



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

PHILIP COX

BA (University of Toronto, 2010)

“The Politics & Poetics of Gulliver’s Travel Writing”

Department of English

Tuesday, August 27, 2019

1:00 P.M.

Clearihue Building

Room A205

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Jentery Sayers, Department of English, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Peyman Vahabzadeh, Department of Sociology, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:

Dr. James Tully, Department of Political Science, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Esther Sangster-Gormley, School of Nursing, UVic

Abstract

Working at the intersection of narrative studies and political theory, this thesis performs an original critical intervention in *Gulliver's Travels* studies to establish the work as an intertextual response to the hegemonic articulations of European travel writing produced between the 15th and 18th centuries under the discourse of Discovery. My argument proceeds through two movements. First, an archeology of studies on *Gulliver's Travels* that identifies key developments and points of significance in analyses of the satire's intertextual relationship with travel writing. Second, a discursive analysis of the role of Discovery generally, and travel writing specifically, in constructing European hegemony within a newly global context. Together these movements allow me to locate *Gulliver's Travels* firmly within the discourse of Discovery and to specify the politics of the text and the poetics of its operations. For this analysis I adopt a conceptualization of hegemony elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), which defines discourse as a structured totality of elements of signification, wherein the meaning and identify of each element is constituted by articulatory practices competing to fix the differences and equivalences between it and others within the discourse. An *hegemonic* discourse is one that successfully limits the possibility of novel articulations according to a particular governing logic. In the Age of Discovery, this governing logic, I argue, is a socio-spatial logic that constructed the "European" subject through its difference from the "Non-European," the "civilized" subject through its difference from the "savage," and the "free land" of the "savage" peoples through its difference from the occupied lands of the "civilized." To conduct the concomitant critical analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*, I draw upon Jacques Rancière's conception of the "distribution of the sensible," which refers both to the partitions determined in sensory experience that anticipate the distributions of parts and wholes, the orders of visibility and invisibility, and the relationships of address or comportment beneath every community; and to the specific practices that partake of these distributions to establish the "common sense" about the objects that make up the common world, the ways in which it is organized,

and the capacities of the people within it. This enables me to establish travel writing as an articulatory practice that utilized a narrative modality to “reveal” the globe in a Eurocentric image dependent upon the logic of Discovery: a discursively constructed paradigm that I identify as what others have labeled “travel realism,” which organized the globe into a single field of discursivity predicated upon the “civilizational” and “rational” superiority of Europeans over their non-European Others. *Gulliver’s Travels*, I conclude, intervenes in this distribution of the sensible by utilizing the satirical form as a recomposing logic to upend the paradigm of travel realism and break away from the “sense” that it makes of the bodies, beings, and lands it re-presents.