ship is caught in a sea fight off Tenerife on the way to Spain, the gansas carry him safely to the shore — and then, unexpectedly, upwards: over the famous peak of Tenerife, above the clouds and on, until twelve days later he lands on the Moon. There he meets kindly giants who speak in melodies, sees a land without crime or sickness, and receives wonder-stones, one of which can take away a body's weight. He does come home — but he lands not in Spain but in China. All this is told in the first person, proudly and a little boastfully, by Domingo Gonsales himself.

Who was Francis Godwin? The real author of the story, Francis Godwin (1562–1633), was an English clergyman and historian. He was born in Northamptonshire, the son of Thomas Godwin, later a bishop, and studied at Christ Church, Oxford. In 1601 he published a large history of the bishops of England, and in the same year he was made Bishop of Llandaff in Wales; from 1617 until his death he was Bishop of Hereford. Godwin was interested not only in church history but also in the new science and in fast, secret ways of sending messages: a Latin treatise, "Nuncius inanimatus" ("The Inanimate Messenger", 1629), is attributed to him. The same ideas — signals made with light, news that travels "in an instant" — appear in Gonsales's story.

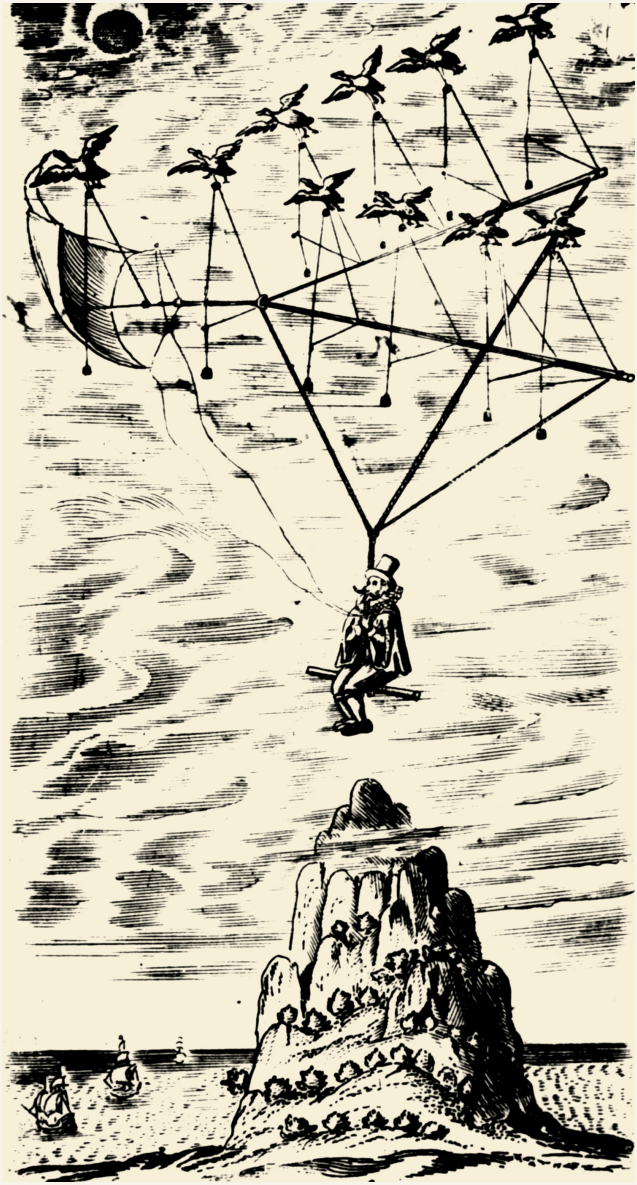
A book published after its author's death. "The Man in the Moone" was published in London in 1638, five years after Godwin died. The title page gives no author's name: the book is presented as the report of Domingo Gonsales himself, "the Speedy Messenger", and a short address to the reader is signed by a certain "E. M.", whose identity is not known for certain. Scholars still debate exactly when Godwin wrote the story. What matters more is that the book appeared at just the right moment. In 1610 Galileo had seen mountains on the Moon through his telescope, and suddenly the Moon was no longer just a light in the sky but a place — a world that one might reach. In the same year, 1638, the English scientist John Wilkins published a book arguing that the Moon might be inhabited, and four years earlier Johannes Kepler's "Dream" of a journey to the Moon had also been published after its author's death.

One of the first science fiction stories. Godwin's tale is often called one of the first works of science fiction in English. It is an adventure story, but behind it stands the newest science of its day. From above, Gonsales watches the Earth turn and openly says that he is forced to agree with Copernicus — only five years after Galileo had been condemned in Rome for the same view. He rejects Aristotle's doctrine of "natural places" and, following William Gilbert's book on the magnet (1600), imagines that the Earth draws bodies to itself as a magnet draws iron, but that this pull grows weaker high above it. So on the way to the Moon the Engine and the birds suddenly weigh nothing at all — one of the first descriptions of weightlessness in literature, half a century before Newton's law of gravitation. Godwin also knows that the lunar day and the lunar night each last about two weeks, and that for the people of the Moon the Earth shines in the sky with phases of its own. Much in the story is, of course, invention — seas on the Moon, air between the planets, birds that spend the winter on the Moon. It is exactly this mixture that makes the book so fascinating: it shows the universe at the very moment when the old picture of the world was falling apart and the new one was only beginning to take shape.

Its influence. The story became popular and was translated into French in 1648. The French writer Cyrano de Bergerac, in his own voyage to the Moon

("The Other World", published 1657), had his hero meet Domingo Gonsales himself on the Moon, and in 1641 John Wilkins, in a book on secret writing and languages, mentioned Gonsales's story and the musical language of the Lunars. Flight with the help of birds, weightlessness, the inhabitants of another world with their own language and society — these themes returned again and again in later science fiction.

This edition. This is a complete rendering, sentence by sentence, of the pages of the first edition of 1638; nothing has been left out or retold. The original has no chapters, so the section headings are ours, added to make the story easier to follow. The book reproduces all the engravings of the 1638 edition — the famous frontispiece of Gonsales drawn by his gansas, the view of St Helena, the woodcut of the Azores and the musical notes of the Lunar language — together with modern colour illustrations. The footnotes explain places, people and allusions that a 17th-century reader understood at once, and where we know otherwise today, they say briefly what we know now. Godwin's own inconsistencies (a few figures and dates) have been left in the text as they are in the original and are explained in the commentary. At the end of the book each section has a commentary: "In plain words" and "What science says".



Domingo Gonsales flying in his Engine drawn by the gansas (frontispiece of the 1638 edition)

TO THE INGENIOUS READER

Here you have an essay of fancy, in which invention is displayed together with judgment. It was not the author's intention (I presume) to talk you into believing every particular circumstance.

It is only fair that you allow him a liberty of imagination, just as you take to yourself a liberty of judgment. In substance, you have here a new discovery of a new world, which perhaps will find little better welcome in your opinion than that of Columbus did at first in the esteem of all men. Yet his discovery of America, poor scouting as it then was, brought to light so much that it has since grown into a vast colony, and that land, unknown at the time, has now proved to be as large as all the rest of the known world.

That there should be Antipodes[1] was once thought as great a paradox as it is now that the Moon should be habitable. But the knowledge of this may seem more properly reserved for this age of discovery of ours, in which our Galileos[2] can, with the help of their spyglasses, gaze the Sun into spots and make out mountains in the Moon.

But this, and more in the narrative that follows, I leave to your fair judgment and to the faithful account of the little eyewitness, our great discoverer.

E. M.

1. People on the opposite side of the globe, walking with their feet toward ours. Some early Christian writers, such as Lactantius, considered the idea absurd.
2. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) saw the mountains of the Moon and the spots on the Sun through his telescope around 1610. The writer playfully turns his name into a plural.

PART I

YOUTH AND WARS

Illustration in the manner of 17th-century painting and engraving

It is well enough and sufficiently known in all the regions of Andalusia that I, Domingo Gonsales, was born of noble parents, and that in the renowned city of Seville[3], namely in the year 1552. My father's name was Therrando Gonsales (he was a near kinsman, on his mother's side, of Don Pedro Sanchez, that worthy Count of Almenara), and as for my mother, she was the daughter of the reverend and famous lawyer Otho Perez de Sallaveda, Governor of Barcelona and Corregidor of Biscay. Being the youngest of the seventeen children they had, I was sent to school, and they intended me for the Church.

3. The capital of Andalusia and the richest city of sixteenth-century Spain, through which all trade with the Americas passed.