EMPIRICAL WONDER:

HISTORICIZING THE FANTASTIC, 1660-1760

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Empirical Wonder:

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"Empirical Wonder" focuses on the emergence of the fantastic in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British culture. To do so, it preliminarily formulates an inclusive theory of the fantastic centering on nineteenth- and twentieth-century genres. The origins of such genres, this study argues, reside in the epistemological shift that attended the rise of empiricism, and their formal and historical identity becomes fully visible against the backdrop of pre-modern culture. While in pre-modern world-views no clear-cut distinction between the natural and the super- or the non-natural existed, the new epistemology entailed the emergence of boundaries between the empirical and the non-empirical, which determined, on the level of literary production, the opposition between the realistic and the non-realistic. Along with these boundaries, however, emerged the need to overcome them. In the seventeenth century, the

religious supernatural and the existence of monsters were increasingly being questioned by modern science, and a variety of attempts were made to enact a mediation between what was perceived as unmistakably real and the problematic phenomena that were threatened by the empirical outlook: apparition narratives were used, for instance, to persuade skeptics of the presence of otherworldly beings, and travelogues often presented monsters as if they were empirical entities. Most of these attempts became soon incompatible with scientific culture, more and more normative, so the task of mediation was assumed by literature. Apparition narratives, originally conceived as factual texts, were progressively aestheticized; analogously, imaginary voyages grew different from fictionalized travelogues – the success of *Gulliver's Travels* resetting the genre's main conventions and establishing a distinctly fictional model. Both apparition narratives and imaginary voyages emerged as self-consciously literary, that is, aesthetic, genres, bridging the gap between the empirical and the non-empirical. The origins of the fantastic ended when its mediatory task gave way to other concerns. Although on a residual level the mediation between the empirical and the non-empirical persisted, the fantastic's main preoccupations changed: in imaginary voyages its distinctive devices were used to dramatize or validate colonial practices, and Gothic fiction disconnected itself from the moral framework typical of apparition narratives.

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Introduction

For a long time seen as the century in which the novel and literary realism were born, the eighteenth century also saw the proliferation of texts − such as apparition narratives and imaginary voyages − we now assimilate to non-realistic genres. Given their engagement with key epistemological issues, some of these works have been seen as documents of the momentous cultural shift that took place between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries: apparition narratives and the "empirical" demonology from which they derive have been read, for instance, as signs of both the problematic persistence of traditional belief and the spread of empirical epistemology. Imaginary voyages have, on the other hand, mostly caught the attention of critics interested in the early modern roots of science fiction, or have been totally obscured by *Gulliver's Travels* – seldom analyzed in the light of other eighteenth-century fictional travelogues. Not much attention has, in other words, been devoted to both apparition narratives' and imaginary voyages' formal and thematic novelty, whose appreciation could help gain a keener sense of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary developments.

These works are, in fact, no less innovative than the novel − and, as I shall show, no less interested in the some of the epistemological questions it addresses. The novel's preponderance seems easy to explain: it probably depended on its explicit commitment to the representation of reality and on its specific focus on the quotidian, which enabled the construction of convincing didactic subtexts. Conversely, the exceptional, distinctly non-empirical situations described by apparition narratives and imaginary voyages could not easily be used to present workable moral norms – and this prevented their valorization. Johnson's famous views on the novel seem to

foreground the reasons for its critical success and for the marginalization of non-realistic genres − which goes along with the marginalization of romance (a broad category, under which most controversial literary forms were placed):

> The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind . . . Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder: it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in desarts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles.[1]

Nonetheless, apparition narratives, imaginary voyages, and the novel have much in common: first of all, their form, that bespeaks the pervasive influence of empiricism. As has been noted, the emergence of the novel partly resulted from late-seventeenth-century generic instability: codes seemingly designed to convey empirical truth were more and more frequently used to narrate facts that were not necessarily true. Analogously, the unrestrained use of empirical codes subtends both apparition narratives and imaginary voyages. The supernatural that is integral to these genres emerges as such against a recognizably "natural" background, whose description is informed by the rhetoric of empiricism. In other words, apparition narratives and imaginary voyages, as well as the novel, deploy what we now call "realistic" modes of representation. The novel, however, tends to be empirical on the level of both form and content: it uses a circumstantial language to describe events that seem not to violate natural laws. Conversely, apparition narratives and imaginary voyages' empirical identity can be more easily ascertained on the level of form: in these texts, ghosts, monsters, and supernatural phenomena are described with a

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[1] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* (March 31, 1750) no. 4.

recognizably pseudo-scientific language. The combination of an empirical mode of presentation with a non-empirical content constitutes the common element of the works I intend to focus on, bespeaks their novelty, and enables us to group them under a single, broad category: the fantastic.

In this study, I argue that not only did the eighteenth century see the rise of the novel; it also saw the rise of genres that can be assimilated to what we now call the fantastic. The use of a category such as "the fantastic" is, of course, anything but unproblematic, and I devote some efforts to justifying it. My first chapter argues that a main feature of the fantastic is the deployment of an empirically-oriented – in other words, realistic − system of verisimilitude, which informs the representation of recognizably non-empirical objects. In fact, twentieth-century genres such as horror and science fiction deploy styles derived from the novel, and eighteenth-century genres such as imaginary voyages and apparition narratives utilize codes influenced by empirical protocols. Complicating Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, and Christine Brooke-Rose's theoretical models, I highlight how the fantastic shares realism's formal and epistemic presuppositions: it incorporates empirical attitudes and modes of presentation that are crucial in the novel too. This entails its difference from other non-empirically-oriented genres and works (such as fairy tales) which, as has been noted, tend to perpetuate a pre-modern representation of the supernatural. To define the basic features of the fantastic, and to support my claim that it emerges in the early modern age, I try to regard it in a broad historical perspective, defining it against traditional literary forms. While in old literary cultures the natural and the supernatural are not felt as incompatible or oppositional, belonging to a cosmology that contemplates both realistic events and direct manifestations of the divine or the demonic – consider the cosmology dramatized in Homer's poems − in the fantastic

the emergence of the supernatural disrupts the apparent regularity of nature. In other words, the fantastic reflects the ontological boundaries that have emerged with the rise of the new science. At the same time, however, the fantastic conflates what is increasingly separate, superseding the contrast between nature and super-nature: it enacts a mediation, bridging the gap between conflicting world-views and reconciling the empirical and the non-empirical − ghosts and monsters appear in a world that is presented as analogous to that of readers.

My second chapter concentrates on the context of the fantastic's emergence, notably on the contrast – increasingly evident in the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers − between the empirical world-view on the one hand and entities that were felt as incompatible with it on the other. Focusing on scientists such as Boyle and Newton, I examine the attempts made to reconcile the empirical outlook, increasingly normative, with traditional beliefs in the supernatural or the monstrous. These attempts were perceived as more and more incompatible with rigorous empirical protocols, and the task of mediation was assumed by fictional texts such as apparition narratives or imaginary voyages, free to escape the constraints of epistemological discourse. To further illuminate the cultural grounds of the fantastic, I also focus on non-scientific mediatory genres that intersected with both apparition narratives and imaginary voyages: notably the "tradition of wonder," which includes empirical descriptions of monsters. And, to support my claim that the fantastic and the novel address analogous problems and deploy similar instruments, I regard the religious subtext of novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. In various ways, these works stage a providential ontology, compatible with natural laws and easier to integrate in a realistic aesthetic. By resorting to the providential, the novel enacts its own low-key mediation between the natural and the supernatural.

Instead of representing divine causation as an otherworldly force, the novel and the other providential narratives produced in these period focus on an immanent, historical dimension which has, however, fully internalized the higher ends associated with the divine.

My third chapter focuses on late-seventeenth-century empirical demonology (notably the work of the Oxford cleric Joseph Glanvill), apparition narratives, and the Gothic. I firstly analyze the rhetorical structure and epistemological attitude of empirical demonology, epitomized by Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1689), both to do justice to its formal and thematic complexity and to retrace the origins of autonomous, market-oriented apparition narratives. I then try to describe the gradual transformation of apparition narratives into works of fiction. Though retaining the empirical outlook utilized by authors such as Glanvill, apparition narratives detached themselves from a scientific framework, and developed a complex narrative structure, a marked affective inflection, and a space for readers' identification.

Along with this, I retrace the emergence of ontological hesitation (as theorized by Todorov), the founding device of the fantastic, based on the oscillation between a natural and a supernatural explanation. Ontological hesitation was initially present on an implicit level: works such as Glanvill's were intended to persuade skeptics of the existence of otherworldly beings, and partly internalized their point of view, staging the transition from disbelief to belief. Ontological hesitation consists of an epistemological state that conjoins typically empirical attitudes: a seemingly skeptical approach is challenged by the direct experience of the supernatural, whose manifestation is fully confirmed through direct verification. In later apparition narratives, such as *The Friendly Daemon* (1715), ontological hesitation was explicitly dramatized, being the best instrument to confer the manifestation of the supernatural

with an aura of exceptionality: the eruption of the supernatural is striking insofar as it runs counter to a witness's expectations. In this chapter, I focus on various eighteenth-century accounts of supernatural events − such as the pamphlets devoted to Duncan Campbell, a dumb seer who was very popular in early-eighteenth-century England. I conclude by retracing the Gothic's formation ,which completes apparition narratives' transformation into aesthetic objects and marks a shift in their ideological focus, no longer exclusively informed by the Christian ethos.

My fourth chapter is devoted to imaginary voyages. Like the novel and apparition narratives, they were strongly influenced by empirical codes, notably the language of travel writing. However, while supernatural fiction invariably tends to stage apparitions, imaginary voyages imply different ontologies: a "realistic" ontological layer is complicated by the presence of other layers that are, from the empirical viewpoint, incompatible with it, engendering a fantastic representation that varies from text to text – a representation ranging from the pantheistic universe of Cavendish's *The Blazing World* to the remote societies described in *Gulliver's Travels*. Each imaginary voyage portrays a unique world − although imitations of Swift's work proliferated, accelerating the genre's conventionalization − but almost invariably constructs an image of nature that resists disenchantment. From the 1750s imaginary voyages' main focus shifts: a new generation of works, such as *Peter Wilkins* (1750) *and William Bingfield* (1752), articulates a proto-imperialist subtext. Disembedding from the epistemological context that shaped them, the distinctive devices of the fantastic are now subordinated to new ideological purposes, mediation no longer constituting their main task. From the 1750s, imaginary voyages are re-functioned: though still implicitly engaging with the problem of mediation, their formal devices are inscribed with new meanings. The transformation of the fantastic,

no longer exclusively shaped by the epistemological crisis that determined its origins,

evinces its full coalescence as a form, as a set of flexible conventions that can be put

to a variety of uses.

Chapter one

Historicizing the Fantastic

In this chapter, I shall argue that a full theoretical understanding of the fantastic is inseparable from an appreciation of its historical existence. To do so, I shall firstly retrace the development of the fantastic in the last three centuries, focusing on its origins. Establishing a parallel to the history and prehistory of realism, I shall argue that the fantastic is intrinsically modern − in fact, the fantastic as a category is absent, as a genre marker, from the great normative poetics of the past, starting from Aristotle's. In this light, its innovation and workings become fully visible: I shall suggest that the fantastic and the novel derive from, and respond to, the same epistemological background. Like the novel, the fantastic is based on the interaction between an empirically-oriented system of verisimilitude and discursive formations – such as representations of the supernatural and the monstrous − that predate empiricism, and takes shape as a response to the questions that attended the rise of modern science. Central among these questions was the contrast between empirical epistemology and preexistent, less restrictive, ontological conceptions.

After reflecting on the history of the fantastic, I shall review well-established theoretical models (such as Todorov's) in order to provide a unified, broad-ranging theory that is compatible with that history. In doing so, I shall try to identify a common ground between the genres that, at various moments, have been associated with the fantastic: science fiction and the Gothic on the one hand, and their eighteenth-century progenitors (imaginary voyages and apparition narratives) on the other. All these genres are, I shall argue, informed by empirically-oriented modes of presentation, and incorporate ontologies that a rigorous empirical perspective would

reject or question. As I shall try to show, the fantastic's ontological variability manifests itself in two ways: in the hesitation between natural and supernatural modes of explanation (first theorized by Todorov), and in the coexistence of an ontological level analogous to what is felt as "real" and ontological levels that are distinctly non-empirical. To throw into relief the historical and formal specificity of the fantastic − and to sketch its prehistory − I shall support my thesis with a brief review of the workings of the supernatural in representative pre-modern and early modern genres: romance, epic, and Elizabethan drama.

i. Scope and History of the Fantastic

Borges said that all literature is fantastic, and for twenty-first century readers it is easy to agree with him. The world-wide success of magical realism has marked the re-emergence of the monstrous and the supernatural within the novelistic, celebrating, updating, and further developing what the novel had problematically tried to conceal under its circumstantial language. At the same time, various twentieth-century literary theories have investigated the multi-faceted, often self-contradictory, nature of novelistic genres, suggesting that the rise of the novel is just a short chapter in the age-old, ongoing history of romance. Frye and Jameson have identified the archetypal structures of novelistic narratives, highlighting the common ground between novel and romance, and the novel's perpetuation of older values and codes has been more or less explicitly detected by theorists such as Lukács or Gasset.[1]

The distinction between novel and romance was, of course, based on the obliteration of the former's uneasy deployment of providential plot and supernatural

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[1] See Northrop Frye, *An Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), chap. 2; José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

overtones. After the novel emerged and became the dominant – at least in canonic terms – literary genre of "high" Western culture, the category and styles of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realism gained a normative value; this despite the fact that novels themselves often call into question the possibility of a reliable realistic representation. In spite of realism's complicity with romance, its engagement with social, economic, and psychological issues and its attention to the quotidian – poignantly defined as the main source of its value by novelists themselves (for instance Sir Walter Scott and George Eliot) –[2] were enough to vindicate its autonomy from other narrative modes. For a long time, these modes have been identified with "romance," a category that covers an immense variety of texts, and whose meaning and application has incessantly shifted over the last three centuries.

Some of the texts that have been, and still are, associated with the category of romance belong to what we now tend to call "the fantastic." As well as romance, the fantastic has been defined differentially in relation to the novel, all the more since it dialectically incorporates some of its recognizably empirical, distinctly modern, modes of presentation. Genres that have been grouped under the heading of the "fantastic" in the twentieth century (fantasy, horror, science fiction) are, in fact, informed by a style that is kin to that of the novel. They tend to deploy – and display – a rich descriptive language (which, as in Radcliffe and Scott, is crucial to the construction of a defamiliarized setting), their characters are developed according to criteria of psychological verisimilitude, and their representation of temporality is precise, consistent, and often intended to display an analogical resemblance to factual history (see, for instance, both *The Lord of the Rings* and Asimov's *Foundation*

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[2] See Sir Walter Scott's review of *Emma* − *Quarterly Review*, no. 14 (October 1815), 188-201 − in which Scott reflects on Jane Austen's innovative ability to represent the quotidian, contrasting it to the superabundance of romance incidents that characterize eighteenth-century novels, and George Eliot's self-reflexive digressions in *Adam Bede*, chap. 17, which poke fun at novelists that "pant after the ideal," overlooking "their everyday fellow-men."

Cycle). In other words, they are all characterized by an interaction of realistic and non-realistic stylizations. Like the novel, they assume a solid notion of reality, which they proceed to subvert or complicate, and the easiest way to do so is to replicate the style of the novel or to build up a world inhabited by sorcerers and aliens, but whose concreteness parallels that of *Middlemarch*. The link with the novel is self-evident when one reads works such as *Harry Potter, Starship Troopers,* and *Solaris* (written long after the novel took shape), and it will be all the more evident while reconstructing the prehistory of the fantastic.

In British literary culture, the opposition between novel and romance, and between the realistic and the non-realistic, emerged when the canon and the idea of the novel were coalescing, around 1750. "Romance" was, however, already used to define unreliable narratives; at first, it broadly indicated all kinds of representation vitiated by a misuse of imagination, soon assuming a scope that, from a literary standpoint, was both synchronic and diachronic. "Romance" defined, for instance, both pre-modern chivalric literature and contemporary adventure fiction set in exotic lands. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works we now regard as "fantastic," and which will constitute the object of this study, tended to be assimilated to the sphere of "romance" – this was the case with *The Castle of Otranto* (which styled itself "romance") and even of *Gulliver's Travels* – although, in the absence of a vocabulary that was suitable to describe ongoing innovations, a variety of terms were used to define them.[3]

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[3] See Ioan Williams, *Novel and Romance. A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) and Geoffrey Day, *From Fiction to the Novel* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

The category of the fantastic emerged, needless to say, much later, between the 30s and the 40s of the twentieth century[4] − while in the eighteenth century "fantastic" mostly had a derogatory meaning, and was not utilized as a critical term. "Fantastic" has now become commonly used, and, outside of the critical idiom, it is still used, to define interrelated genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and horror. While for the critics who follow the terminological usage established by Todorov's seminal work,[5] "the fantastic" indicates fiction of the supernatural produced between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries – with a particular focus on Romantic authors – the term is more frequently used to cover a variety of non-realistic texts. According to a common reference work, the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the fantastic "encompasses fantasy, supernatural fiction, and supernatural horror".[6] But to have a sense of the usage of the term one just has to check on the World Wide Web: bookshops catalogues, fan websites, and various strains of academic discourse all use "fantastic" in its broader sense, which covers science fiction, fantasy, and the Gothic's various incarnations.

Although the category of the fantastic emerged in the twentieth century, works such as *The Castle of Otranto* and *Gulliver's Travels* – as well as many others that will constitute the object of this study − can be regarded as the ancestors of the broad complex of texts that category covers. And, by the same token, in the eighteenth century the novel/romance opposition, used by both critics and novelists, often took on a meaning that is analogous to the fantastic/realistic opposition. As I shall show, the link between the fantastic and the novel not only resides in their dialectical relationship, but also in their extra-literary, namely, epistemological, origins. On one

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[4] Gary Westfahl, "Fantastic," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. J. Clute and J. Grant (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 335.

[5] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University 1973).

[6] John Clute, "Science Fiction," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 844.

level, the fantastic is based on the interaction between empirical (from 1750, novelistic) and non-empirical styles, using empirically-oriented – realistic − criteria of verisimilitude to make the presentation of what is evidently unreal more consistent and compelling for readers that are familiar with the new science. On another level, the texts that I shall take as stages in the development of the fantastic engage with issues determined by the rise of the new science. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, empiricism implicitly threatened religious culture; scientists, epistemologists, and theologians made various attempts to enact a mediation between world-views that were felt as increasingly incompatible – the novel's providential plot being one of these attempts. The relation between the novel and the fantastic resides, therefore, not only in their dialogue – which mostly occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – but also in their intertwined roots.

The penetration of empiricism into various realms of knowledge that took place between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries subtends the development of the fantastic as well as that of the novel. Imaginary voyages such as *Gulliver's Travels* derive from factual travelogues, incorporating an empirical mode of presentation that is used to give flesh and blood to Medieval monsters, to describe supernatural phenomena, and, more broadly, bridge the gap between empiricism and the aberrant entities it should theoretically negate. The re-enchantment of nature that, as we shall see, characterizes imaginary voyages, takes shape as a response to empirical skepticism, which tended to question explanatory modes closely connected to traditional religious culture (in Medieval and early modern culture the non-natural was often taken as a sign of the divine). The other main strain of eighteenth-century fantastic, constituted by the literature of the supernatural, in particular by apparition narratives such as Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, explicitly responds to the

crisis of traditional belief, perpetuating a kind of mediation that was problematically attempted by late-seventeenth-century science. In the apparition narratives produced in this period, supernatural phenomena, in particular the appearance of ghosts, are taken as evidence of the existence of God. The empirical logic that privileges first-hand experience is used to assert and validate the presence of the supernatural, and, indirectly, of the divine.

The opposition between the empirical and the non-empirical, and, on a literary level, between the realistic and the unrealistic, coalesced between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and the fantastic emerged as an instrument to dissever what was increasingly felt to be separate. In the light of this, both the formal identity and the historical existence of the genres associated to the fantastic become evident, and it is easier to distinguish what the fantastic *is not*. Eighteenth-century fairy tales, for instance, do not participate in the fantastic's innovation, often perpetuating old and highly conventionalized narrative structures, onto which new meanings were inscribed. Both formally and semantically, fairy tales do not replicate the tension between the empirical and the non-empirical that is crucial to the fantastic: they only marginally deploy the rhetoric of realism and do not problematize the presence of magic. Of course, new fairy tales were written, and they were rooted in specific socio-cultural contexts that are distinctly modern − in the case of Madame D'Aulnoy, the decline of aristocracy, in the case of Grimm and Andersen, the definition of bourgeois virtues[7] − but despite being semantically innovative, they are formally traditional, at the level of plot, motifs, settings, and stereotypes. Modeled on a pre-existent body of oral narratives, they do not constitute a full-fledged literary innovation. By the same token, poetry characterized by an aestheticized supernatural

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[7] See Jack Zipes, *Fairy-Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1988).

(often inseparable from an antiquarian interest) produced in the eighteenth century is informed by a self-conscious return to a pre-rational past that takes place at the level of both form − marked by antiquarianism − and content − marked by the overt presence of the supernatural.

In other words, the novelty of fairy tales and of the poetry of the supernatural is paradoxically constituted by their conservative quality. The way they present the supernatural tends to follow age-old models, basically conforming to the traditional workings of the marvelous, which, as theorists have noticed, persist in the modern age.[8] In the world of fairy tales, as in the world of medieval romances, magic does not necessarily go along with wonder, because the supernatural is so frequent as to be natural. Besides, the allegorical quality of fairy tales (which tend to work as cautionary tales) shifts our attention from the ontological status of the phenomena they describe to the moral meanings they convey. By the same token, early-eighteenth-century poetry of the supernatural takes on the atmosphere of Elizabethan drama or of old ballads.[9] True, the introduction of pre-extant motifs into a new literary system often constitutes an innovation − there is no need, for instance, to point out that the revolutionary impact of the novel has also been determined by a strategic recuperation of the literary past. But in the history of the mainstream literary genres associated with the fantastic, antiquarian poetry and fairy tales have not been taken as main sites of innovation (although their influence on Gothic and fantasy fiction is undeniable). After all, the fantastic's main characteristic has been a self-conscious escape from reality, an escape that assumes the disruption, or the complication, of a realistic world.

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[8] See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, and Francesco Orlando, "Forms of the Supernatural in Narrative", in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) ,vol. 2, 207-243.

[9] See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Insistence of Horror. Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Identifying the origins of the fantastic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries partly runs counter to established critical views. Historians of fantasy date its birth from the late nineteenth century, while historians of science fiction, despite acknowledging the existence of precedents (first and foremost *Gulliver's Travels*) briefly focus on the eighteenth century and concentrate their efforts on the literary products of the age of positivism: Verne and Wells' romances. [10] Less problematically, the birth of the Gothic and of horror fiction are identified in the resurgence and "novelization" of romance in the age of the Enlightenment. In this study, I shall argue that the devices typical of the fantastic were developed before they were pervasively used and institutionalized. Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, one registers an increasing production of works characterized by an innovative interaction of empirically-oriented stylizations (that is, stylizations influenced by the culture of empiricism) and non-realistic stylizations (monsters, supernatural entities or imaginary technological inventions); a pattern that is partly analogous to the novel's conflation of claims to historicity and providential teleology. The precursors of the fantastic used a realistic language to lend to the unreal an air of credibility, and, in a similar fashion, the novel used its circumstantial representation of reality to stage the workings of providence – implicitly problematized by the new science − privileging a fully immanent representation of the divine agency.

The stylistic and ontological contamination typical of the fantastic was enabled by the rise of codes influenced by the new science – the same codes that subtended the development of realism. Used in a way that was not restricted to what we would now define as serious scientific writing, these codes were combined with pre-existent discursive formations (Menippean satire, the discourse of superstition, literature on

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[10] See for instance Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), and Paul Alkon, *Science Fiction Before 1900. Imagination Discovers Technology* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

monsters), and connected to different ontological and cosmological models (such as the traditional Christian cosmology, or the early-empirical conception of nature as a hyper-productive creator). In many early modern texts, a pseudo-empirical perspective was used to describe ghosts – to frame, paradoxically enough, synecdoches of world-views not reducible to empiricism. Framing a "prodigy" in an empirical perspective entails evoking or reviving the world-picture to which that prodigy is integral, bringing to the fore, and hypothesizing the existence of, the entire cosmology to which an entity belongs.

The formation of the fantastic, characterized by the conflation of the new (the modern) and the old (the pre-modern), is partly analogous to the rise of the novel as described by theorists: Frye reads the rise of realism as the displacement of an archetypal mythical essence, and Bakhtin highlights the novel's preservation of ossified codes, that interact with the variety of styles drawn from contemporary history. More recently, Fredric Jameson has reinterpreted Frye's model, identifying the coexistence of romance teleological structures and realistic settings that characterizes the novel as intrinsic to its mediatory vocation. With a closer attention to the formation of the novel in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, Michael McKeon has assessed the coexistence of romance plots and empirical attitudes in the founding works of the tradition of realism.

After the eighteenth century, the principle of formal and semantic organization that characterizes the early works of the fantastic was further specified in the Victorian Gothic and in early science fiction, informing texts whose success in turn catalyzed the development of new genres, which met the needs of new ideological and cultural contexts. The ancestors of these genres were either forgotten, or retroactively assimilated into new families. *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, is always

incorporated into genealogies of science fiction, but, since its reflection on technology is intermittent, it cannot be regarded as a proper science fiction work. Besides being a satire, it is, less problematically, an eighteenth-century imaginary voyage, which presents themes and devices that in later science fiction will become pervasive − like, to a different extent, various other early modern works that have been seen as ancestors of science fiction, such as Thomas More's *Utopia*.

The history of the fantastic in the nineteenth century is well-known: the Victorian age saw a massive proliferation of markedly non-realistic genres, influenced by the novel: although Bakthin's idea of "novelization" can be criticized for its teleological bias, the novel's influence on romance (which in the nineteenth century included what we now call the fantastic) rivals romance's influence on the novel. After the first incarnation of the Gothic dissolved, its constitutive elements escaped the ancient castles in which they had been relegated, migrating to other genres and settings. During the 1840s and 1850s writers such as Dickens, Collins, Bulwer-Lytton, and Poe tried their hand at the fiction of the supernatural (which entertained a fruitful dialogue with realism, epitomized by works such as *Wuthering Heights* and *Bleak House*).[11] At the end of the century, the Gothic was revived in what has been called "The Neo-Gothic of Decadence," set in the bourgeois world and ranging from *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* to *The Turn of the Screw*.[12]

And, in the late century, what we now call "fantasy" and "science fiction" started taking shape. George MacDonald and William Morris are generally taken as

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[11] On lifecycle of the Gothic and its derivations, see David H. Richter, *The Progress of Romance. Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 125-154, which also focuses on the Gothic's influence on the novel. See also Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
[12] See David Richter, *The Progress of Romance*, 139-144.

Tolkien's precursors:[13] in 1890, MacDonald, who defined both fairy tales and his own works as products of a "fantastic imagination" –[14] a notion derived from Romanticism – wrote fiction dense with religious and allegorical meanings, which dramatizes a liminal movement between this world and a supernatural dimension (see his *At the Back of the North Wind*), or set in vaguely medieval other-worlds (see *The Princess and the Goblin*). At the same time, science fiction's physiognomy and concerns gained relevance, although there is consensus in identifying in origins in *Frankenstein*.[15] In 1895, following Verne's model, Wells wrote *The Time Machine*, "a scientific romance", which, like most epistemologically-committed science fiction, brings to the extreme the spirit of rational inquiry that often informs Victorian novelistic writing. (The socio-anthropological imagination of realism, which posits a set of conditions and explores their implications, finds a correlative in science fiction's sociological and scientific imagination, which consists in positing a state of affairs marked by the presence of an innovation, and exploring, both logically and imaginatively, its implications and consequences.) From this new literary stock many branches rapidly sprouted, new texts onto which pre-existent plot and axiological structures were engrafted. Young readers of the 1930s lost themselves in space-operas that are not so different from the adventures of Sindbad the Sailor, while the 50s and 60s have seen the production of science fiction works which update the philosophical vocation of enlightenment imaginary voyages (see the works of Lem, Clarke, and Dick). This intricate interbreeding is well exemplified by the *Star Wars*

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[13] See Richard Mathews, *Fantasy. The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 16-25.

[14] George MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination," originally published as a preface to *The Light Princess and Other Fairy-Tales* (New York: Putnam, 1893), now reprinted in David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 64-69.

[15] For a survey of various versions of the origins of science fiction see George Slusser, *The Origins of Science Fiction*, in *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed (London: Blackwell, 2005), 27-42. See also Paul Alkon, *Science Fiction Before 1900*.

trilogy, in which, again, science fiction is just a thin layer under which the old structures of romance continue to shimmer. Frye's model is useful to describe movies as well.

And there is no need to point out that the progressive differentiation of the fantastic culminated in the twentieth century. The development of new medias and venues for the consumption of fiction, and the increasing fascination with technology, as well as the need for re-enchantment that goes along with it, brought about an increasing production and consumption of non-realistic genres, and a further popularization of the imaginary of the fantastic. Not surprisingly, the twentieth century has also seen a solidification of the critical notions associated to these genres. From the density of examples a set of categories that describe the fantastic emerged.

ii. The Literature of Ontological Variability

As I have suggested, "the fantastic" can be seen as a group of genres characterized by common formal principles that emerged in early modernity. This claim needs further elaboration, because in the last thirty years or so, after the rise and fall of structuralism, theorists have tended to concentrate on single genres rather than on the fantastic as a pervasive set of formal devices. And, as I already pointed out, since Todorov published his successful work the term "fantastic" itself – following the usage of nineteenth-century writers such as Maupassant – has been almost exclusively attached to a single family of literary genres: late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction of the supernatural.

In fact, science fiction has been treated mostly individually, and in significant cases, notably in Darko Suvin's seminal work,[16] understanding its form goes along

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[16] See Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction.*

with the attempt to historicize it (which is, in Suvin's case, inseparable from the attempt to canonize it). The other main genre of the fantastic, fantasy, has received no less theoretical and historical attention, especially in the massive production of criticism dedicated to Tolkien's fiction. In the synthesis that follows, I shall focus on significant theories produced between the 70s and the 80s, because, besides setting up the notions used in subsequent debates, they present a specific attention to literary form which has eventually faded from critical view – and which in the rest of this study I shall try to complement with an adequate historical contextualization. In doing so, I shall try to highlight the common features of such theories. I shall sketch an all-encompassing definition of the fantastic that may help me to bridge the gap between the various genres that its category covers, and to underline the continuity between the eighteenth-century works that constitute the objects of this study and the works produced in the centuries that followed.

Before reviewing theories that concentrate on the fantastic as a whole, it is useful to focus briefly on Todorov's model, for two reasons. First, it is the touchstone against which most theories and histories of the fantastic have tended to measure their own value. Second, despite the amount of criticism it has elicited, the heuristics it offers can be fruitfully used, I believe, also to understand genres for which it was not originally intended. For Todorov, the central characteristic of the fantastic is what he calls an "ontological hesitation;" which is to say, the cause of a phenomena are impossible to determine: one swings between natural and supernatural explanations that are felt to be contradictory; more often than not, the hesitation is based on the presence of an enquiring mind that seeks causal explanation. According to Todorov, who states that it is a genre but treats it as a rhetorical device, the fantastic occupies the space of such hesitation: it can, therefore, be regarded as an effect rather than a

form. The hesitation can be resolved by means of a rational explanation (as in Radcliffe's novels or in *The Hound of the Baskerville*) – and, as a result, the fantastic bleeds into "the uncanny"; it can, alternatively, be resolved by means of a supernatural explanation – and the fantastic bleeds into "the marvelous" (as in *The Castle of Otranto*); or it can be maintained until the end, like in *The Turn of the Screw* or in short-stories by Poe (Todorov, it has often been noticed, provides remarkably few examples of the "pure" fantastic). In fact, Todorov's constitutes a broader theory of genres, also providing a taxonomy of the various kinds of "marvelous," to which he relegates science fiction.

There is no need to emphasize the problems of Todorov's theory. It mobilizes the notion of genre in a preliminary critique of Frye but does not understand the fantastic according to the logic of genres. Genres are closely interrelated, and their workings are inferential: reading a story entails imagining its possible developments on the grounds of previous stories that present a resemblance to it.[17] Neglecting the fact that the fantastic as an effect is based on the construction of a seemingly empirical world, Todorov does not take into consideration readerly expectations and the forms which are correlated to those expectations, he fails to highlight that the literature of the supernatural often presents itself as a deliberate disruption of realistic narratives. Most of his critics, such as Rosemary Jackson,[18] have enriched Todorov's ideas with a focus on genre, pointing out that the fantastic's disruption of our notion of reality is in fact a disruption of literary realism. And there is no need to point out that the broad categorization Todorov proposes (uncanny/fantastic-uncanny/pure fantastic/fantastic marvelous/pure marvelous) does not do justice to the ontological structure of other

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[17] On the inferential workings of genre see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), and Umberto Eco, *The Reader in the Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[18] See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981).

genres. Probably, in regarding science fiction as purely marvelous, he has in mind Flash Gordon's comic books rather than Arthur J. Clarke's fiction. This is not, of course, to minimize the merits of Todorov's work, which runs counter to the a-historical bias of structuralism. He tries to frame the fantastic in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural context, reading it as a reaction to nineteenth-century positivism and as a series of attempts to articulate meanings that will find full expression in psychoanalysis.

More inclusive theoretical works have been produced, for instance by Eric Rabkin and Christine Brooke-Rose, full of intuitions and heuristics that have not been so influential (or so provocative) as Todorov's. These theories still have some validity: they provide suggestions to identify the common ground of science fiction and fiction of the supernatural, and broaden the scope of Todorov's model. [19]

Laying emphasis on readers' responses – he defines the fantastic as "a feeling of astonishment" – Rabkin identifies the structural principle of the fantastic as what he calls a "diametric reversal" (that is, a sudden change) of the properties of a fictional world, and, by extension, of the notions of reality that those properties replicate.[20] On the grounds of these principles he organizes a spectrum of genres, which is, among other things, intended to bridge the gap between the fantastic and realism. At one end,

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[19] See Eric Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis. Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) – whose scope is mostly thematic − and Lucy Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996) – which privileges a psychoanalytic approach.

[20] "The fantastic is a quality of astonishment that we feel when the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn about 180˚. We recognize this reversal in the reactions of characters, the statements of narrators, and the implications of structure, all playing on and against our whole experience as people and readers. The fantastic is a potent tool in the hands of an author who wishes to satirize man's world or clarify the inner workings of man's soul. In more or less degree, a whole range of narratives uses the fantastic. And at the far end of this range, we find Fantasy, the genre whose center and concern, whose primary enterprise, is to present and consider the fantastic. But in varying measure, every narrative that uses the fantastic is marked by Fantasy, and offers us a fantastic world", Eric Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 41.

Rabkin places fantasy, which, besides disrupting readers' sense of the empirical world and its workings − in this case Rabkin seems to suggest that the world-view that undergoes the reversal is not explicitly presented in the text − enacts a long sequence of reversals: in fact at every turn of page the ontology of fantasy tends to present new elements that undermine a previous conception of the world. At the other end Rabkin places realism, characterized by a reality-bound system of verisimilitude that occasionally stages a reversal (an example is the use of the Gothic in *Wuthering Heights*). In the middle there are all the other actualizations of the fantastic, measured according to the degree to which they enact a reversal of their initial ontology.

Rabkin's notion of "reversal," although extremely suggestive, does not formalize the workings of the fantastic precisely enough, and it is not helpful in retracing its cultural and historical roots. The "diametric reversal" model does not explain how a text's world-view interacts with a reader's world-view: it does not explain, in other words, whether the reversal involves purely textual factors or counteracts a reader's ontological assumptions. Nor does it explain the role of characters in the perception/dramatization of ontological change. Furthermore, the idea of reversal implies a disruption, while in examples of what Rabkin regards as "pure fantastic," such as fantasy, the appearance of new phenomena and laws does not necessarily entail a complete invalidation of the old ones. Instead of a disruption, the literature of the fantastic seems to enact a progressive complication of a text's ontology, expanding the scope and possibilities of its fictional world, and ultimately building a self-contained universe characterized by various subsets of laws.

Reacting against Todorov, Christine Brooke-Rose resorts to a more rigorous approach, which, however, fails to valorize its own strengths. Brooke-Rose does not aim so much at a general, systematic theory of the fantastic as at focusing on, and

overcoming, particular nuances and implications of Todorov's work. She points out

the works, produced in the Middle Ages and in the twentieth century, which do not fit

into Todorov's model (for instance the *Divine Comedy*) and, taking Darko Suvin's

theory of science fiction as a touchstone, exposes Todorov's arbitrary inclusion of

science fiction under the category of "the marvelous" as reductive. Brooke-Rose also

highlights how science fiction uses the same mode of presentation of realism – one of

the reasons why Suvin values it. By the same token, in a final chapter devoted to *The

Lord of the Rings*, she highlights how Tolkien's work deploys the same mode of

presentation as science fiction and the novel. In general, Brooke-Rose's work tends to

critical revision rather than to theoretical synthesis, and despite pointing to the

presence of realism in the genres analyzed, it does not take the presence of an

empirically-oriented system of verisimilitude as a possible criterion for a general

theory of the fantastic.

    After this survey, we have at our disposal the three main notions mobilized in

attempts to theorize the fantastic: realism (implied by Todorov and explicitly used by

Jackson and Brooke-Rose), ontological hesitation (used by Todorov just for the

fiction of the supernatural), and diametric reversal (used by Rabkin for all the genres

of the fantastic). The idea of realism presents, as we have seen, significant historical

implications, highlighting that the genres of the fantastic participate in the modernity

of the novel, as well as formal ones, highlighting the way in which the fictional world

in all of the genres of the fantastic is constructed. However, we should further specify

what "realism" means in this context: following Brooke-Rose, we can see it as a way

to organize and present information in narrative, but we can also see it as a way to

define the ontology implied by narratives, the set of possibilities informing them.

This second definition applies to, but does not fully describe, the genres of the

fantastic, whose fictional worlds, although partly representing empirical reality, are designed to be intrinsically different from the factual world. These genres are not, *stricto senso*, realistic, their ontologies having a higher degree of internal differentiation. Some of the phenomena they describe exist, while some others do not.

On these grounds, one can argue that the fictional worlds of the fantastic imply a variable ontology, and that the various layers of such an ontology are to some extent felt as incompatible, they are felt as irreconcilable in the light of dominant representations of the real world. The presence of such variability is suggested by Todorov's idea of ontological hesitation as well as by the notion of "reversal" proposed by Rabkin. True, it has been suggested that all works of literature tend to present variable ontologies. Theorists such as Thomas Pavel have pointed out that fictional worlds can be described by means of logical propositions implied by the narrative, and that they can be split into smaller domains, characterized by their own sets of logical propositions. Let us think of the various sections, and places, of the *Odyssey*, which contain different beings – lotus-eaters, Cyclopes, witches − absent from other parts of the narrative, and, of course, from the real world.[21] These domains often coincide with different literary genres – or with different, commonly shared, ways of understanding reality. A work that contains various internal domains is, for instance, *Don Quixote*: "the realistic world, evoked at the beginning . . . by mentioning a familiar Spanish province (La Mancha), a recent past ("there lived a little while ago"), and a contemporary social group ("a gentleman of those…"), suffers a progressive modification towards comic ideality (where the laws of nature are milder and the hero can recover fast from beatings and falls)." [22] The different

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[21] On the theory of possible worlds and their ontology see Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[22] Félix Martínez-Bonati, "Towards a Formal Ontology of Fictional Worlds," *Philosophy and Literature*, 7 no. 2 (1983), 192.

kinds of temporality that characterize the world of Don Quixote are, in fact, different ways of representing and regulating the constitutive processes of reality – they constitute different ontologies.

Thus, the notion of ontological variability may not be able to establish an adequate differential between the realistic and the fantastic. According to Thomas Pavel, all fictional worlds have some degree of internal variability because of what he calls their "salient" structure.[23] That is, they invariably contain an ontological structure that is common to dominant paradigms of reality (even in the most improbable fantasy worlds there are anthropomorphic figures and, despite occasional moments of disruption, the law of gravity seems to be in force) which is partly coextensive with another ontological level. In the second half of the seventeenth century, there were certainly islands off the mouth of the Orinoco, but there was not a man called Robinson Crusoe (a counterfactual entity), and in none of them survival in complete solitude could have been possible for thirty years without tremendous physical and psychological hardships. Thus, in *Robinson Crusoe* a pseudo-factual ontological level is partly coextensive with a non-factual ontological level, which is informed by the mutability of romance and, as has been often noted, by a religious, providential cosmology.

In the fantastic, however, the ontological variability is complicated by a particular factor, which constitutes its other main formal principle: it tends to be highlighted. That is, ontological change and complication is perceived as such by characters themselves – as well as, needless to say, by readers – by means of internal perspectives that are epistemically oriented. Similar perspectives tend to characterize narrators even if they are not eye-witnesses. Through multiple devices of focalization,

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[23] See Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*.

the fantastic highlights and strengthens the tension between the ontologies that are built into a plot. In all kinds of literature of the fantastic, both narrating and reading are forms of exploration, all the more since that literature is fundamentally escapist, valorizing its counter-factual quality. Reading a text such as *Gulliver's Travels* in fact goes along with apprehending, or questioning, the laws that govern a fictional world – which implies that these laws appear as variable.

The ontological variability that characterizes the literature of the fantastic is enabled by a mode of presentation influenced by empiricism and shared by the novel. Novels, as well as the fantastic, are characterized by the circulation of paradigmatic knowledge, that takes place at the level of both narrator and characters' voices. By "paradigmatic" I mean "based on a pattern of abstraction that appears to be grounded in historical and empirical particularity." The voice of novelistic narrators consists, for instance, in a series of statements that focus on society and nature. These statements have a conceptual structure recognizably analogous to that subtending empirical knowledge. While, and after, exploring the island, Robinson Crusoe formalizes techniques for survival (related to agricultural and mechanical technology); in Fielding's *Tom Jones* one finds a variety of moral taxonomies and statements exemplified – but seemingly derived from – the narrative. In the nineteenth century, realism tries to assimilate itself to science: the narratorial statements scattered throughout Balzac's works look like constituents of an anthropological and sociological system, but they are more often than not completely arbitrary: they serve to motivate the story, to justify its existence on pseudo-empirical grounds. This paradigmatic knowledge about the world also informs the fantastic, highlighting the novelty of the phenomena that characters astonishingly encounter. At the same time, however, this novelty can be perceived by readers even in the absence

of a specific internal focalization: the juxtaposition of what is stylized as "real" with what can be recognized as unreal implicitly raises question on the nature of the world.

The perception of ontological variability is heightened by ontological hesitation as theorized by Todorov, whose presence is evident in the fiction of the supernatural, in which we are generally led to make inferences about the causes of a phenomenon and the cosmologies that enable it. This device can also be found in science fiction and fantasy, in which characters encounter entities whose nature is uncertain, which produce inferences that could radically alter their (and our) conception of a fictional universe's ontology: what is planet Solaris? What are the functions and origins of the immense artifact in A. C. Clarke's *Rendez-vous with Rama*? What kind of technology can propel Captain Nemo's submarine? What is the nature of Bilbo's magic ring at the beginning of *Lord of the Rings*? In these cases, "ontology" must be intended in a broad sense. The hesitation is not just between the natural and the supernatural, but between a conception of the natural that is presented as "normal" and that appears analogous to what we experience in everyday life, and a non-empirical conception, which unfolds itself as we and the characters explore, and wonder at, the fictional world.

The complexity of the ontologies that characterize the fantastic suggests, however, that the notion of ontological hesitation does not fully describe their characteristics. Ontological hesitation is a mode of focalization, and a response, presupposing a fractured ontological landscape – whose representation can be assimilated to the sequence of "diametric reversals" theorized by Eric Rabkin. However, while in the literature of the supernatural hesitation is overtly dramatized, in other texts it is just an interpretive possibility, deriving from the "collision" of

ontologies that are felt to be contradictory or are not usually juxtaposed because they belong to different world-pictures or cosmologies.

The presence of a mixed, multi-level ontological structure is fully confirmed by both fantasy and science fiction, while the literature of the supernatural tends to have only two main ontological levels. These genres' ontologies unfolds unpredictably, in a progressive accretion of entities and properties, whose presence contradicts a narrative's initial assumptions and complicates the new assumptions that have been added. In fact, fantasy and science fiction are different from pre-modern narrative modes such as epic insofar as they present their worlds as unique ontological structures, autonomous universes whose constituents, originally separate, are unpredictably assembled. The ontology of classical epic draws from a pre-existent mythological body, which a new work can, granted, alter, at the same time fully exploiting its narrative possibilities; reading the *Odyssey*, one can easily infer who the gods that may intervene in Ulysses's adventures are. The same can be said for narratives that elaborate on Biblical themes or are set in the Christian cosmos − Satan's encounter with Eve in *Paradise Lost* departs from the Biblical narrative, but is both ethically and ontologically consistent with it. On the other hand, while reading fantasy fiction, one can, true, roughly infer what kinds of narratives that particular fictional world is drawing from, but one cannot infer its characteristics before gaining direct information. There is, of course, a high degree of conventionality even in the fantastic. But in innovative works the variable combination of pre-existent elements tends to prevent immediate inferences: the ontology of fantasy and science fiction unfolds itself through a system of references that change from work to work.

In other words, while an empirically-grounded representation seems to elicit a set of inferences that will develop along lines that are already established – that is, lines

that are contained within dominant descriptions of reality – the subsets of ontological properties that characterize the fantastic are not part of a single, preexistent system of descriptions referring to a single world. Besides, these properties are felt as incompatible: let us think, first of all, of the problematic relation between the natural and the supernatural in nineteenth-century fantastic, or of any narrative – notably eighteenth-century imaginary voyages − incorporating both a conspicuous realistic subtext and non-empirical entities. The relation of the empirical and the non-empirical is, in fact, a main structural principle of early works of the fantastic, which build a realistic setting and complicate it through the addition of super- or non-natural entities.

However, even the juxtaposition of various non-realistic ontologies (frequent in twentieth-century genres) tends to imply a discontinuity. In many science-fictional worlds, for instance, we first learn that a more advanced knowledge – which is usually rationally-oriented − exists, then we learn that there are entities that challenge that knowledge, constituting a new ontological level that is perceived as such even within the story. The ontology that initially characterizes a science-fictional world is, in other words, rendered in realistic terms and presents itself as a structured, comprehensible domain that the appearance of new entities suddenly disrupts. Thus, the relation between the empirical and the non-empirical is transported to another level, characterized by a higher degree of imaginative elaboration. A fictional world whose workings are presented as regular as those of the empirical world is complicated by a new, apparently disruptive, ontology. And once this ontology has been "naturalized," other, no less innovative, entities and world-views can be mobilized, often engendering new ontological hesitations.

The structural principle whereby various ontological levels are cumulatively added could be termed "ontological accretion." The way ontological accretion takes shape – and is presented in the narrative − tells much about the cultural matrix of the fantastic, strongly influenced by empiricism. Fantasy and science fiction are characterized by a taxonomic imagination; they are based on the introduction into the narrative of new properties and classes of beings, and on an explanation of their characteristics that imitates historical or empirical knowledge. While romance – and, more broadly, medieval culture – tends to privilege monstrosities and prodigies, emphasizing the irreducible and inexplicable uniqueness of a phenomenon, fantasy and science fiction dramatize the process of exploring, enriching, and hesitating over one's world image. Often, characters and readers do exactly the same thing: they wonder at the richness of an unknown universe, their marvel mirroring, and stimulating, that of readers. This happens in *The Lord of The Rings*, which describes, among other things, a process of discovery that takes place on the historical, the geographical, and the cosmological level, and it becomes even more explicit in contemporary fantasy, such as the *Harry Potter* series, characterized by a dual world structure: a universe that looks analogous to ours is juxtaposed with another universe whose rules are progressively understood by Harry during his adventurous Bildung.

Both ontological hesitation and ontological accretion – closely interrelated and hardly separable − are based on a mode of representation influenced by scientific and empirical knowledge. They presuppose that the world functions according to consistent laws that can be described with some degree of accuracy, a highly developed awareness of the presence of such laws, an awareness that, paradoxically enough, seems to go along with the attitude that Max Weber has called

"disenchantment."[24] In the modern age, we tend to believe that even phenomena whose workings and causes are not immediately intelligible can be rationally understood. We have a sense that phenomena can be reduced to a clear-cut ontology, that particularity can be reduced to generality. The fantastic seems both to react to, and to be informed by, such awareness, which became commonly shared between the seventeenth- and the eighteenth- centuries, in concomitance with a major epistemological and socio-cultural shift. This implies, again, that the fantastic is fundamentally different from pre-modern manifestations of the supernatural, whose main characteristics I shall now try to describe.

iii. For a Prehistory of the Fantastic

At this point, it would be easy to object that ontological variability in literature is almost as old as literature itself. A category that includes both works of the modern fantastic and masterpieces of classical literature is the Bakhtinian notion of Menippean satire, elaborated to define the formal and philosophical complexity of Dostoevsky's work, and quickly assimilated into the critical idiom. Bakthin uses Menippean satire to explain and historicize the polyphonic, open-ended quality of works such as *The Brothers Karamazov*, characterized by the coexistence of radically different world-views. *The Brothers Karamazov* vertiginously swings between Ivan's rebellion against a fundamentally oppressive God – based on a rationalistic, anthropocentric view – and Aleša's saintly aspirations, that assume a different sense of God's identity and of the ontology which is a direct emanation of it. For Bakthin, the unresolved coexistence of radically different world-views, and the attempt to test philosophical systems in an open-ended fashion that characterize Dostoevsky's work

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[24] See Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2004), 1-31.

are constant features of the tradition of Menippean satire. [25] (However, *The Brothers Karamazov*'s ontological perspectives are not anchored in problematic physical phenomena, and are restricted to individual minds, the outer world presenting itself as a homogeneous but opaque entity that demands interpretation).

One finds the characteristics of Menippean satire as defined by Bakthin in the fantastic as well. Menippean satire is intrinsically relativistic: such relativism results from a compound generic and ontological texture, from the tendency to incorporate and carnivalize different stylizations of the world in an unrestrained dialogue. Bakthin explicitly says that "in all of world literature we could not find a genre more free than the menippea in its invention and use of the fantastic" and that Menippean satire is characterized by an "organic combination . . . of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and . . . crude *slum naturalism.*"[26] Along with this, he emphasizes how the Menippea is often intended to test philosophical ideas (or to debunk them through parody), which also helps us understand its historical roots. The Menippea took shape in a moment of cultural transition, when Christianity was rising and undermining world-views inherited from classical culture; it was an instrument to debunk previous philosophies, or, one can add, to minimize their contrast through formal play, thereby accommodating them in a new world-view − an explanation which is qualified by the variety of Menippean satires produced during the long and tormented transition from the Middle Ages to modernity.

The ontological variability of Menippean satire makes it a possible ancestor of the fantastic, all the more because at the root of science fiction there are Swift and

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[25] See Michail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For a sense of the historical continuity of Menippean satire (as defined by Bakthin) see Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

[26] Michail Bakthin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 114, 116.

Cyrano's works, which undeniably belong to the tradition of Menippean satire. However, one of the main characteristics of the fantastic is its empirical element: both ontological hesitation and ontological accretion are based on styles that reproduce the focus of empirical culture, and on the evocation of the set of laws that govern reality. This is evident in a foundational work of the fantastic which is also the most influential modern exponent of Menippean satire: *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift combines Lucian and Rabelais's irony and free formal play with a style and values derived from scientific travel writing; he forges a protagonist/narrator − Gulliver − that is self-consciously committed to empiricism, spending words and energies to take measurements of monsters. In other words, Bakthin's definition of Menippean satire as "fantastic" is not sufficiently historicized. Despite its "fantastic" element, Menippean satire could be critical of overtly "unrealistic" representations − Lucian's *True History*, for instance, is a mild parodic attack on *The Odyssey*'s improbability and lack of formal self-consciousness.[27] At the same time, however, the fantastic representation of Menippean satire does not differentiate it from other pre-modern genres such as epic or tragedy, which portray super- or non-natural entities.

Thus, even the history and characteristics of Menippean satire indicate that before the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries the dichotomy realistic/fantastic did not yet exist. As Auerbach reminds us, in all literary cultures there were significant episodes of realism, a realism that was, however, mostly dialogical, engendered by a work's disruption and alteration of the style of a previous work or genre (for instance, the *Divine Comedy* injects contemporary politics into the medieval dream vision, and Chaucer rewrites medieval romance in a variety of ways), but which was never transformed into a self-conscious structural principle, a salient

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[27] See Jacques Bompaire, *Lucien Écrivain. Imitation et creation* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958), 659, note 2.

feature. The novelty of the fantastic is evident if one turns to the genres that immediately precede, and overlap with, its emergence: epic and romance.

My focus on epic and romance in this section is determined by reasons that are both historical and heuristic. They are the dominant narrative forms of the pre-modern world, and they circulated in environments in which there was a certain degree of intellectual sophistication; they were the touchstone against which modern forms, by reaction, surgical recuperation, or tacit perpetuation, defined themselves; and, by virtue of their longevity, they constitute highly inclusive descriptive categories. For obvious reasons, in the sections that follow I shall not attempt to sketch a full-fledged prehistory of the fantastic, I shall just provide significant examples that can help throw light on the fantastic as a specifically modern phenomenon. While describing the fantastic in terms of what precedes it, however, I shall also try to keep track of the main cultural changes that enabled its emergence, epitomized by Elizabethan drama and *Paradise Lost*. Such changes are the dissolution of the old supernatural, the penetration of empiricism into literary representation, and the rise of world-views that coexisted, and competed, with the traditional Christian cosmology.

Epic

Epic has been reincarnated many times for more than two thousand years, throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: let us think of ancient Norse poetry, of the tradition of the *chansons de geste*, or of *The Faerie Queene*, even of Ariosto's semi-parodic *Orlando Furioso*. Most epic works draw from a pre-existent body of mythology, folklore, or literary knowledge: epic's dramatization of the Whole, its ambition to represent the organic relation between individual and society,

and, more broadly, to provide a comprehensive representation of the universe of which that society is part, finds a correlative in an epic work's link with the narratives that precede it.[28] In other words, a deep sense of continuity informs not only the cosmology of epic, but also its intertextual workings. Epic does not present itself as a rupture, but as the culmination of a tradition. Hence, the characters and phenomena that exist in its universe, are, to a large extent, already known.

This translates into an epistemic attitude: in the epic universe, the encounter with the supernatural is never problematic, because the supernatural is part of the quotidian, and it is animated by the same forces that animate the natural. According to Ortega y Gasset, in ancient epic "the gods stand for a dynasty under which the impossible is possible. The normal does not exist where they reign".[29] In fact, Odysseus never questions the nature of the laws behind a certain occurrence; he knows in advance that he will encounter the supernatural. He knows what a Cyclops is and he knows, and often reminds us, that the gods blow into his sails and will hopefully lead him to a safe harbor – he never wonders, for instance, at Circe's powers. And we know about Circe even more than Odysseus, since in his narrative to the Phaecians, before recounting what Circe did to his men, he presents her as a goddess and gives us her genealogy:

> We sailed on from there with heavy hearts,
> grieving for dear shipmates we had lost,
> though glad we had avoided death ourselves,
> until we reached the island of Aeaea,
> where fair-haired Circe lived, fearful goddess
> with a human voice—sister by blood
> to bloody minded Aeetes, both children
> of sun god Helios, who gives men light. (X, 177-184)[30]

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[28] On epic's organic view see György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Boston: MIT Press, 1971), in particular 46-47. On epic's links with tradition, see José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, in particular 122.

[29] José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 138.

[30] Homer, *The Odyssey* (Arlington, VA: RicherResourcesPublications, 2006), 184.

By the same token, particularly surprising supernatural events in Virgil's *Aeneid* are significant not in relation to their nature and workings, but to their moral relevance. At the beginning of his long journey, Aeneas approaches a mound covered with plants and tears up some javelin branches to cover the altar (III, 26). The sight of blood oozing from the roots leads to the realization that those javelins are, in fact, Polydorus, Priam's youngest son, whose story follows the events narrated in Euripides' *Hecuba*. Aeneas never explains the reason Polydorus has been metamorphized (III, 49-56), because Polydorus's function in the poem is just to provide one of the many prophetic voices – evidently animated by the will of the gods – that encourage Aeneas to flee, and, implicitly, to perform his task (III, 44). In fact, Aeneas had torn the branch to perform his duty to the Gods, who responded by giving him a sign of his vocation and by showing that Troy cannot be reborn, since even Priamus's younger son is dead.[31]

A similar approach to the supernatural can be found also in a work that belongs to a very different culture, the *Divine Comedy*, which constitutes a genre of its own but nevertheless shares many traits of epic, all the more because Virgil is Dante's model. Despite being a supreme expression of the Mystery, the cosmology that rules Dante's work has nothing mysterious. God's power, and the way it has organized Dante's otherworld, are self-evident, and are derived from contemporary theology. This does not mean that Dante stops experiencing wonder: in fact, he passes out a remarkable number of times. But his wonder derives from a form of religious sublime, it is the unspeakable apprehension of God's power, epitomized in his final ascent to heaven, where the contemplation of God's countenance exceeds – and

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[31] See Douglass Biow, *Mirabile Dictu. Representation of the Marvelous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 13-35.

transcends – the beauty of all human art (*Paradiso*, XXVII, 91-96). Dante's world is pervaded by forces that are fully perceptible but only partly knowable, and express themselves with a particular intensity in phenomena such as the theophany Dante witnesses at the end.

On the other hand, like every other literary form, epic too can be innovative. Douglas Biow recounts how Servius, Virgil's first commentator, did not like the Polydorus episode because it was neither historical nor based on classical models.[32] And the ontological accretion that characterizes the *Divine Comedy* consists in new information about the structure of the otherworld that innovatively develops the medieval religious imaginary. Dante's hell incorporates many elements and characters of classical mythology included in the *Aeneid*, such as the rivers Styx and Acheron, Charon and Cerberus. Besides, in the *Inferno*, we learn of the various punishments, the law of *contrappasso*, to which the souls of sinners are condemned – a punitive system that adumbrates a moral system directly derived from Dante's political experience. This kind of ontological accretion strongly resembles that of science fiction and fantasy. In the *Divine Comedy*, we are in fact introduced to new types of phenomena that redefine and enrich the traditional image of hell and its social and moral organization, and which convey Dante's moral and political message.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between epic and the fantastic. Every supernatural event that takes place in Odysseus, Aeneas, Jason, and, later, Dante's universe, can be attributed to the same order of causes, which escapes explanation and makes it useless: the divine. There is an overarching ontology that suffuses every new accretion, forestalling rational or philosophical enquiries on the

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[32] See Douglass Biow, *Mirabile Dictu*, 14-16.

part of characters, reducing all phenomena to a single ontological framework. In the fantastic, there is a different state of affairs: ontologies are problematic, fractured and differentiated. Instead of a self-evident organizing principle that brings about prodigies, there are unexpected laws of nature – or super-nature – that astonishingly manifest themselves. Gulliver (as well as Captain Kirk and his crew in *Star Trek*) finds himself puzzled many times during his journey, because his mindset privileges causality: he tries to understand how things work. While in ancient epic the difference between nature and super-nature is potentially reconcilable, in the fantastic ontological variability is particularly problematic: it is thrown into relief, and seen in a perspective that privileges explanation and the construction of empirical knowledge.

This overarching order is the literary correlative of the ontological imaginary of early religious societies, which is, according to Charles Taylor, analogous to that of Medieval Christianity. "In early religion", writes Taylor, "the spirits and forces with whom we are dealing are in numerous ways intricated in the world." This is particularly evident "in the enchanted world of our medieval ancestors," since "for all that the God they worshipped transcended the world, they nevertheless had to deal with intracosmic spirits and with causal powers that were embedded in things: relics, sacred places, and the like".[33] The coextensive presence of the natural and the supernatural is particularly evident in pre-Socratic culture: it is dramatized in the totality that according to Hegel characterizes the world of epic, where the immanence of divine forces signifies the self-evidence of the cosmic order and of the place that men occupy in it.[34] Even if, apparently, in ancient epic the struggle can be between men and gods, on a fundamental level it is between gods and other gods: Athena

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[33] Charles Taylor, "The Great Disembedding," in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 55.
[34] See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lecture on Fine Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1044.

helps Odysseus in spite of Poseidon's hostility. Humans – Odysseus much more than the pious Aeneas, notoriously a puppet in the hands of his supernatural sponsors – have a certain degree of agency, but at the same time tend to be pawns on the divine chessboard (in fact, Odysseus, who cries because he is desperately homesick, does not have much in common with the transgressive adventurer portrayed in canto XXIII of the *Divine Comedy*). This is not detrimental to their self-determination, though, because in the world of epic humans and gods often want the same things. The domain of nature, where men usually act, and that of super-nature, which is pervaded by divine powers, tend to coincide, although the subjects and phenomena that inhabit them tend to keep their distinctive identity, because the universe is hierarchically organized.

Things are different in epic works written when traditional notions of the divine were under revision, such as *Paradise Lost*, which emblematically registers the intellectual climate and the cultural changes of early modern England. Milton's work evinces an ambition far superior to that of any other epic poem, because its attempt to justify God's ways takes shape in a cultural moment – the post-revolutionary years – that saw the emergence of a tendentially secular materialism and a proliferation of political and theological points of view: an arena in which *Paradise Lost*, despite its monumentality, was just one among many voices. As we shall see, Milton's poem engages with some of these points of view, trying to supersede their contradictions. This implies, needless to say, that *Paradise Lost* cannot perpetuate the ontological consistency of classical epic, and that its dramatization of the divine is less the invocation of an implicit, commonly shared truth, than a long, twisted explanatory statement. Given Milton's desire to say something relevant for contemporary natural and political philosophy, such a statement includes various perspectives, is constantly

on the verge of contradiction. If, to a certain extent, *Paradise Lost* manages to resolve the antinomy between, on the one hand, a new conception of nature that seems to be partly independent of God – who thereby becomes supernatural − and, on the other hand, the idea of a centralized divine power, it is also characterized by fissures that are the most visible signs of its novelty. As a result, the totality that the poem stages appears to have been created instead of pre-given.

In early modern British culture, the ontological wholeness that epic had portrayed and mirrored was undermined by new kinds of materialism, that implicitly threatened Christian theology and traditional conceptions of the supernatural. On the one hand, there were the Cartesian and the Hobbesian philosophies, proponents of a mechanism that was tendentially autonomous of the divine agency. On the other hand, there were various strains of Puritan theology, which saw God as omnipotent and able to direct earthly events (a providentialism that conflicts with the materialism of contemporary politics), still rooting the order of nature in the divine agency. And, at the same time, there were mediatory doctrines, such as vitalism, that were influenced both by the new materialism's focus on matter and Christian theology. The vitalist philosophy, derived from Paracelsus's alchemy, posited that matter was endowed with a soul and an independent volition; God was, therefore, immanent, an idea that was relatively successful among seventeenth century thinkers and writers, since it resolved the tension between theology and science, and, as has been convincingly argued by John Rogers, could be subordinated to political purposes.[35]

By virtue of the interaction of vitalism with traditional Christian theodicy, *Paradise Lost* is characterized by a form of ontological variability, that attests to its links to the tradition of the fantastic. *Paradise Lost* is characterized by an unstable

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[35] See John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution. Science, Poetry and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

ontology that both presents nature as endowed with autonomous agency and perpetuates a traditional representation of the divine. Nature and super-nature begin to show their boundaries: Milton's version of creation refers both to a form of materialism (which fascinated him for its liberal implications) and to traditional Christian theodicy, juxtaposing world-views that were originally separate. Following many commentators' responses to *Paradise Lost*, John Rogers has in fact noticed how the poem is marked by an ontological shift. In the first eight books, it is strongly influenced by vitalism: this stance can be seen in Uriel's description of the creation:

> Swift to their several Quarters hasted then
> The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Air, Fire;
> But this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n
> Flew upward, spirited with various forms
> That roll'd orbicular, and turn'd to Stars
> Numberless (3,714-19)

In Uriel's description the elements are imbued with spiritual forces and moved by their own independent agency, constituting the universe in a process of self-organization which does not seem to have been determined by God's will. Raphael's account of the emergence of dry land (7, 276-84) further emphasizes the autonomy of physical elements. Earth, the "great mother," is "fermented to conceive," – the use of the passive form suggesting that a physiological, impersonal agency is at work — and God's command to the waters, that gather in a single place, coincides with a process that developed independently of his active volition. Raphael describes Earth's self-fecundation through reflexive participles, without mentioning God's divine agency, as a circular process that seems to establish the autonomy of material elements. But the moment in which the possibility of self-creation is most cogently presented is when Satan reflects on his origins:

> That we were form'd, then say'st thou? and the work
> Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
> From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!

> Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw
> When this creation was? Remember'st thou
> Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
> We know no time when we were not as now;
> Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
> By our own quick'ning power when fatal course
> Had circl'd his full Orb, the birth mature
> Of this our native Heav'n, Ethereal Sons. (5, 583-63)

Satan's vitalist ideas ground his political views, and stand in an ambivalent relationship with the points in which the poem seems to argue for the hierarchical organization of the cosmos. In fact, Satan himself, probably to legitimate his own authority, evokes an image of hierarchy (5, 791-93). Satan's is not, obviously, the most reliable voice in the poem, but he shares some of his vitalist ideas with good angels such as Raphael, and, paradoxically enough, he participates in what has been seen as the liberal subtext of *Paradise Lost*, inseparable from the vitalist subtext − that runs throughout the first eight books. Another account of divine creation sees God's redemption of a primeval chaos characterized in Hobbesian terms (7, 233-241). Milton portrays a process of divine infusion, rendered through "digestive" imagery that culminates in the description of a state of affairs that is fully compatible with vitalist models: in fact, at the end of the process there are dregs of inert chaos that God has not managed to animate. Later, the divine law that mandates Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise is still presented in vitalist terms: the purity of the elements that constitute paradise is incompatible with "gross . . . unharmonious mixture" (11, 48-57).

After book eight, however, the role of the divine seems different, and a second ontological layer emerges, attributing to the divine a decisive role, and complicating the relation between nature (as represented by the vitalist subtext) and super-nature (that is, God's agency): the expulsion of man seems to be directly mandated by God (11, 93-98), who appoints Michael as the harbinger of retributive justice (11, 99-111).

God is anthropomorphic, and his agency unmistakable. John Rogers sees this discrepancy as recurrent in Milton's thought, noting that "the ontological distinction between the two models of agency and organization dramatized in the expulsion narrative emerges in a more recognizable theological form in Milton's own *Christian Doctrine*".[36] Milton's vitalist sensibility is, in other words, at odds with his theological views. This constitutes a contradiction that is both ethical and cosmological. As Rogers emphasizes, for Milton vitalism has a markedly political significance, implying the freedom of both natural and human agency. For Rogers, *Paradise Lost* mediates this contradiction in the twelfth book by projecting the antinomy on the diachronic level: Michael states that Mosaic law will be ultimately superseded in a process of historical development (12.300-306), Adam promises to redeem, envisioning a pattern of human progress (12.563-69); and the disappearance of Adam and Eve "down the Cliff" (12.637-40) situates Adam and Eve in the realm of nature and self-determination. This antinomy, and its aesthetic resolution in *Paradise Lost*, is directly related to Milton's keen awareness of the contrast between humanity's need for free agency and the need to maintain a system of divine authority.

Thus, *Paradise Lost* is characterized by strong ontological tensions. Despite the poem's explicit intentions, its world is distinctively Miltonic, transcending the constraints of epic − *Paradise Lost* gives an innovative account of genesis. This innovation marks its movement towards the fantastic: Milton merges the Bible, traditional epic imaginary (*Paradise Lost*'s battle scenes are inspired by Homer), with forms of contemporary materialism in a way that attests to the uniqueness of his poem's fictional world. Thus, despite its themes, *Paradise Lost* is a post-lapsarian

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[36] John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, 154.

poem, and, as the history of its canonization in the eighteenth century shows, its perceived value was aesthetic rather than religious.[37] At the core of the poem's ambivalence lies Milton's interest in contemporary materialism: *Paradise Lost* does not replicate the styles of empiricism, but its focus on human agency and its attempt to define nature as semi-autonomous inevitably run counter to the Biblical material. As in the fantastic, in *Paradise Lost*, suspended between vitalism and traditional Christian theodicy, we find ourselves exploring the boundaries between different world-views. And the separation of God's agency and nature's agency tends to disrupt the harmonic coexistence of the natural and the supernatural that traditionally characterizes the world of epic.

Romance

The Middle Ages' dominant genre, romance, does not seem to perpetuate the ontological framework of epic; it does not provide an overarching explanatory system. While epic emphasizes the organic connection between the individual and the whole, romance, in particular Arthurian romance, tends to narrow its focus on single individuals. As well as epic, romance focuses on the life and exploits of exceptional characters faced with exceptional enterprises – but these enterprises ultimately serve to measure their worthiness, their conformity to an aristocratic code. Proportional to the value of a knight are the dangers he has to overcome: in Chrétien's romances, supernatural beings have been placed on the hero's path just to test him. Thus, magic functions as an indicator of the moral qualities of a character, bringing to the surface his strengths and flaws, and implicitly pointing to further directions for moral

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[37] See Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon. Print Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 2.

development.[38] Romance does not have cosmological sweep: as we shall see, it eludes epistemic questions, trying not to enter territories which only religious genres are entitled to explore.

In other words, romance's commitment to courtly ideals ultimately determines its ontology – which, as in ancient epic, is based on a preexistent body of folklore. "The place of magic in the text is rarely explained; the audience is assumed to be familiar with magical characters such as Morgan Le Fay, or locations such as the Isle of Avalon, and the existence of magical swords, rings, beds, bridges, and girdles".[39] The supernatural apparatus deployed in Arthurian romance tends not to raise too many questions. This can clearly be seen in romance heroes' attitude towards magic. In Chrétien's *Lancelot or the Knight of the Cart*, for instance, the protagonist's life is threatened by a flaming lance that materializes while he is sleeping (500-540); however, he is not particularly astonished at it, nor is he astonished at the effects of a magic spell (2335). He maintains this attitude even before two lions that disappear immediately after he has demonstrated his courage, turning out to be illusions (3120). At one point, he uses his magic ring, well prepared to detect and elude the supernatural (3124).[40] In the Arthurian universe, magic is a relatively frequent occurrence, and its eruption does not disrupt or contradict characters' notions of reality. Wonder is not necessarily associated with magic − while it is a defining feature of the fantastic.

In other words, romance magic is not intended to highlight the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural. It seldom, for instance, bleeds into the

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[38] See Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). Sweeney extensively discusses the role of magic in romance, highlighting its subordination to moral purposes and providing examples from the entire body of Chrétien's work.

[39] Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance*, 47.

[40] Chretién de Troyes, *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1997).

miraculous, which one finds in the hagiographies or in popular drama. Mostly interested in moral problems, romances tend to escape cosmological issues, not to interfere with religious orthodoxy. For example, Sweeney notes, they tend not to use black magic in order to retain the Church's tolerance of literature. Only occasionally is magic characterized as "demonic," and often in connection with female characters such as Morgan Le Fay (whose control of the magic arts is part of her the knowledge of nature: new conceptions of magic that gesture towards modern science tend to enter romance as well).[41] And when religion becomes a central concern, the generic identity of romance is called into question.[42]

By the same token, romance does not attempt to adopt a causal logic: the eruption of the inexplicable would radically modify its priorities. When the inexplicable is perceived as such, we have works that are so powerfully innovative that threaten to detach themselves from tradition, so that romance verges on antiromance. This is the case of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, whose unconventional form emerges as a response to a social context that was very different from Chrétien's. While Continental romance tended to address and mediate questions of disparity – between the old and the new aristocracy − through courtly ideals, English romance engaged with them more problematically. The imposition of the feudal system after the Conquest and the substitution of a system of divisible inheritances with one based on primogeniture engendered a deeper awareness of the

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[41] See Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses. Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), especially chap. 1.

[42] One of the few examples of a full engagement with Christian magic in Arthurian romance is provided by Chrétien's *Perceval*. Perceval's maturation at the Graal's castle is a test of ingenuity rather than of physical prowess. And when he achieves what he has to, the poem's focus suddenly shifts to Gawain's exploits, a sequence of encounters with traditional magic that, unlike in conventional romances, do not manage to speed up his development. Chrétien's poem encapsulates romance magic, identifying it with a moral code which it exposes as worldly, at the same time defining a Christian test that does not revolve around physical exploits. *Perceval* relativizes its own deployment of magic, privileging other tests and ideals.

problem of social disparity within the upper ranks.[43] Thus, the courtly ethos to which

Gawain tries to conform turns out to be an unreliable standard, a mere fiction.

Gawain can survive a duel with the green knight, doomed to failure because of the

latter's supernatural powers, only by means of a trick, made possible by the use of

magic. Ashamed, he returns to court, to discover that by jokingly sharing Gawain's

sign of humiliation (the green knight's girdle, which he now carries on his arm)

Arthur and the entire court are ready to share and relativize his failure. This

detachment from the ideals and conventional plots of romance is inseparable from a

new treatment of magic, traditionally instrumental to the treatment of ethical

problems.

The entrance of the Green Knight into Arthur's court is suffused with a wonder

that is engendered and emphasized with a degree of self-consciousness absent from

Chrétien's romances. The greenness of the knight resists interpretation, and his ability

to walk and talk even after Gawain has beheaded him is seen as a marvel that

surpasses all other marvels (I, 239), as a startling departure from conventionality. One

has to confront more radical hesitations about the nature of the enemy than in

Continental romances.[44] Hesitations over the Green Knight's identity, however, do

not go so far as to call into question the structure of the world as a whole, as in the

fantastic: his greenness does not have epistemological implications. The Green

Knight's intentions seem more relevant than the forces that animate him. In fact,

although at first sight he seems to transcend the usual patterns of romance

supernatural, he will turn out to be contained within them. In a happy ending that

with surprising deftness reaffirms, after having undermined, the conventions of

Arthurian romance, we learn that he has been sent by Morgan Le Fay to test the

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[43] See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of The English Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987), 140-150.
[44] See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 118-119.

worthiness of Arthur's knights. Despite the underlying skepticism of the Gawain poet, magic and its traditional functions are not yet fully debunked.

But the disenchantment of romance, and the reinvention of the supernatural, is well underway, as it is shown by a contemporary masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, which contains various parodies of romance, such as the *Tale of Sir Tophas* or *The Squire's Tale*, where all the paraphernalia of chivalric literature (such as a magic mirror, ring and sword) are mobilized and suddenly abandoned. Generic disruption does not yet amount to ontological collision, but nevertheless establishes a tension between two world-pictures, making it possible to regard ontologies as discrete objects. The interruption of the story draws attention to its construction with a semi-parodic effect that is heightened by the presence of the narrator, the squire, a young man whose social position constitutes a realistic version of the position of romance heroes, who here become young men in search of advancement. A fuller revision of the role of romance magic is provided by *The Franklin's Tale*, in which we have, quite conventionally, a love triangle and a vow of faithfulness. Dorigen is married to Averagus, and while he is abroad she is wooed by Aurelius. She responds by declaring that if Aurelius removes from the sea the rocks that endanger Averagus's return, she will be his. But Aurelius resorts to an astrologer, who removes the rocks. The nature of the magic deployed by the astrologer is unclear: the Franklin provides a jumbled list of esoteric terms, and we do not really know if the dematerialization of the rocks has been the result of a delusion or of an actual form of magic. One of the many reminiscences of pagan culture interspersed in *The Canterbury Tales*,[45] astrology is here a way to reframe magic both as partly inexplicable and as determined by human agency, suggesting that it could be an illusion. Significantly,

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[45] On medieval astronomy and astrology in Chaucer's work See J. D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). See also Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

the squire is a "clerk," and possesses a distinctive, rationally organized, knowledge of nature that determines his social standing. Chaucer's revision of the role of magic in romance entails both a realistic rewriting of it (astrology constituted an actual body of knowledge, which focused on the properties of natural objects) and a question regarding its nature and the way it should be represented. Although its formal experimentation does not point towards an epistemic reflection, *The Franklin's Tale* inhabits an ambivalent space between romance and antiromance, juxtaposing two world-views and thereby paving the way for ontological awareness. The questions over the nature of magic that characterize *The Franklin's Tale* amount to a generic transition: old romance magic is framed from a point of view that is more firmly anchored in empirical reality. Such a transition is a prelude to the broader epistemological shift leading to the formation of the fantastic, and its main consequence is a refiguration of the supernatural, whose role and quality, though not yet framed in self-conscious empirical terms, becomes now problematic.

While Chaucer's works entail refigurations of magic, in the early modern works that marked the transition to new standards of verisimilitude the role of the traditional supernatural is more fully revised: it is both debunked and turned into a delusive figment of sick subjectivities: the supernatural is psychologized, relocated within the subject, partly or totally connected to a mental causation. This can be seen in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which sets out to rework in a semi-parodic way the conventions of romance. First of all, it constitutes a parodic recapitulation of all its ingredients, mobilized with a bounty and a freedom that bespeaks Ariosto's poem's fundamental playfulness, making it far more improbable than its predecessors. Monsters, magical armors, sorcerers, anachronisms crowd *Orlando Furioso*, whose characters spend their time fruitlessly chasing one another, without fulfilling the tasks

which were crucial for their medieval ancestors. In addition to this, *Orlando Furioso*'s obtrusive narrator makes various digressions on his audience and his own love life, deliberately breaking the narrative spell and thereby prefiguring narrative voices such as Fielding's. Condemned by contemporary critics for its disregard of Aristotelian unities – Aristotelian theories articulated the early modern need for reality in literary representation –[46] *Orlando Furioso*'s magic nevertheless implies a not yet articulated realistic norm.

The fact that *Orlando Furioso* gestures towards realism − and participates in the dissolution of the old supernatural − is all the more visible since magic occasionally provides an allegorical representation of self-deception. This can be seen in a key episode of *Orlando Furioso*, set in the palace of the wizard Atlante (XII, 4-17). Whoever arrives at the enchanted palace sees the object of his desires: Orlando sees Angelica, kidnapped by a mysterious knight, and Ruggiero sees Bradamante, kidnapped by a giant. The castle will later be destroyed by Astolfo, who embodies human reason: he will also recuperate Orlando's intelligence ("senno"), imprisoned on the moon. Thus, magic is characterized as a constitutively irrational force, a function of human fallibility: *Orlando Furioso* partly preserves romance magic, using it as a test for the individual, but does so in a way that emphasizes the role of human consciousness in shaping deceitful enchantments.

Ariosto's experiments were taken on by Cervantes, with an important difference: in *Don Quixote* romance is fully encapsulated within a new realistic code. The marvelous is incorporated and presented as a projection of the protagonist's mind, which maintains the ontological regime of romance by regarding everyday life as a disguise, the result of an enchantment. Cervantes turns romance marvels into

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[46] See Martina Scordilis Brownlee, "Cervantes as Reader of Ariosto," in *Romance. Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 220-237.

figments of a delusive self caught in its tormented relationship with the outer world. Debunking the supernatural, *Don Quixote*, which was, not surprisingly, enormously influential in eighteenth-century England, paves the way for the novel. At the same time, however, it preserves romance magic with remarkable consistency. In fact, the significance of *Don Quixote* derives from its dual nature: not only does it disenchant an old genre, it also embodies modern literature's tendency to preserve what is pre-modern, its difficulty in eluding a pre-rational past.

And the internalization of enchantment in a visionary viewpoint constitutes an important literary precedent: eliminating *Don Quixote*'s playful narrator and maintaining only the main character's perspective, one obtains a situation similar to that portrayed in late-eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century tales of the fantastic, full of unreliable point of views, subjective worlds that can easily be confused with reality in spite of the uncanny forces that animate them. *Don Quixote*'s deployment of madness lays the ground for the play with subjectivity and its deceits that characterizes not only critiques of superstition (such as *Tom Jones*, where Partridge insistently and ridiculously sees apparitions), but also strains of the fantastic itself, which derives from empiricism the assumption that knowledge is the product of a percipient individual and develops the problems inherent to such assumption. Todorov states this only marginally, but one of the implications of ontological hesitation is that the witness of a particular event may in fact have created it, because of his or her mind's pathological state – let us think of Edgar Allan Poe's *Ligeia*. By the same token, emphasizing the importance of a firm grasp on reality, *Don Quixote* shows how a subjectivity can radically reinvent it, producing fantastic representations.

Elizabethan Specters

A departure from the coherent cosmology that characterizes medieval culture takes place in a literary age whose fruits have been considered as the archetypes of modernity: the Elizabethan age, "a period which sees the emergence of numerous figures who challenge the conflicting cultural and religious orthodoxies of their times in their claim to create a new cosmology and a new physics: a new image of the universe."[47] Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium*, the religious disputes triggered by the Reformation – temporarily mitigated during Elizabeth's reign – and, in general, the innovative impulse embodied by Machiavelli, Bruno, and Montaigne are the most eloquent examples of this shift, whose existential implications Marlowe and Shakespeare's dramas (as well as John Donne's poetry) capture vividly. This implies, however, that Elizabethan drama is not only foundationally modern, it is also, as generations of Shakespearean scholars have reminded us, deeply medieval. In a process of ontological accretion, it reincorporates conceptions and values that were dominant in the Middle Ages (such as a theocentric view strongly influenced by Platonism), envisioning in vivid terms their complex relationship with new world-views.[48]

Let us take, for example, *Doctor Faustus*. The protagonist's rejection of the principle of authority, his refutation of conventional Christian morality and his search for a new knowledge, soon turn into a cosmological enquiry, ultimately frustrated by the persistence of a stable, conservative universe, where there is no space for individual discovery and unrestrained mobility.[49] Mephistopheles, who is also

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[47] Hilary Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge. Giordano Bruno in England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 74-75.

[48] On the problematic coexistence of medieval and humanist culture in the Elizabethan drama, see E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

[49] "Is to dispute well Logikes chiefest end?/Affords this art no greater miracle?/Then read no more, thou hast attain'd that end/ A greater subject fitteth *Faustus* wit" (*Dr Faustus*, I, i). For a reading of

Faustus's tempter, disappointingly answers his questions by describing the structure of the universe in absolutely orthodox terms (II,i), a description that is further qualified, made even more orthodox, by the chorus. Faustus sets out to discover "the secrets of astronomy," but, unable to escape the dichotomies of traditional Christian soteriology, winds up sinking into the mouth of Hell, concluding his trajectory like Dante's Ulysses.

Faustus's eagerness to know manifests itself through a doubt that takes the shape of an ontological hesitation − a main component of his *hybris*, particularly visible at the end, when, facing his damnation, he envisions an unstable image of God which conveys his doubts and his hope. The traditional battle between good and evil that characterizes mystery plays is here complicated by Faustus's epistemic stance, by his ability to imagine alternative worlds, which threatens to refigure his fictional universe. In a vibrant sequence of visions, Faustus turns to the God of the New Testament (O I'le leape up to my God: who puls me downe/ See see where Christs bloud streames in the firmament/ One drop would save my soule, half a drop, ah my Christ; V,ii, 155-157), then, to a more wrathful God, and finally realizing the vanity of his hopes, he invokes "*Pythagoras Metempsychosis*," hoping that he can reincarnate into some "brutish beast" (V, ii, 184-186). But his spirit of inquiry, which has tried to break loose from Christian restraints, is ultimately frustrated by the tragic teleology, by the emergence of a clear-cut cosmological framework inherited from both classical and Medieval dramas. In lines that, it has been suggested, are reminiscent of Bruno's materialism,[50] Faustus gives voice to impossible hopes, ruthlessly frustrated by the stage directions:

Faustus's monologues that sets them in the context of contemporary cosmological and philosophical debates, with particular attention to Giordano Bruno's thought and influence, see Hilary Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge*, 74-113.

[50] Hilary Gatti, *The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge*, 109.

> O Soule be chang'd into little water drops,
>
> And fall into the Ocean, ne're be found.
>> *Thunder, and enter the devils* (V, ii, 194-196).

These lines show a particular kind of ontological variability, engendered by Faustus's defiant stance. Medieval drama presupposes an idea of man that Elizabethan authors, concerned with new, typically early modern questions, did not perpetuate. Previously, "writers and their public were intensely aware of the ontological propositions placing man in the middle of the chain of beings, and attributed to him a sizable set of properties following from this".[51] In response to contemporary humanism, the properties of characters – the range of their agency, their way of conceiving of themselves and of relating to the traditional religious world-view – radically changed. Elizabethan characters are no longer sure of the constitution of their world, manifestations of the supernatural open up various interpretations and inferences, and God is no longer unambiguously at the center of the stage. While in mystery plays the religious supernatural occupied, also in material terms, a central position, in Elizabethan drama – not, as we have seen, in *Doctor Faustus* − it is a marginal, therefore problematic, presence. We have the conflation of two ontologies, one of which, correlated to a traditional world-view, is evidently being questioned by the other, daringly anthropocentric. But this anthropocentrism, consisting mostly of fruitless, ultimately self-defeating actions, is not validated by a stable image of the universe; we are still far from the Enlightenment, the world is not yet presented as a rational construction intended to be investigated empirically (and we are, therefore, not yet in the domain of the fantastic, characterized by a well-established empirical vision). According to Thomas Pavel, in Elizabethan drama "The late medieval world is still there, in the peripheral shadows . . . This shift of attention

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[51] Thomas G. Pavel, "Narrative Domains," *Poetics Today*, 1, no. 4 (1980), 108.

brought to the front the problems of human action and its relation to systems of values."[52]

The play in which this is more evident is *Hamlet*. The Prince of Denmark's problematic relation with the supernatural prefigures the fantastic, perfectly fitting into Todorov's model. Sharing Marcello and Horatio's doubts, Hamlet famously responds to the appearance of his father's ghost with these words:

> Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
> Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
> Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
> Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
> Thou comest in such a questionable shape
> That I will speak to thee (I.4.39-44).

This uncertainty has momentous implications: the ghost of old Hamlet, because of its ambiguity, does not sanction the legitimacy of Hamlet's mission as a nemesis. Keith Thomas puts the implications of the ghost's appearance in terms that do justice to the ambivalence of *Hamlet*'s plot and highlights that the ghost is one of the play's interpretive keys: "By revealing the truth about his father's death to Hamlet, the ghost sets off a train of consequences which involve Ophelia in the ultimate sin of suicide and Hamlet in a series of murders. If the ghost had never appeared, or if Hamlet had refused to listen to his promptings, these events, and their terrible consequences to soul and body, would never have occurred."[53] The ghost's ambivalence is both ethical and ontological: in Elizabethan drama ghosts were often framed as ambiguous figures, which suggests that their symbolic function could be understood in the light of broader cultural processes. Not only does the nature of the ghost puzzle Hamlet, but has long puzzled commentators: its role and characteristics have been read in the light of Elizabethan "pneumatology," and it has been convincingly argued that the

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[52] Thomas G. Pavel, "Narrative Domains," 108.
[53] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Trowbridge and London, Redwood Press, 1971), 590.

image of the ghost results from the conflation of Senecan conventions with a variety of discordant views of the supernatural: the pagan imaginary, notions associated with the belief in Purgatory – which had just been removed from the Anglican cosmology – and the belief in the terrestrial agency of demons.[54] *Hamlet* does not enable a clear-cut interpretation of the ghost – whose monumental, martial appearance sanctions its links to the past but at the same time uncannily erases the body of old Hamlet –[55] and even if Claudius eventually, and hesitatingly, turns out to be a villain, which validates Hamlet's father's words, fundamental questions about the forces that govern their universe are left unanswered.

As the nature of the ghost is unclear, so is the nature of the order that Hamlet is called to reestablish, all the more because it ultimately turns out to be a dying one – Fortinbras will become the new king of Denmark, and the hectic sequence of killings that marks the drama's ending amounts to a self-disintegration of the dynasty that Hamlet was supposed to redeem. As in other Shakespearean dramas, the political order, which in the conventional Elizabethan vision was seen as a reflection of the cosmic order, becomes uncertain; in *Hamlet* this uncertainty overtly extends to the image of the universe from which it is inseparable.[56] (Not surprisingly, for Hamlet the metaphysical realm one accesses after death is an "undiscovered country"). The uncertain nature of the ghost is correlated with Hamlet's characteristics. While the ghost is unknowable, Hamlet is eager to know, and organizes a play within the play to verify empirically if his uncle is guilty, an attitude that Bacon would have

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[54] See Robert H. West, "King Hamlet's Ambiguous Ghost," *PMLA*, 70, no. 5 (1955), 1107-1117.

[55] On stage representations of ghosts in the Renaissance see Anne Rosalind Jones, Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245-256.

[56] In Elizabethan drama social disruption is portrayed as a disruption in the chain of being. The cosmic and the political order are partly coextensive, damaging one entails damaging the other. The coextensive organization of the cosmic and the political order is still present in seventeenth-century political theory – see Hobbes's *Leviathan* – where plans of social organization are inseparable from concepts of natural philosophy.

appreciated. The knowledge he wants to attain mostly focuses, given the genre in which he is bound up, on the nature of the tragic mission. His attitude, which symbolizes the spirit of enquiry of the Renaissance, is one of the reasons why Hamlet – who has, tellingly, studied at Wittenberg (a place that saw the rejection of traditional rules) – has gained an archetypal valence. Like so many modern characters, Hamlet observes, makes inferences, collects knowledge and information, and registers the fundamental ambivalence of what surrounds him.

In *Macbeth*, things are similar. The nature of the witches is mysterious and not validated by any particular belief of the Elizabethan audience, and Macbeth's personal interaction with the supernatural leaves plenty of room for doubts. The witches, it has been argued, are not necessarily those of Elizabethan superstition, and, in the light of Elizabethan pneumatological standards, they do not seem to be demons or human beings; they rather seem a "deliberately-forged contradiction,"[57] a construct that is intended to be ambivalent. Besides, Macbeth is the only one who sees Banquo's ghost, so that the supernatural could also be a concretization of his inner drives, and what the audience sees could be a projection of Macbeth's mind. (This pattern will be replicated in Lewis's *The Monk*, where the main character, who undergoes a temptation and corruption modeled on Macbeth's, is the only one who sees the devil.) But unlike Hamlet, Macbeth – a soldier rather than a thinker – does not embark on any kind of verification.

Both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* constitute precedents of the fantastic insofar as they use the supernatural as the correlative of an unfathomable universe. However, both Hamlet and Macbeth live in worlds – and in a genre – where the supernatural is to some extent expected, and where the activity of rational inquiry constitutes an

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[57] See Robert H. West, "King Hamlet's Ambiguous Ghost," 111-112.

anomaly, an interference in the usual workings of the tragic teleology. The overt ontological variability that is characteristic of the fantastic will become central in works pervaded by the language and values of the new science, in works whose style consistently imitates the language used to represent reality. The supernatural of Hamlet and Macbeth's worlds does not constitute a rupture, because the sense of reality of Elizabethan characters is less normative that that of Enlightenment characters. The "realistic" representation of ghosts that characterized Elizabethan drama, where the supernatural was an unproblematic convention, went along with the absence of a skeptical view. On the contrary, using a disenchanted reality as a foil, apparition narratives and the Gothic established a two-sided perspective on ghosts, questioning them and at the same time lending them an air of truthfulness. In other words, the appearance of the supernatural in Elizabethan dramas constitutes an interpretive crux, but is not presented as the central point of interest in the play. Hamlet questions not so much the fact that ghosts may return from the otherworld as the fact that their words could be deceptive. The same could be said for Shakespearean romances, where the presence of the supernatural, astutely orchestrated by characters such as Prospero, is firmly built into a drama's ontology. While in the subsequent works of the fantastic the devices of ontological instability and ontological accretion are based on a neat extra-literary distinction between what is empirical and what is not, Elizabethan drama, like epic and romance, does not assume that the supernatural is distinctly non-empirical.

In the Elizabethan age, the possibility of apparitions had not yet been heavily called into question (James I wrote a demonology tract), and the literary representation of ghosts was highly conventional. Ghosts were instrumental to the unfolding of tragic plots; as a consequence, not too much attention could be devoted

to them. Things started to change with the diffusion of humanism, and, more decidedly, of modern science. It is difficult to represent with a high degree of accuracy the effects of empiricism on the mindset of literary audiences, but certainly the sense that the laws of reality could be reduced to a closed system, that they could be objectified, was gradually internalized by texts, enabling a new kind of literary imaginary.

This objectification could take place, among other things, through print: textbooks of physics and taxonomies tended to define with a high degree of consistency a set of entities and phenomena, tended to establish what was natural and what was not. Travel writers devoted much energy to contesting the existence of monsters, exiling them into the sphere of romance, natural scientists provided self-contained, ordered representations of the world, and various empirical thinkers ruthlessly attacked superstition. The sense that reality was a coherent, discrete entity, enabled a representation of the supernatural characterized by a higher tension between the empirical and the non-empirical, and enabled a new kind of literature to take the latter as its distinctive feature. As we shall see, empirical skepticism, based on the assumption that the world is ontologically homogeneous, contributed to question the existence of ghosts and monsters, but at the same time laid the ground for their sensational return in the literature of the fantastic.

Chapter Two

The Natural, the Supernatural, and the Monstrous in Early-Empirical

Culture

In this chapter, I shall briefly examine the relations between the new science, religious culture, and superstition in the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. I shall focus in particular on literary and scientific attempts to mediate between an empirically-oriented conception of the physical world and traditional views of the supernatural that were increasingly felt as incompatible with empiricism. This will be instrumental to my reconstruction of the emergence of apparition narratives and imaginary voyages, the founding genres of the fantastic. In the next chapters, I shall argue that the fictional works associated to the fantastic assumed the mediatory task that in the early stages of empirical culture was accomplished by purportedly factual texts such as apparition narratives and descriptions of monsters. The super- or the non-natural were no longer legitimate objects of inquiry for natural philosophers, more and more rigorously committed to verifiable truth; thus, the mediation between the empirical and the non-empirical could be achieved only in a recognizably fictive space, gradually identified as the aesthetic.

Late-seventeenth-century mediatory formations, which will be the object of the pages that follow, can be roughly divided into three categories. First, an inclusive, extremely flexible conception of nature – present in epistemological discourse and rapidly incorporated by imaginary voyages − which does not categorically debunk the notion of the supernatural, regarding it as a means to account for phenomena that cannot be directly perceived or explained: there are realms or operations of the natural world where the spirits or the divine force act directly, in a harmonious, non-

contradictory ontological variability, the natural seamlessly bleeding into the supernatural. Second, a providential view that, although excluding the possibility of direct revelation, sees history as directed by God's agency, able to steer its course in a way that brings the natural to the verge of the supernatural. The workings of providence, I shall argue, were often dramatized by the new genres of the fantastic, that tended to privilege providence's supernatural component. Third, seemingly empirical descriptions of supernatural or seemingly non-natural entities and phenomena − monsters, ghosts, demonic manifestations − regarded by empirical thinkers with increasing skepticism. As we shall see, ghosts were viewed as evidence of the existence of God, but science soon grew uninterested in them. No longer supportable by a pseudo-scientific apparatus, but still appealing to the general public, apparition narratives detached themselves from epistemological and theological discourses and turned into recognizably fictional texts, and, over the course of the eighteenth century, they became clearly recognizable as fiction. Descriptions of monsters followed a similar trajectory: in the seventeenth century, monsters were taken as a direct manifestation – and a sign − of the capacity and inexplicability of nature, and of the forces, both natural or supernatural, which lie behind it. But the new science, originally fascinated with the study of anomalies as keys to disclose the workings of nature, gradually medicalized them. Monsters survived − and thrived − in the tradition of imaginary voyages. Implying a highly inclusive conception of nature – which does not rule out metaphysical explanations – the representation of monsters compensated for the loss caused by the hegemony of a normative empirical view.

The other aim of this chapter will be to highlight developments in literary culture that emerged as a response to the same factors subtending the formation of the fantastic. The novel and the fantastic took shape as a response to epistemological

change, presenting a formal and thematic analogy: both are constructed by combining the rhetoric of empiricism with notions that empiricism tended to question. Taking into account various canonic works, I shall focus on the way in which novels incorporated a providential world-view inherited from religious culture. In doing so, I shall both highlight the common ground between the novel and the fantastic (that is, their engagement with cosmological questions entailed by the rise of the new science), and their different treatment of the supernatural, namely, their different formal and generic identity. While the fantastic overtly stages the coexistence of the empirical and the non-empirical, the novel presents natural, but hardly probable, chains of events, implying that they are supernaturally directed.

i. Empirical Supernaturalism: Science and Philosophy

There is no need to emphasize that the emergence of the new science and of an empirically-oriented world view in the course of the seventeenth century did not necessarily bring about a disruption of religious beliefs. Scientists often presented their knowledge as a confirmation of God's power, and many attempts were made to reconcile the providential and the natural order: for example, in what has been called "natural religion," God's existence could be justified only on rigorously rational grounds. And although in the eighteenth century deists, materialists, and agnostics attacked religious institutions and tenets (Hume's *Enquiry*, for instance, tacitly denies the existence of the soul), an explicit, radical confrontation between religion and science did not take place until the second half of the nineteenth century, when

debates over the evolution of man cogently called into question the dogma of creation.[1]

In spite of science's unaggressive stance, however, religious thinkers tended to be defensive: *The New Planet no Planet*, Alexander Ross's fierce response to John Wilkins's *Discourse Concerning a New Planet*, or Richard Baxter's *The Arrogance of Reason against Divine Revelation Repressed* reject, respectively, the Copernican universe, and the spirit of enquiry of modern science − whose obsessive search for empirical evidence, Baxter complains, would end up shaking the foundations of Christianity. In *Reasons of Christian Religion* (1667), Baxter reacted against Hobbes's materialism, guilty of reducing every phenomenon to mechanical laws; by the same token, Meric Casaubon, in *Of Credulity and Incredulity in Things Divine and Spiritual* (1670), stated that focusing exclusively on the material realm could lead to losing sight of the divine. The defensive stance of religion shows that although the new science did not set out to revise the principles of Christianity, its disruptive potential and the problematic implications of its main arguments were evident. "As the order of providence and miracles retreated before the order of nature and the law, Christianity required more and more explanations to square it with the findings . . . of the mechanical philosophy."[2] In fact, few people openly professed themselves "atheists": the epithet was rather used by religious thinkers in relation to philosophical or scientific concepts that – in Stillingfleet's phrase − were thought to "weaken the known and generally received proofs of God and providence" by attributing "too

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[1] See John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On seventeenth-century religion and science see Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973).

[2] Martin I. J. Griffin, Jr., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (New York: Brill, 1992), 51.

much to the mechanical powers of matter and motion."[3] Atheism was, in most cases, a

potential development anxiously anticipated by theologians in writings that promoted

the new epistemology.[4]

Men of science themselves were, however, aware of their limits and obligations,

since hard-core materialism could too easily translate into a loss of moral and

metaphysical coordinates. In his *History of the Royal Society,* Thomas Sprat wrote

that "whoever shall impiously attempt to subvert the Authority of the Divine Power

on false Pretences to better Knowledge, he will unsettle the strongest Foundation of

our Hopes, he will make a terrible Confusion in all the offices and opinions of men,

he will destroy the most prevailing Argument to Virtue, he will remove all human

Actions from their firmest Center, he will even deprive himself of the Prerogative of

his immortal Soul".[5] And scientific inquiry was presented as conducive to a full

understanding of God's creativity: in 1661 Robert Hooke suggested that practice in

experimental philosophy was not only "the most likely way to erect a glorious and

everlasting structure and temple to nature," but also afforded a verification of the

ingenuity of "the all-wise God of Nature."[6] The findings of empirical investigation

were taken as signs of the divine agency in the natural world.

The supernatural, that is, the belief in spiritual forces and in the role of the divine

agency, provided scientists not only with an indispensable moral framework, but also

with a flexible explanatory instrument. This can be seen in debates over the nature of

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[3] See the unfinished version of Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or a Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith* (London, 1662), in *Works* (London, 1710), vol. 2 (ii), 80.

[4] On the development of a self-conscious atheist thought, see Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (London: Routledge, 1990). For Buckley, atheism developed from the ideas of thinkers such as Mersenne, Descartes, and Newton, who were not, of course, professed atheists, but laid the presuppositions for the full development of atheism in the eighteenth century by rationalizing God without emphasizing the role and nature of Christ. On "atheism" as a construct of seventeenth-century theologians, see Martin I. J. Griffin, Jr. *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, 49-60.

[5] Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (London, 1668), 346.

[6] Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Insects Body* [London, 1665] (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 28, 194.

matter (useful to contextualize both contemporary views on ghosts and the ontology of imaginary voyages). Despite Hobbes's controversial influence – he was often taken as a butt by Christian thinkers – seventeenth-century scientific thinking had not gone so far as to follow Descartes's example and acknowledge the existence of inert matter. Only marginally did this depend on the need to maintain or defend religious orthodoxy; attributing to matter the power to move itself was difficult from both a religious and a scientific perspective; thus, thinkers such as Walter Warner, Walter Charleton, and Matthew Hale developed the notion of an active principle that inhered in matter, added to it by God Himself. This idea was picked up by Robert Boyle, who, in his *Suspicions about some hidden qualities in the air*, talked of "a little vital quintessence" or "some vital substance" in the air.[7] Newton and Locke themselves reflected on the role of active principles; like other seventeenth-century thinkers, they were aware of what was at stake: motion could not be totally disconnected from God, without whom it could not be properly accounted for. The support of active principles was sometimes brought to the extreme: Henry More went so far as to argue that "Nature is the body of God, nay God the Father, who is also the World, and whatsoever is in any way sensible or perceptible."[8]

More's stance, almost pantheistic, is a reminder of the immense variety of strategies mobilized to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural throughout the seventeenth century: religious sects espoused different epistemological approaches,[9] and derivations of Paracelsianism, like vitalism, postulated that God had imbued matter with a soul, and with autonomous volition – which implies a

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[7] Robert Boyle, *Works* (London, 1782), vol. 4, 90.
[8] Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus: Or, a brief Discourse of the nature, causes, kinds, and cure of Enthusiasm* (London, 1656), 1. On seventeenth-century debates on active principles see John Henry, "Occult Qualities and the Experimental Philosophy: Active Principles in Pre-Newtonian Matter Theory," *History of Science*, 24 (1986), 355-381.
[9] Thomas Harmon Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," *Isis*, 72., no. 3 (Sep., 1981), 342-356.

conception of nature as an independent agent.[10] And even in the realm of scientific

thinking much effort was devoted to demonstrate the existence of spirits, often

regarded as the "active principles" that moved matter. Mayhow, Hooke, and Newton

investigated the structure of the soul, trying to account for its workings in ways that

were not intended to be strictly mechanical. Mayhow stated that the soul was "a

divine *aura* endowed with sense from the first Creation, and coextensive with the

whole world."[11] By the same token, Hooke did not regard the workings of the soul as

mechanical, asserting that the soul had a "Directive and Architectonical Power,"[12] the

ability to move matter. Newton wrote in a notebook that God could "stimulate our

perception by his own will," fervently opposed Cartesian mechanism, and throughout

the 1670s defined a cosmology which described the entire natural space as a divine

sensorium.[13]

   Thus, figures such as Hooke, Boyle, and to a certain extent Newton, were not

proponents of a full scientific disenchantment. Given the presence of active forces in

which the divine matrix was more immediately visible, and given the complex

workings of nature, the empirical world as a whole tended to be seen as evidence of

intelligent design,[14] and the terminology used, for instance, by Hooke in

Micrographia is characterized by an almost pre-Romantic excitement (sometimes

prefiguring the emotional contemplation of nature dramatized in Humboldt and

Darwin's writings), by a deep confidence in the relation between natural objects and

the divine will. See, for instance, Hooke's memorable description of the eye: "It is

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[10] See John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), chap. 1.
[11] John Mayhow, *Medico-physical Works* [London, 1674] (Edinburgh: Livingstone, 1957), 255.
[12] Robert Hooke, *Lectures of Light*, in *The Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke*, ed. Richard Wallare (London, 1705), 140.
[13] On spirits and the soul in late-seventeenth-century science see Simon Schaffer, "Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers: Souls and Spirits in Restoration Natural Philosophy", *Science in Context*,1 (1987), 55-85.

[14] See R. S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, chap. 2.

beyond the Wit of Man to imagine any thing could have been more complete. Nay, it could never have entered into the Imagination or Thought of man to conceive how such a Sensation as Vision could be performed, had not the All-wise Contriver of the world endued him with the Faculty and Organ of seeing it self."[15] Emphasizing the need to study active principles, Boyle expressed a similar opinion: he wrote that a philosopher's task is to show that God "can make so vast a Machine, perform all those things which he designed it should, by the meer contrivance of Brute matter, managed by certain Laws of Local Motion."[16] Late-seventeenth-century scientists regarded the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural as porous: in the second part of the *Christian Virtuoso*, Boyle stated that the cosmos could be divided into three spheres: "supernatural, natural in a stricter sense, that is, mechanical, and natural in a larger sense, that which I call supra-mechanical".[17] For Boyle, the "supra-mechanical" is an ontological terrain that bridges the gap between the natural and the supernatural, a mediatory category that accounts for inexplicable phenomena and provides the tangible world with room for the divine and its direct emanations.

But in the eighteenth century scientists learned to restrict themselves to the natural domain. Unlike France, where the new materialism was fervently brandished by figures who publicly professed atheism – first of all, Voltaire – eighteenth-century England saw a relatively peaceful coexistence of science and religion. The former did not attack the latter. Scientists' stance is foreshadowed by Locke's reflections on "The

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[15] Robert Hooke, *Lectures of Light*, in The *Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke* (London, 1705), 121.
[16] Robert Boyle, *A Free Enquiry into the vulgarly received notion of Nature*, in *The Works*, vol. 5 (London, 1685-86), 7-8. On Boyle's conception of the divine agency, see Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 1.
[17] Robert Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso*, in *The Works*, 2nd ed. (London, 1754), vol. 6, 754. On the interaction of the natural and the supernatural in Boyle's work, see Simon Schaffer, "Occultism and Reason," in *Philosophy, Its History and Historiography*, ed. Alan John Holland (Dordrecht and Boston: G. Reidel, 1985), 117-144.

Reasonableness of Christianity,"[18] and by Thomas Sprat's reflections on the relation between religion and empirical knowledge in his *History of the Royal Society*. According to Sprat, "There is not any one Thing, which is now approv'd and practis'd in the World, that is confirm'd by stronger Evidence, than this which the society requires: except only the *Holy Mysteries of our Religion*. In almost all other matters of *Belief*, of *Opinion*, or of *Science*; the assurance whereby Men are guided, is nothing near so firm, as this."[19] For Sprat, science and religion have separate scopes, and empirical skepticism cannot endanger faith: given the relatively unproblematic spread of science on every level of early-eighteenth-century society, cultivated audiences probably developed an analogous sense of separation.

The changes in the conception of the physical world in the eighteenth century show that the growth of scientific knowledge was not impeded by religious belief. To assess such changes, one can take as a touchstone the ideas of the most influential seventeenth-century natural scientist: emblematically, for Newton God was responsible not only for the existence of the laws of nature, but also for their abrogation; he believed that the universe was governed and held together directly by God's will. "Everything in the world," wrote Newton in his *Opticks*, "is subordinate to him, and subservient to his Will." Newton thought that God "may vary the Laws of Nature, and make worlds of several sorts in several parts of the universe."[20] God could generate discrete ontological systems that were, however, invariably subtended by his creative, ordering capability: as a result, the principles of mechanical philosophy could afford a necessarily limited insight into the workings of nature. For Newton, active principles – he later identified them with the "aether" that had been hypothesized by seventeenth-century scientists to explain the movements of matter −

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[18] John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures* (London, 1695).
[19] Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (London, 1668), 100.
[20] Isaac Newton, *Opticks* [London 1704] (4th ed., rpt., London, 1952), 403f.

were a sign and emanation of God's providence. Things, however, changed: thinkers such as Greene and John Toland regarded active principles as immanent in matter, and by the 1750s the reaction to Newton's ideas was more common: in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume stated that "it argues surely more power in the Deity to delegate a certain degree of power . . . than to produce every thing by his own immediate volition".[21] Hume's view – which had been anticipated by Leibniz – was shared by scientists such as Joseph Priestley and James Hutton,[22] who believed that the laws of nature were coextensive with the structure of the universe, and could not be suspended or reinvented by God.

Reactions to Newton show that the eighteenth century saw an increasing autonomization of matter, its tacit separation from the divine agency. Nature gradually became an independent source of value, a universal standard that could be applied in all branches of human knowledge. The habit of observation shifted scientists' – as well as the general public's – attention: nature was no longer valuable as a manifestation of God's power, as a sign, but became valuable in itself.[23] The valorization of nature goes along with the popularization of empirical knowledge. Between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the general public was encouraged to participate in the production of science: Halley's astronomical broadsheets, for instance, invited readers to collect information about eclipses (which Halley used in later publications)[24] and from its inception, the Royal Society had encouraged merchants and workers to collect botanical, geographical, and

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[21] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [London, 1748] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56.

[22] See P. M. Heimann, "Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth-Century Thought," in *Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. John W. Yolton (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 393-405.

[23] See Lorraine Daston, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vital (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), in particular 126.

[24] See Alice N. Walters, "Ephemeral Events: English Broadsides of Early Eighteenth Century Solar Eclipses," *History of Science*, 37 (1999), 1-43.

zoological information, thereby contributing to the Baconian history of trades. The spread of empiricism was facilitated by the fact that, as we have seen, science had no interest in attacking religious tenets. At the same time, mediatory works that bridged the gap between empiricism and religion were produced: these works, easily accessible, presented the workings of providence in a sensationalist light that provisionally obfuscated doubts and skepticism.

ii. Empirical Supernaturalism: Providential Narratives

The accommodation of the new science to the Christian cosmology was, as we have seen with respect to late-seventeenth-century empiricism, enacted by scientists themselves, but it was also enacted by texts produced for the literary market, having therefore a higher range of circulation than the writings of the Royal Society virtuosi. These writings are epitomized by the strain of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century literature that has been called the "tradition of wonder," which includes providential literature.[25]

Providential literature's main appeal is a sensationalism that is inseparable from its mediatory function. With a typically Puritan interpretive logic, storms, earthquakes, and natural disasters are seen as omens or agents of punishment, direct manifestations of God's ability to steer the course of natural phenomena. *God's Wonders in the Great Deep*, for instance, collects "several Wonderful and Amazing Relations . . . of Persons at Sea who have met with strange and unexpected Deliverances"; *Gods Judgment against Murderers* relates, among other things, the unhappy fate of "a Gentleman who Murder'd his own Mother";[26] even captivity narratives are assimilated into the interpretive machine of Providential literature: see,

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[25] Discussed by J. Paul Hunter in *Before Novels. The Cultural Context of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: London, 1994), 217-222.
[26] *Gods Judgement against Murderers* (London, 1712).

for example, *God's Protecting Providence . . . Evidenced In the Remarkable Deliverance of Robert Barrow . . . From the cruel Devouring Jaws of the Inhumane Canibals of Florida.*[27] In these writings, natural laws are not overtly broken, but events are directed by divine forces in a way that seems to contradict their purported immanence. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, providence books were extremely popular, assuming a polemical significance: in his introduction to a collection of providential anecdotes, William Turner wrote that "[T]o record Providences *seems to be one of the best Methods that can be pursued, against the abounding* Atheism of this age."[28] Their production seems to have decreased over the course of the eighteenth century, after readers learned to keep the natural and the supernatural separated, and new fictional discourses developed, inheriting the mediatory task that had characterized various late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century genres. Apparition narratives' empirical presentation of ghosts, and the novel's implicitly providential world-view, bridged the gap between the empirical and the non-empirical within a recognizably aesthetic framework.

Thus, despite their apparent commitment to facticity, providential narratives perpetuate a teleological pattern. Sometimes, however, such bipolarity fully manifests itself, bringing a text to the verge of contradiction; this can be seen in an eighteenth-century work whose complex generic identity is inseparable from a problematic treatment of the relation between religion and empiricism: Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). In Defoe, raised in a family of dissenters and educated in the Puritan academy of Newington Green, where the new science had already been included in the school curriculum, the contrast, and the mediation, between empiricism and religion were a primary concern. This concern shapes the *Journal*,

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[27] Jonathan Dickinson, *God's Protecting Providence . . .*(Philadelphia, 1699).
[28] *A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences, both of Judgment and Mercy, Which have Hapned in this PRESENT AGE* (London, 1697), fol. [biv].

which is half Baconian history (rigorously grounded in fact but containing inexistent characters such as H. F.),[29] half piece of providential literature. The *Journal* includes a vast amount of empirical information – parish bills, orders of the Lord Mayor, even "magic" marks used by quacks − and proposes paradigmatic techniques to fight the plague in the future. On the other hand, the plague is also framed from a point of view that is not empirical at all: at the end, taking a markedly religious stance, H. F. says that it was caused by supernatural forces and defeated through God's intervention; therefore, physicians who look for a natural cause will never find it ("labour as much as they will to lessen the debt they owe to their maker.")[30] Furthermore, he uses a typological mode of presentation, regarding actual historical events as pale repetitions of paradigmatic Biblical events (237). But his religious ideas are expressed timidly, he is afraid to act as a "teacher" rather than as an "observer of things" (236): he is conscious that his work has an empirical outlook, and he wants to encourage the belief that the plague can be counteracted, that nature can be dominated. In this respect, the *Journal* resembles Defoe's *Essay upon Projects*, which advocates schemes for national improvement. In spite of its tension, however, *A Journal of the Plague Year* finds a formal and thematic balance in H. F.'s attempt to read the signs of the world − its main theme, articulated through a great variety of descriptions, is the legibility of the plague. These signs are, on the one hand, the information upon which schemes against the plague can be implemented in the future, and, on the other, more or less visible traces of divine agency − H. F. puts it clearly: God can determine events, such as the appearance and the sudden disappearance of the plague, which are rationally inexplicable. Held together by a thematic organization that makes them partly

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[29] On the tradition of seventeenth-century historiography that probably influenced the *Journal*, see Robert Meyer, *History and the Early English Novel. Matter of Fact from Bacon to Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chap. 1-6.

[30] Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* [London, 1722] (London: Penguin, 2003), 236. Further references will appear in the text.

analogous, the materialist and the providential perspectives coexist and sometimes look inseparable.

The *Journal of the Plague Year* can be connected to the genealogy of the fantastic; as we have seen, the plague can be reduced to two different ontological frameworks, which entails a form of ontological hesitation. Defoe frames the plague not only as a material phenomenon, but also as a system of signs. These signs appear to be strictly physical, not to say clinical – let us think of the symptoms often described in the *Journal* – and have to be decoded according to practical and medical knowledge, but they also have a moral and metaphysical valence, signifying God's incomprehensible will. A literal, objective interpretation interacts with a symbolic, figural one, and it is difficult to determine which kind of reading should be privileged. On the one hand, H. F.'s empiricism mirrors the pragmatic and empirical attitude of Defoe's *An Essay Upon Projects*; on the other, his pious considerations about the role of divine agency in the outburst and disappearance of the plague seem to neutralize his empirical commitment, gesturing towards a model of causality more reliable than that afforded by science, and ultimately incompatible with the belief – fueled by empiricism – that human and natural agency are autonomous. The *Journal* builds up a world whose nature is uncertain, and takes contradictory stances: why is it so important to study and describe the dynamic of the plague if its defeat can ultimately be achieved only by divine providence and the reduction of human sinfulness? Why is it so important to study it as a contingent, historical phenomenon if its essence can be better understood in terms of Biblical typology?

Of course, the *Journal of the Plague Year* and providential literature are products of a transitional moment: besides deriving from the contrast between empiricism and the religious world-view, their ontological instability is accentuated by their generic

instability – the use of empirical languages had not yet been regularized. Texts such as the *Journal* were not yet subtended by well-established writing practices and discursive boundaries, so, despite their markers of truthfulness, they describe things that are not strictly true in empirical terms. Few other works produced after the first half of the eighteenth century blended such a full-fledged empirical commitment (epitomized by Defoe's language, famously dense with figures and all sorts of data) with such a radical vindication of the role of providence. Eventually, more rigid boundaries between religious and empirical languages were established, and the need to mediate the latent conflict between empiricism and religion, was satisfied, in various ways, by fictional texts, which avoided the *Journal*'s suggestive contradictions, enacting a seamless integration of the natural and the supernatural. As we shall see, novels staged a providential order, and the literature of the supernatural fruitfully interacted with both empirical and religious culture, turning ghosts into hypostatic figures, that were both material and otherworldly.

iii. Ghosts in the Age of Reason

No less problematic than the relation between science and religion is the relation between empirical knowledge and what was increasingly regarded as superstition, for superstition and orthodox religion sometimes bled into each other, enacting an all-encompassing mediation: religious thinkers such as Glanvill and Baxter regarded the appearance of ghosts as evidence of the existence of God. Glanvill's empirical approach is, of course, not representative of mainstream science. Empiricism's attempt to clarify its relation to traditional belief rather entailed an assessment of the supernatural that inevitably tended to circumscribe its range; as we have seen, late seventeenth-century science refigured the supernatural as an active principle, which

was invisible and impalpable. However, superstition did not die: it survived in popular belief, and it was recuperated as an aesthetic construct, both on the level of representation and on the level of critical discourse.

The surgical separation of acceptable and unacceptable supernatural belief can be seen in Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, which establishes a clear-cut separation of religion, superstition, and empirical knowledge, defining the object of modern scientists as "matter, a viable and sensible *matter*, which is the object of their *labours*."[31] Empirical laws become autonomous, affording an explanatory model that does not take into account the divine agency (although it was not easy to explain the movement of matter on merely empirical grounds). However, Sprat also regards the natural philosopher as endowed with a knowledge that enables him to perceive the imprinting of God's perfection: "What the *Scripture* relates of the Purity of *God*, of the Spirituality of his *Nature*, and that of *Angels*, and the *Souls* of Men, cannot seem incredible to him" (348). Instead of disposing of the supernatural, Sprat implies, assuming a deist stance, that it has been made superfluous by the intellectual development of man; empirical science has made God's agency visible through the impressive system of laws that govern the world. Sprat shores up this concept by means of a political analogy: God is like a Prince that has established effective laws rather than like a prince that is obliged to resort to exceptional justice (361-362). [32]

Sprat's argument operates on two levels: it is both a justification of natural philosophy (which enables us to see God's hand) and a reassessment of traditional beliefs that lays the ground for a full condemnation of superstition:

> And as for the *terrors* and *misapprehensions* which commonly confound
> weaker minds, and make mens hearts to fail and boggle at Trifles; there is so

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[31] Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (London, 1668), 110. Further references will appear in the text.

[32] On Sprat and superstition see Brain Easlea, *Witch Hunting, Magic and the New Philosophy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), 207-213.

little hope of having them remov'd by *Speculation* alone, that it is evident they were first produc'd by the most *contemplative* men among the *Ancients*; and chiefly prevail'd of late years, when that way of *Learning* flourish'd. The *Poets* began of old to impose the deceit. They to make all things look more venerable than they were, devis'd a thousand false *Chimeras*; on every *Field*, *River*, *Grove*, and *Cave* they bestow'd a *Fantasm* of their own making: with these they amaz'd the world; these they cloath'd with what shapes they pleas'd; by these they pretended, that all Wars, and Counsails, and Actions of Men were admistred. And in the modern *Ages* these *Fantastical Forms* were reviv'd, and possess'd *Christendom*, in the very height of the *Scholemens* time: An infinit number of *Fairies* haunted every house; all Churches were fill'd with *Apparitions*; men began to be frighted from their *Cradles*, which fright continu'd to their *Graves*, and their *Names* also were made the causes of scaring others. All which abuses if those acute *Philosophers* did not promote, yet they were never able to overcome; nay, even not so much as King *Oberon* and his invisible *Army*.

But from the time in which the *Real Philosophy* has appear'd, there is scarce any whisper remaining of such *horrors*: Every man is unshaken at those Tales, at which his *Ancestors* trembled: the cours of things goes quietly along, in its own true channel of *Natural Causes and Effects*. For this we are beholden to *Experiments*; which though they have not yet completed the discovery of the true world, yet they have already vanquish'd those wild inhabitants of the false worlds, that us'd to astonish the minds of men. A Blessing for which we ought to be thankful, if we remember, that it is one of the greatest Curses that God pronounces on the wicked, *That they shall fear where no fear is* (339-341).

Sprat derogatorily defines the objects of superstition as "fantastical forms" generated by fear and perceived with horror, whose elimination is a main task of reason, committed to empirical truth. Sprat's position reflects a general trend – the belief in Witchcraft, for instance, declined long before the Witchcraft Act, passed in 1736. The critique of superstition took place on various levels, and it was not necessarily based on scientific arguments. In the seventeenth century, a conservative thinker like Sir Robert Filmer regarded witchcraft as groundless because the form in which people often detected it, devil-worship, was not justified by the Scriptures. Thus, skepticism towards witchcraft could not be separated from skepticism towards the devil, whose manifestations in Protestant countries were regarded as Papist tricks,

and whose agency was regarded as limited by God's will and, again, contested on the grounds of his appearance and actions in the Scriptures. But the most powerful critiques certainly came from empirically-oriented thinkers. Materialists such as Hobbes tended to think that no intercourse could exist between corporeal and incorporeal beings, thereby encouraging general skepticism towards both witchcraft and devil worship.[33] Furthermore, the new protocols of credibility associated with empiricism rendered testimonies concerning apparitions much more problematic than in the past. This attitude is epitomized by Locke's philosophy, which devalued traditional testimony, because "the further off it is from the original truth, the less proof and force it has." Locke also lists objects and phenomena that do not fall "under the reach of our senses . . . and are not capable of testimony," which include "the existence, nature and operations of finite immaterial beings without us . . . spirits, angels, devils, etc."[34]

But the late seventeenth century also saw attempts to bring superstition into the realm of empirical knowledge. The most significant one was Joseph Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1689), on which I shall focus extensively in chapter 3, while investigating the development of supernatural fiction. Glanvill, who was close to the Royal Society, as well as Richard Baxter, who was a theologian, saw ghosts as proofs of the existence of the soul and the other world, and provided an impressive amount of second-hand – and sometimes first-hand − information about witches' and evil demons' misdeeds. In Henry More's introduction to *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, as well as in Glanvill's own reflections, ghosts are seen as antidotes against atheism. Glanvill and More were reproducing some of the protocols of empiricism, speaking

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[33] See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Trowbridge and London: Redwood Press, 1971), 570-583.

[34] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [London, 1698] (London: Penguin, 1997), 586.

"to skepticism and atheism in the only language they will understand."[35] For Glanvill, testimonies about ghosts, authenticated by the circumstantial information provided in his collection, can be equated with any other empirical data collected by reliable witnesses. Not surprisingly, his approach did not set the standard for scientific inquiry, but spawned a great number of apparition narratives. These reproduced many features of *Sadducismus Triumphatus*'s empirical rhetoric, at the same time avoiding the complex epistemological reflections and unrelenting commitment to documentary precision that characterize Glanvill's work.

The survival of ghosts both on the level of theological speculation and on the level of popular belief suggests that the early protestant notion − connected to the abolition of Purgatory − that the souls of dead men could not return to the material world was no longer influential. Ghosts' fascination did not just persist, but was revamped by the rise of empiricism, which probably – and paradoxically – raised questions over the sources of a human body's vitality: as we have seen, scientific inquiry inevitably encountered its limits, and natural philosophers ultimately resorted to the supernatural to explain the inexplicable. Throughout the seventeenth century, one finds countless testimonies of apparitions, and both empiricism and occult theories such as Paracelsianism were mobilized to justify their existence.[36] As the production of apparition narratives shows, ghosts made their way well into the eighteenth century too; Dr. Johnson talked of their existence as a question which after five thousand years is still undecided.[37] According to Boswell, Johnson saw ghosts as evidence of the immortality of the soul – perpetuating the view of late-seventeenth-century thinkers like Glanvill. On the other hand, a vibrant critique of superstition

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[35] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 87.
[36] See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 587-595.
[37] James Boswell, *Dr. Johnson's table-talk: containing aphorisms on literature, life, and manners; with anecdotes of distinguished persons* (London, 1798), 248.

took shape, categorizing ghosts as illegitimate objects of belief. In literary production, this view is epitomized by *Tom Jones*, where Partridge's recurrent encounters with apparitions are constantly ridiculed: Fielding's ruthless parody of apparition narratives is, as we shall see, inseparable from a sustained satire of superstition.

Given ghosts' role as liminal figures that participate in the nature of both the material and the immaterial world, questions concerning their existence directly touched anxieties connected to the rise of modern materialism. There was, true, no overt conflict between religion and science; nonetheless, science's increasing ability to realign practices and values, the centrality it was gaining, the promises it was making, and, above all, the world-view it prescribed in order to be effective, made signs of the divine less easy to perceive. "The new science . . . carried with it an insistence that all truths be demonstrated, an emphasis on the need for direct experience, and a disinclination to accept inherited dogmas without putting them to the test."[38] The empirical world-view taught both scientists and common people to see things in a particular way, and demanded a constant application, obfuscating other perspectives. In other words, the increasingly stronger sense that reality was governed by a consistent set of rules undermined the belief in revelation. Thus, more than witches or fairies, ghosts are a bridge between the physical and the metaphysical realms, hypostatic figures whose links to this world are self-evident, so that their return can be more easily justified. While witches and fairies were ambivalent entities (the former were both human and demonic, and the latter belonged to an independent, not necessarily Christian, realm), Ghosts perfectly lent themselves to being presented as concrete manifestations of the divine: they made the soul visible, and, in some

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[38] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 644.

cases, palpable; they could move objects as they had once moved their limbs. In the next chapter, we will retrace ghosts' transformation from ambivalent objects of scientific inquiry into full-fledged literary characters, a transformation that does not bespeak so much their fall into discredit as their uneasy coexistence with the empirical world-view.

iv. The Naturalization of the Monstrous

The monstrous tends to be a vital part of the medieval cosmology even in cases in which monsters actively threaten the world order. Sometimes they are manifestations of a destructive principle that is tightly interwoven with the creative principle embodied by benevolent gods, who have, in turn, destructive sides, so that good and evil bleed into each other. (In Snorri's *Edda* Thor fights against the giants, but occasionally allies with them.) The chaos monsters embody is therefore built into the structure of the universe. And even in case of dualistic conceptions, such as the Christian one – where the divine and the providential contradictorily coexist with their negation, evil – the monstrous defines itself in relation to God, because its vocation is the disruption of an order which will necessarily be reestablished. Sometimes monsters exist just to test the faith of men, sometimes they are portents, carriers of divine messages – a function, as we shall see, that persists in the early modern age.[39]

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[39] For a survey of the functions of the monstrous in various medieval religious cultures, see *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. K. E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen (Leuven; Paris; Sterling, Virginia: Peeters, 2001). In their "Introduction," Robert Olsen and Karin Olsen conclude from various essays in the collection that in Christian Old-English culture as well as in Old-Norse culture, "cosmology, the individual human body and the social order of a human community are somehow interconnected, and that monstrosity is consequently a threefold modification of the world order, if not a total disruption of it" (21). Such modification is, one can add, not so much the negation of a cosmology as an integral part of it.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, monsters were still seen as prodigies, signs of God's intention that portended catastrophes or momentous changes determined by the moral conduct of the Britons.[40] At the same time, however, under the influence of empiricism a different, more modern conception also emerged, which framed monsters as natural entities. But such a conception was not fully compatible with the full-fledged empirical view that became dominant in the eighteenth century. The pamphlets and broadsheets I shall examine imply an idea of nature that is not entirely disenchanted, perpetuating an ancient sense of wonder; monsters and prodigies are products of an unrestrained, "wonderful" creativity that seems analogous to the creativity of God. Instead of being presented as a principle of regularity, nature appears as a force that can easily transcend human understanding. A similar view informs late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century imaginary voyages, probably influenced by this strain of the tradition of wonder: as the literature on monsters disappeared, imaginary voyages incorporated its objects within a framework that was more and more recognizably fictional − a new progeny of "natural" monsters, epitomized by the creatures encountered by Gulliver, haunted literary production.

The religious origins of the literature about monsters are exemplified by titles such as *Signes and wonders from Heaven. With a true Relation of a Monster borne in Ratcliffe, Highway, at the signe of the three Arrows, Mistris Bullock the Midwife delivering her thereof*,[41] which also includes an illustration on the front page (fig. i), whose graphic sensationalism is typical of this kind of literature:

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[40] On monsters as socio-political and religious signifiers in the seventeenth century, see William E. Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics, and Providence in England, 1657-1727* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

[41] *Signes and wonders from Heaven. With a true Relation of a Monster borne in Ratcliffe, Highway, at the signe of the three Arrows, Mistris Bullock the Midwife delivering her thereof* (London, 1645). Further references will appear in the text.

Signes and wonders from Heaven. 2

With a true Relation of a Monster borne in *Ratcliffe High-way*, at the signe of the three Arrowes, Mistris *Bullock* the Midwife delivering her thereof.

Also shewing how a Cat kitned a Monster in *Lombardstreet* in *London*.

Likewise a new discovery of Witches in *Stepney* Parish.

And how 20. Witches more were executed in *Suffolke* this last Assise. Also how the Divell came to Soffam to a Farmers house in the habit of a Gentlewoman on horsebacke.

With divers other strange remarkable passages.

Aug: 8 Printed at *London* by I. H.

Signes and wonders from Heaven is characterized by a primitive empirical rhetoric: it purports to be a "true relation," and provides factual information concerning the monster's apparition, although its frame, and the introductory paragraph, are still overtly religious, invoking a punitive God and emphasizing that men's sins have caused his wrath (sins that have to do with the civil wars, although the author does not seem to prefer any faction). The medieval fascination with wonders is here combined with Puritan hermeneutics; in this case, however, signs do not need to be detected because they are directly sent by God, and are palpable examples of his power. "Have there not beene," writes the author,

> strange Comets seen in the ayre, prodigies, fights on the seas, marvelous tempests and stormes on the Land: all these are eminent tokens of Gods anger to sinners. yet that one all: Has not nature altered her course so much, that women framed of pure flesh and blood, bringeth forth ugly and deformed Monsters; and contrarywise Beasts bring forth humane shapes contrary to their kind (2).

While providential literature tends to preserve the consistency of natural laws, nature's course is here radically altered. As in the Middle Ages, anomalies demonstrate the existence of an omnipotent force, and the presence of all the supernatural creatures that roam the Earth is ultimately enabled by God: "hath not the Lord suffered the Devil to amble about like a roring Lyon seeking to devour us" (2). This pamphlet, however, also emphasizes the proximity and historical existence of monsters, trying to authenticate itself. The birth of "the strange misshapen Monster" is accurately situated both in place and time: "July 28. At a place called *Ratcliffe High-Way* neere unto London, at the signe of the three Arrows, dwelt a woman named Mistris *Hart* . . . on the 28 day of *July* last, aboit 6. of the cloke in the morning she fell strongly in labour" (4).

In an earlier pamphlet, hybridity is, by the same token, a sign of God's ability to freely manipulate nature. In a *Most certaine report of a monster borne at Oteringham in Holdernesse the 9 of Aprill last past 1595*, a woman is delivered of a "Monsterous child, a terror to all the beholders. The head whereof was like a Conny: The handes was like a mole: The bodie, legges, and feete like a woman."[42] In this case too, the monster is intended to be an omen: "Many times hath the Lord shewed us his wonders, and marvelous works, to be a forewarning of the punishments which he hath prepared for sin". But in the seventeenth century, concomitant with the rise of modern science, hybrid creatures can work as messengers even without God's direction: for instance in *The Marine Mercury, or, A True relation of the strange appearance of a Man-Fish . . . Credibly Reported by six Saylors*, whose tone evinces an empirical stance, an interest in nature rather than in God. Like the Royal Society scientists, the narrator valorizes – on the title-page − the lack of sophistication of his witnesses,

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[42] V. Duncalfe, *A Most certaine report of a monster borne at Oteringham in Holdernesse the 9 of Aprill last past 1595* (London, 1695).

"which certainly could not be deluded by any shadow or phantasme, being hardy and spiritfull persons, though of a coorse and rough conversation." [43] And the information the man-fish reveals does not center on providential events or catastrophes determined by the wrath of God: it carries intelligence about a "company of rebels" that Sir Simon Heartley – we are told in the appendix – effortlessly manages to defeat. Furthermore, the narrator insists on the truthfulness of the story through the "strange, therefore true" trope, "according to which the very appearance of unlikelihood acquires the status of a claim to historicity." [44] He implies that nature is infinitely productive: the sea, he states, produces a variety of exceptional creatures, and those who will not believe him "beleeve no further then their weake sight can discerne." The novelty of a creature, the narrator implies, constitutes evidence of its existence, because nature's creativity transcends our narrow human scope − a variation of the "strange, therefore true" trope.

The secularity, as well as the transitional quality, of this description is made all the more evident by the way the man-fish is perceived. The sailors "did not know what to say or thinke of him, whether he were a deity or a mortall creature" (A4). These words articulate a form of ontological hesitation, and are subtended by two modes of explanation that are more and more perceived as mutually exclusive. In this pamphlet, the explanation of the uncommon does not necessarily lead to an acknowledgment of the divine agency, since nature is, potentially, a self-sufficient creator. However, the man-fish is still a sign, a mysterious carrier of news: despite its relatively non-religious characterization, it shares the proleptic function of most early modern monsters.

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[43] John Hare, *The Marine Mercury, or, A True relation of the strange appearance of a Man-Fish about three miles within the River of Thames, having a Musket in one hand, and a Petition in the other. Credibly reported by six Sailors…* (London, 1642). Further references will appear in the text.
[44] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 71.

A later broadside shows, however, that the traditional role of monsters as carriers of momentous messages is regarded with increasing disenchantment. In *The Worlds Wonder! Or, The Prophetical Fish*, the monster is turned into a mere stylization, a conflation of icons that evinces a human rather than divine creator. The subject of *The Prophetical Fish* evokes pamphlets such as *A Most certaine report of a* monster . . . which also includes the report "of a most strange and huge fish" driven on the sands by God as a warning (fig. ii):

The Worlds Wonder !

OR,

The Prophetical FISH.

Being a full Description of this Monster, its length & breadth, with Predictions on it.
As it was taken by Fisher-men in the Port of Cvcanga, neer the Province and Kingdom of China, in the year 1664. and sent to the Emperour of Germany, and from thence Convey'd to his Royal Majesty, the KING of Great Brittain, &c.
To the tune of, When Stormy Winds do blow.
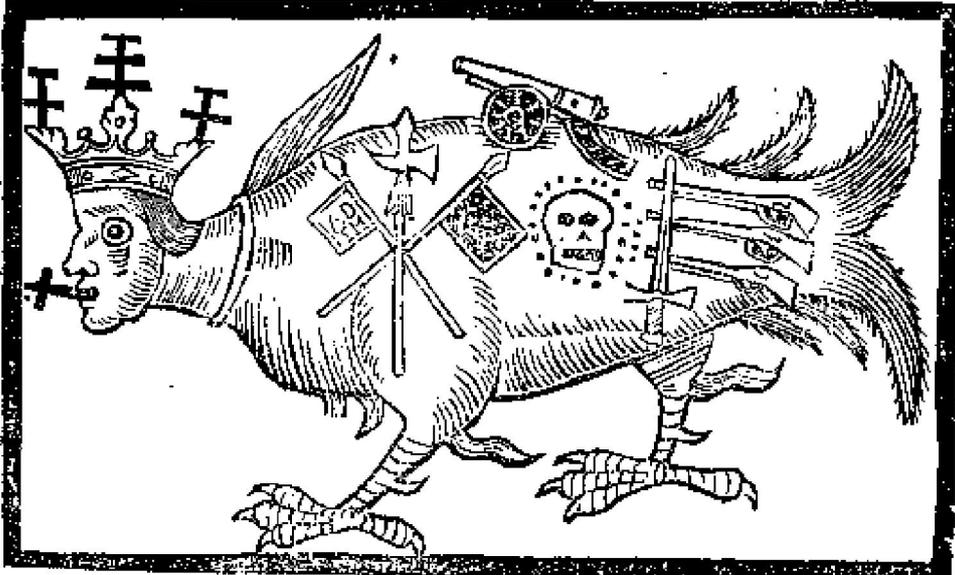
We tell you of a Wonder,
that lately hath been Shewn,
A Strange as Winters Thunder;
or Frost and Snow in June:
Fish by Fishermen was catch'd
late in Cvcanga Bay,
Where Health, and Wealth,
their Plenty do Display.

Sixteen hundred fifty four,
this Monstrous Fish was caught,
Sent to the German Emperour,
Then from him it was brought
To Charles the King of England,
A Prince of high Renown,
Which well, doth tell,
much wellfare to his Crown,

This monstrous Fish is twelve Foot long,
and likewise six foot broad;
Upon his back (so firme and strong)
he bears a ponderous load,
A Piece of Ordnance mounted,
upon a warlike Carr;
Whose Charge, at large,
doth threaten woful War.

The face of it, is like a man,
upon 'its head a Crown;
A Cross for England, in the Clan,
Presaging all's our own;
The Cross doth issue from his mouth,
which he seems to disgorge;
And cry, We'l die,
for England, and St. George.

This broadside enacts a semi-parodic objectification of the literature on monsters. It does so, first of all, through its title, whose exclamation mark emphasizes and exposes the pamphlet's (and a whole genre's) sensationalism, and through the image

of the monster, which conflates a set of iconic representations. A cross, a skull, a crown, rifles, and a cannon, are engrafted onto the body of the "fish," whose prophetical meaning is reified, foregrounding the usual function of monsters. Besides, the characteristics of the "prophetical fish" pointedly epitomize the general characteristics of medieval and early modern monsters: it has bird's paws and a human head – it is a hybrid. But the parodic element is latent: since ballads were often used to convey newness and truth, the representation of the monster can also be seen as "reliable." This broadside's oscillation between truthfulness and stylization in fact engenders a particular form of ontological hesitation – one that bespeaks increasing doubts over the existence of monsters.

Self-conscious presentations of monsters are, however, uncommon in these pamphlets. The influence of empiricism rather provided instruments to make monsters look real, to focus on their anatomy. Let us take a broadsheet entitled *A True and Perfect Relation of the Taking and Destroying of a Sea-Monster. As it was Attested by Mr. Francis Searson, Surgeon, who was present at the Killing of him.*[45] The emphasis on the truthfulness and exactness of this relation (although the broadsheet has neither a date nor a place of publication) is a sign of empirical commitment, further demonstrated by the plain and succinct language of the description:

> The whole creature weighed (according to Computation) at least 50 Tuns, and was 70 Feet in length. 2 The upper part Resembles a Man, from the middle downwards he was a Fish, had Fins, and a Forked Tail. 3. His head was of a great bulk, contain'd several hundreds of weight, and had a terrible aspect. 4. He had short, coarse and curled hair upon his head 5. His nose was long and large. 6. His Eyes were also large, and so were both his Ears. 7. His mouth was Answerable; for when he opened it, it was at least 2 yards wide. 8. His Teeth were thick, long and sharp. 9. His Chin was 2 Feet long, and had a beard 16 feet long.

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[45] *A True and Perfect Relation of the Taking and Destroying of a Sea-Monster* (London, 1699).

The focus of the description narrows on the body, rather than on the meaning, of the monster: the object itself is more important than the message it is supposed to convey, which suggests that the empirical perspective is displacing the traditional ontological framework attached to representations of monsters. On the other hand, if their origins are not extensively explained (as in this broadsheet), the nature that has produced monsters appears no less powerful, productive, and mysterious than God, all the more so since for a long time monsters have been perceived as divine creations. In other words, the presentations of monsters as objects whose origins are not fully explicable can activate the mode of interpretation they traditionally implied. Monsters often work as generators of inferences.

The empirical perspective is even stronger in *A True and Perfect Account of the Miraculous Sea-Monster. Or Wonderful Fish*,[46] whose title-page (fig. iii) helps frame the cultural changes that are taking place:

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[46] *A True and Perfect Account of the Miraculous Sea-Monster. Or Wonderful Fish. Lately Taken in Ireland* (London, 1674). Further references will appear in the text.

A True and Perfect
ACCOUNT ℛ·𝒟
Of the Miraculous
SEA-MONSTER.
OR,
Wonderful FISH
Lately taken in
IRELAND:
Bigger than an Ox , yet without Legs, Bones,
Fins, or Scales; with two Heads, and ten Horns
of 10 or 11 foot long, on eight of which Horns
there grew knubs about the bigness of a Cloak-
button , in shape like Crowns or Coronets , to
the number of 100 on each Horn, which were all
to open, and had rows of Teeth within them:
And in all other parts wonderful and unparalel'd.

Together with the manner how it first appeared and was taken
at a place called *Dingel Ichough* , in the West of *Ireland*, and
since brought to *Dublin*, to be shewn publiquely : And all other Ma-
terial Circumstances relating thereunto.
Faithfully Communicated by an Eye witness.
Printed for *P. Brooksby*, and *W. Whitwood*, 1674.

The typographical preponderance of the word "account," which, emblematically, towers over "miraculous," bespeaks the values and the rhetorical intentions informing this pamphlet. The fact that the fish is wonderful does not prevent its concrete description, "faithfully communicated by an eye-witness" that has been able to produce an exact measurement – in fact, the description goes on for five pages, is much longer than in pamphlets in which monsters were regarded as divine prodigies, and insists on the creature's size, which transcends the data of everyday experience. This pamphlet's deep commitment to empiricism is epitomized by its preoccupations with the epistemological implications of print: the use of a "Quarto page," specifies the narrator, entails a necessarily unfaithful representation of the monster. Another significant empirical element is constituted by the pamphlet's neat distinction between prodigies and natural entities:

> We might now divert the reader a little, and tell him that some Zealots hearing
> of a strange creature with several heads, ten Horns, and more than triple
> Crowns, took it for the Apocaliptical Beast, and fancied the Pope was landed in
> Person; but – *Non bonum est ludere cum Sanctis*, we dare not prophain a text for
> a jest, nor play the fool with Thunderbolts, and hope none will be so
> impertinently vain, as to place every strange production in Nature to the account
> of Prodigies, since, if we consider how large a shore the Sea makes of this
> inferior Globe, and that Nature is ever active and wonderfully fruitiful, we may
> not irrationally conclude, or at least suspect the Ocean to be inhabited with as
> many several species of Creatures, as the Earth; and that the vast Wilderness of
> Waters contains as many Monsters, and altogether Strange ones, as any in the
> Desarts of Afrique (8).

Monsters are no longer divine signifiers but natural beings, which, however, does not deprive them of the status of wonders. The naturalization of the uncommon does not necessarily cause its disenchantment, because nature is "active and wonderfully fruitful;" what looks strange in a part of the world may be perfectly common somewhere else, although the entire world is ultimately part of "nature," whose operations do not manifest themselves entirely on the local level, but are characterized by an intense variability and a broad geographical distribution. Though still a whole, cohesive entity, nature is, therefore, not defined as the result of a repetitive pattern; it is, rather, defined by virtue of its unrestrained productivity, whose underlying forces are only partly explained. This idea is connected with early empiricism's fascination with anomalies as ways to understand natural workings: as Lorraine Daston and Katharine Parks have shown, in the first years of modern science irreducible singularity fuels scientific enquiry.[47] Many sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century scientists saw nature's mistakes as keys to understand its secrets, a view, which, of course, contained the presuppositions for its own supersession: in seventeenth-century scientific journals such as *The Philosophical Transactions* or *Miscellanea Curiosa*,

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[47] Se Lorraine Daston and Katharine Parks, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

the description of monstrous births was increasingly medicalized, and the norm against which anomaly was defined gradually became preponderant.[48]

Still, in the late-seventeenth-century pamphlets I have examined here monsters (especially those whose origins cannot be reduced to anomalous births) are a symbol for the unpredictable and the incomprehensible. They represent nature's capacity to transcend common models of experience. Although progressively naturalized, the persisting otherness of monsters is, I believe, implicitly connected to the fading conception of monsters as divine creations, which survives as an interpretive possibility. Implying that the productivity of nature is not reducible to common experience – and implying that monsters cannot be reduced to a species or a class – these pamphlets also imply that monsters may be prodigies. Signifiers of the inexplicable, monsters evince a resistance to disenchanted nature, and evoke an ontological order whose rules can be radically subverted by the providential hand or other active principles whose workings we ignore. Thus, their naturalization is intended not so much to disenchant them as to suggest that there may be unknowable forces to which nature is ultimately subordinated. As a consequence, descriptions of monsters suggest that a true empirical approach is conducive to wonder: new experience astonishingly transcends previous experience.

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the production of pamphlets on monsters seems to have decreased. The ambivalence upon which their appeal is based is no longer possible in a literary system increasingly informed by the need to establish a clear-cut difference between the true and the false. One can clearly see this shift in travel writing – previously populated by monsters of all kinds. See, for instance, the rational sifting for evidence by John Hawkesworth in his *Account of the*

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[48] On the medicalization of monsters in the seventeenth century, see A. W. Bates, *Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe* (London: Rodopi, 2005).

Voyages undertaken by the order of His Present Majesty (1773): drawing from an impressive amount of travelogues, Hawkesworth examines all the available information about Patagonian giants – first encountered by Magellan's men, then fugaciously seen by almost all the sailors who coasted the strait in the next two centuries. He concludes that, in the absence of tangible evidence, and in the light of the testimony of later travelers such as John Narborough, who never saw giants, the existence of similar creatures can be discarded as a superstitious belief.[49]

The interest in monsters rapidly becomes questionable. However, monsters will thrive in the realm of fiction, and, as we shall see, will be incorporated by genres that belong to the constellation of the fantastic. The theoretical presuppositions for this shift can be found in Bacon's philosophy: *The Advancement of Learning*'s ideal division of knowledge includes a history of marvels. Although Bacon preserves a category – marvels − which will soon become unacceptable in scientific circles, his vision is already modern. Bacon's focus on the exceptional serves to deepen our understanding of what is common; he sees the knowledge of variables as instrumental to establishing the regularity of natural constants. This clearly emerges, for instance, in Bacon's discussion of the process of "rejection and exclusion" of the "natures" of objects in *Novum Organum*, most notably in his discussion of "deviating instances" (II, XXXIX). Prodigies or errors of nature, Bacon decisively argues, can help define the laws a given object deviates from. Accordingly, in his *Advancement of Learning* Bacon formulates a research program on "nature in course, of nature erring or varying, and of nature altered or wrought." The knowledge of "nature erring" implies as a touchstone a rational, regular nature: the fascination with marvels is now

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[49] John Hawkesworth, Introduction to *An Account of the Voyages undertaken by the order of His Present Majesty* (London, 1773), viii-xvii. On travel writing's progressive rejection of monsters, see Percy G. Adams, *Travelers* and *Travel Liars, 1660-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

subordinated to the objectives of modern science. Bacon's interest in "works of nature which have a digression and deflexion from the ordinary course of generations, productions, and motions" ultimately serves to debunk "books of fabulous experiments" and "frivolous impostures for pleasure and strangeness".[50] Taking the regularity of nature as a norm, Bacon classifies monsters and prodigies as fictive constructs, which satisfy a need for the strange and the fabulous, and implicitly defines the causes for monsters' fascination.

Thus, in empirical culture, the early modern approach to monsters as anomalies that can indirectly reveal nature's workings is gradually displaced by an interest in nature as a set of regular phenomena. In scientific discourse the notion of monstrosity is medicalized, while travel writing no longer seems interested in sirens and giants, assimilating the unknown to the known. Abnormal births, once seen as omens, paradoxically become objects of scientific inquiry, intended to explain the inexplicable. Monstrosity, domesticated by scientific discourse − and expelled from empirical travel writing, or retained only on the level of connotation − now meant malformation. By the eighteenth century the body of knowledge that had been built by exploring the constitution of anomalies has become self-sufficient, able to provide a touchstone for further inquiry. Nonetheless, in the first decades of the century, one still encounters an enormous wave of popular interest in abnormal births, the subspecies of monstrosity that was compatible with scientific inquiry. In 1726, a woman called Mary Toft purported that she had given birth to 17 rabbits, enthralling for many months both the doctors who came to examine her and the general audience. Competing factions discussed Toft's case, which also echoed in contemporary

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[50] Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (London: Dent, 1861), vol. 3, 70. On Bacon and Sprat's treatment of monsters see Robert Stillman, *The New Philosophy and Universal Language in Seventeenth-Century England, Bacon, Hobbes, and Wilkins* (Lewisburg. Bucknell University Press, 1995), chap. 3.

literature, eventually turning out to be a hoax. [51] The interest in monsters was medicalized, but still implied a fascination with marvels. However, according to Daston and Park, by the mid-eighteenth-century "the appetite for the marvelous has become, as Hume declared, the hallmark of the 'ignorant and barbarous,' antithetical to the study of nature as conducted by the man of 'good sense, education, and learning.'"[52]

v. The Novel as Providential Narrative

Retracing the development of the fantastic entails focusing on other literary innovations, informed by the same questions subtending its formation. A close relation between the fantastic and the novel exists, a relation that can be ascertained with respect to both their form and their origins. Not only does the fantastic deploy the empirical mode of presentation that has become a trademark of the novel, it also engages with the same epistemic issues that inform novelistic plots. As we shall see, eighteenth-century novels elaborated a system of verisimilitude that enabled the representation of the divine agency – and its full integration with the workings of nature − without overtly, and problematically, resorting to the supernatural.

As theorists have noted, the novel has been strongly influenced by traditional religious culture: the romance structures it tends to perpetuate often dramatize a providential order, which continues to shimmer under the surface of realistic language.[53] Although their frame is not overtly religious – let us think of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pamela*, shaped by concerns that are self-evidently economic and social –

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[51] See Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985), chap. 1 and 2.

[52] Lorraine Daston, Katharine Parks, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 54.

[53] See, in particular, Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), chap. 2, and Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

novels are not entirely secular. On the contrary, the coexistence of values derived

from empirical culture with a romance plot that is religiously inflected amounts to

their provisional reconciliation. Although the rise of the novel can be easily equated

with the rise of secularism, the genre's enormous success also evinces the need to

compensate for the crisis of traditional belief.

The novel's incorporation of both a providential teleology and an empirical mode

of presentation, discursive structures that are increasingly independent of each other,

bespeaks its links with the tradition of the fantastic. Both the novel and the fantastic

mirror the coexistence of potentially conflicting world views, combining them in

different ways. While the fantastic inevitably highlights the different ontological

frames of reference it deploys – to make a ghost's apparition compelling, it has to

emphasize its unexpectedness, its distance from the ontological regime of everyday

life − the novel tends to amalgamate them, to naturalize the workings of providence,

engendering a low-key wonder. The links between the two traditions in their initial

stage is particularly visible in Defoe's work and background: texts as diverse as

Robinson Crusoe, *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, and *A Journal of the Plague Year* are

a result of Defoe's intense but problematic interest in empirical knowledge.

The formal and ideological contamination enacted by the novel was enabled by

seventeenth-century genres such as spiritual autobiography, in which the archetypal

structure of romance was used for pious purposes.[54] This is evident in *Robinson

Crusoe*, rightly seen as a piece of propaganda for commerce and technology[55] but also

characterized by a substantial religious subtext – in Defoe's works, spiritual

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[54] On the influence of spiritual autobiography on Defoe and Richardson's works, see G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Richardson's links with the tradition of spiritual autobiography do not seem to have been extensively treated; for a reading of *Pamela* as a "spiritual autobiography," see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 364.
[55] On the technological subtext of Defoe's fiction, see Ilse Vickers, *Defoe and the New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

autobiography's subjective view is empirically inflected by amalgamating it with the perspective of travel writing. Even more explicitly than *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela* intermittently deploys Biblical typology and tinges its improbable romance resolution with religious overtones, while Fielding's works turn providential plots into self-conscious narrative constructs.

The seventeenth-century work that probably constituted a model for much subsequent fiction, certainly for *Robinson Crusoe*, is *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which a supernatural derived from both religious culture and romance is combined with a focus on concrete social issues that prefigures the novel's realistic aesthetic.[56] Bunyan's allegorical method entails consistency on the level of meaning, but not consistency on the level of mimetic representation, resulting in a fictional space that blends non-empirical and recognizably empirical, not to say historical, elements. Various identifiable social types (By-Ends, who has a tendency to confuse virtue with title, or Ignorance, who ignores the meaning of our moral action in this world) interact with entities that are drawn from the Bible and chivalric romance (the Giant Despair, the monster Apollyon, a hybrid creature that seems to be taken from a medieval bestiary) and move in a magic landscape (Christian explores the enchanted ground – which makes people drowsy and unable to go on in their journey – Doubting Castle – where giant Despair dwells – and even Palace Beautiful – the residence of the Lord of the Hill, in which Christian is armed). But the combination of Biblical figures and romance stereotypes with values, images, and attitudes drawn from contemporary history is ultimately contained within *The Pilgrim's Progress* overarching Christian framework. The dimension where events take place does not fully coincide with the empirical world: it is a dreamlike continuum (probably derived from the tradition of

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[56] On Bunyan and romance, see Michael Davies, *Theology and Narrative in the Work of John Bunyan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chap. 4. On Bunyan and the tradition of the novel, see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, chap. 8.

the medieval dream vision) where the physical and the metaphysical harmoniously

coexist, and an omnipotent divine providence ultimately binds together all phenomena

and entities.

In *Robinson Crusoe* – which perpetuated, and elaborated, Bunyan's realistic

rewriting of romance − providence takes a different shape, informed by empirically-

oriented criteria of verisimilitude. The supernatural manifests itself in an accurate

realistic setting: as a consequence, ontological instability is so fully developed that

Defoe's work has been seen as part of the tradition of the fantastic.[57] Robinson

deploys various interpretive instruments, both as a character, when he is on the island,

and as a narrator, when he is reconstructing his experience, thereby oscillating

between a materialistic and a providential view. He often sees events as a result of

God's direct intervention, and no less often he forgets God's agency and embraces the

chaos and the adventure of a purely material world, where ingenuity matters more

than prayers. In the most representative of his oscillations, on discovering that the

barley has miraculously grown out of the seeds that he threw away, he seems to

acknowledge the presence of supernatural forces ("for it really was the work of

Providence as to me, that should order and appoint, that 10 or 12 grains of corn should

remain unspoil'd [when the rats had destroy'd all the rest,] as if it had been dropt from

heaven.")[58] However, the empirical perspective derived from travel writing tends to

prevail and Robinson falls back into a materialistic vision, cataloguing his riches and

counting the people he has killed. Providence unmistakably manifests itself in the last

third of the novel, when Robinson's triumph and advent as governor of the island are

so irresistible and perfect – the apotheosis of the hero that, according to Frye,

constitutes the third stage of the career of a romance protagonist − that they seem to

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[57] See Ian Bell, *Defoe's Fiction* (London and Sidney: Croom Helm, 1985), 90.

[58] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 2003), 64.

have been propitiated by supernatural forces. ("As the all-powerful governor of his island, Crusoe can be said to resemble the inscrutable deity he has imagined earlier: to the cannibals and the mutineers he is a mysterious and irresistible force.")[59] And, in the *Further Adventures*, Robinson will fully understand that his successful venture into global capitalism has in fact been determined by divine providence. While in *Robinson Crusoe* Robinson's escape from home and subsequent shipwreck are presented as crime and punishment, and his new role is retroactively validated after his deliverance, in the *Further Adventures* his moral standing is less ambivalent. After gaining evidence of the legitimacy of his trade, which turn out to be extremely profitable, he tends to read his impulse to travel as engendered by God's will:

> in the middle of all this felicity, one blow from unseen Providence unhinged me at once; and not only made a breach upon me inevitable and incurable, but drove me, by its consequences, into a deep relapse of the wandering disposition, which, as I may say, being born in my very blood, soon recovered its hold of me; and, like the returns of a violent distemper, came on with an irresistible force upon me.[60]

Robinson is talking about his wife's death, determined, he thinks, by providence, which stimulated the desire for travel and adventure that is an essential part of his nature. This explanation emblematically conjoins the two ontological perspectives of Robinson's narrative: a providential, although painful, event awakes Robinson's natural instinct, which is presented as such, so that the "irresistible force" that leads him to a new sequence of successful enterprises is presented as both biological and divine. Robinson's "wandering disposition," which was originally at odds with his moral imperatives, and seemed to have caused his misadventures, is now a direct effect of the divine agency. Although intermittently, in the *Further Adventures* providence and nature are presented as one – ultimately justifying Robinson's desire

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[59] John Richetti, "Introduction" to *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 2001), xxvii.
[60] Daniel Defoe, *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, in *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London,1833), 218.

for travels. Besides, Robinson self-consciously becomes an agent of providence by destroying pagan idols in Siberia. This, of course, amounts to a supersession of *Robinson Crusoe*'s ontological hesitation, which dramatizes Defoe's inner conflicts more fully and compellingly.

    Pamela too engages with religion, presenting potentially contradictory ontological implications in spite of the fact that it purports to have been "built upon experience," to be free from "the Romantic flights of unnatural fancy," and to be faithful to real events. The narrative's denouement seems to run counter to the conception of empirical and historical experience implied by its circumstantial style and opening professions. In the light of Frye's archetypalist model − as reworked by Jameson – one clearly sees that *Pamela*'s representation of the world is not simply realistic. As in romance, the story is tripartite (descent of the hero to an inferior world, trial, apotheosis) and the hero is "something like a registering apparatus for transformed states of being."[61] In fact, Mr. B.'s sudden repentance, though psychologically motivated – it is determined by Pamela's contagious sincerity – is so sudden and radical as to betray its nature as romance inversion, and goes along with a broader change. Mr. B.'s monstrous servants are put to good use, and the entire village seems to be entering a state of prosperity, seemingly generated by Pamela's advent, but so pervasive as to suggest that stronger forces are at work − the virtue of Pamela is indeed "rewarded." Although Pamela's character should be read in the light of progressive ideals that imply a valorization of individual agency and of "nature" as a criterion for establishing individual value – the qualities that allow her to rise are to a large extent innate − she invokes divine Providence a variety of times, and does so in a fictional world whose workings confirm her belief. As in *Robinson Crusoe*,

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[61] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 112.

providence is active, and Pamela's professions of trust in God's agency are more than simple attempts to reassure herself:

> in every state of life, and in all the changes and chances of it, for the future, will I trust in Providence, who knows what is best for us, and frequently turns the very evils we most dread, to be the causes of our happiness, and of our deliverance from greater −My experiences, young as I am, as to this great point of reliance on Heaven, are strong.[62]

Not surprisingly, contemporaries were not always at ease with the novel's ending, problematic for Richardson himself. In a later stage of his career, discussing *Clarissa* and probably having *Pamela* in mind, he wrote that:"a Writer who follows Nature and pretends to keep the Christian System in his Eye, cannot make a Heaven in this world for his Favourites."[63] The "heaven" Richardson is talking about is more than an occasional metaphor: it bespeaks the new meaning and functions assumed by poetic justice, a notion that Richardson, borrowing from neoclassical theory, explicitly used and reflected on in *Clarissa*.[64] Poetic justice should here be intended not only as a category of neoclassical dramatic theory, but also as an organizational principle active in many late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works of fiction, in which providence was constantly invoked and romance resolutions were tinged with religious overtones. One finds this kind of poetic justice not only in Richardson's but also in Fielding's works, from *Joseph Andrews* to *Amelia*, or in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*. Martin Battestin has read the pervasive presence of providence in fiction as the sign of a productive cooperation of theology and literature: the teleological plot that characterizes works such as *Tom Jones* mirrors, Battestin argues,

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[62] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (London: Penguin, 1985), 312.

[63] Samuel Richardson, *Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 108.

[64] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: Preface, Hints of Prefaces, and Postscript*, ed. R. F. Brissenden, Augustan Reprint Society, no. 103 (1964).

the Augustan faith in order, also expressed by Pope's *Essay on Man*.[65] According to Battestin, "the Creation and that providence that preside over . . . [*Tom Jones*] are, according to the language of traditional Christian theology, the 'Art of God'.[66]

As we have seen, however, the idea and role of Providence could be easily eclipsed by a relentless focus on natural processes, and works mentioned by Battestin as examples of a faith in providence, such as Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, are in fact anxious reactions to skepticism, symptoms of a crisis. The insistence on the role of providence in human affairs that characterizes eighteenth-century literature rather bespeaks the need to persuade atheists or to compensate for an impending loss. Given the problematic status of the supernatural in this period, it is therefore more plausible to argue that "poetic justice operates more profoundly not as a representation of the divine, but as a replacement of it."[67] Happy endings such as *Pamela*'s − and, more ambivalently, *Robinson Crusoe*'s − provided readers with a vicarious experience of the power of the divine: they conjured up the "heaven" mentioned by Richardson.

In fact, *Pamela*'s temporality is not exclusively linear, often evoking an overarching Biblical teleology and a cyclical conception of history. This happens, for instance, when Pamela writes or recites psalms she has applied to, or rewritten for, her present situation (179, 349), which frame Pamela's story in a typological perspective. Towards the end, Mr. B. juxtaposes the original psalm 137 and Pamela's rewriting: as a result, the trials and conflicts of human existence seem to consist of the same archetypal essence, and the novel's representation of a linear historical development is relativized. As in *A Journal of the Plague Year*, empirical models of causality seem to

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[65] See Martin Battestin, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), in particular chap. 5, which focuses on the role of providence in *Tom Jones*.

[66] Martin Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, 142.

[67] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*, 124.

give way to a different, not necessarily immanent, ordering principle. *Pamela*'s non-linear temporality fully emerges in its sequel, in which "Pamela's destiny as a wife is figured not in terms of progress towards a defined if unattainable happiness, but in terms of an ever-increasing atemporality and typology.")[68] *Pamela*'s representation of experience is therefore not completely secular: while its protestations of truthfulness and circumstantial style conform to the imperatives of empiricism, its structure as well as Pamela's view reproduce the teleological movement typical of Christian narratives. Richardson amalgamates the two world-views without throwing into relief their potential incongruity: he builds up a seemingly empirical world to enable its ultimate re-enchantment.

In the light of this, Fielding's famous critique of Richardson appears not just a critique of *Pamela*'s moral contradictions: it seems to redefine the ontology of the new mode of writing that *Pamela* embodied. In *Joseph Andrews*, the role of the narrator is so prominent, and the romance resolution so artificial (with a sensational sequence of recognitions and inversions, we first learn that Fanny is Joseph's sister, then that Joseph is Mr. Wilson's son) that it cannot be mistaken for a providential intervention: as the title of the novel's final chapter states, Joseph's "true history is brought to a happy conclusion." The workings of poetic justice are complicated and placed into the hands of a self-conscious narrator. A layer of artifice coats the entire story, which, despite its self-contradictory affiliations (it purports to be linked to history, epic poetry, and romance; an ironic way to declare its novelty) escapes the generic and ontological ambivalence of the novel it set out to criticize. Ultimately, *Joseph Andrews*' seemingly providential organization is a human construct.

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[68] Betty A. Schellenberg, "Enclosing the Immovable: Structuring Social Authority in *Pamela*," in *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. David Blewett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 78.

A fuller criticism of the literary representation of providence can be found in *Jonathan Wild*, which includes parodies of most contemporary literary forms, paving the way for Fielding's major works. In chapters 11 ("The Great and Wonderful Behavior of our Hero in the Boat") and 12 ("The Strange and yet Natural Escape of our Hero"), the conventions of providential literature are recuperated and debunked.[69] Like many protagonists of seventeenth-century books of wonder, Wild is now a sailor in danger. His "greatness," however, seems to guarantee that Heaven and Providence ("whose peculiar care, it seems, he is") will help him. Wild is, of course, much less inclined to redemption than Puritan sailors, since he begins to "ejaculate a round of blasphemies," which do not seem to interfere with his deliverance. Then, he decides to face death: with "wonderful resolution," he "leap[s] into the sea for drink." At this point, a new chapter begins, and the narrator digresses on how poets and historians use dolphins or seahorses to rescue their heroes, a habit he disapproves of: "we do not chuse to have any recourse to miracles, from the strict observance we pay to that rule of Horace, *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus*. The meaning of which is, do not bring in a supernatural agent when you can do without him; and indeed we are much deeper read in natural than supernatural causes."[70] Fielding is obviously discussing the Classical pantheon of deities, but his mention of "miracles" has Christian overtones. By criticizing an unrealistic literary convention associated with classical works in a context that also evokes the tradition of wonder, Fielding highlights how for contemporary audiences literature tends to provide a vicarious representation of the providential, how aesthetic enjoyment is often based on a virtual apprehension of the divine.

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[69] On *Jonathan Wild*'s critique of providential narratives, see Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding. A Critical Biography* (London: Blackwell, 2000), 128-131.

[70] Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild* [London, 1743] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81.

In a similar vein, *Tom Jones* conveys Fielding's skepticism towards poetic justice, characterized as incompatible with an aesthetic committed to moral truth. In the introductory chapter to book VIII, "a comparison between the world and the stage," the narrator describes the possible reactions of the audience before Black George's immoral behavior (he has run away with Tom's money), discussing the functions and limits of poetic justice: "The pit, as usual, was no doubt divided; those who delight in heroic virtue and perfect character objected to the producing such instances of villainy, without punishing them for the sake of example." Fielding does not take sides with this part of the audience, criticizing the use of arbitrary retributive systems on the grounds that they are unable to take into account the fluidity of human identity. Partly contradicting his own way of designing characters, he states that nature does not create immutable personalities: "he who engages your admiration today will probably attract your contempt tomorrow".[71]

Fielding's critique of poetic justice is not consistent with what happens in *Tom Jones*, whose organization and denouement, as well as the narrator's professions of absolute control over his work, have often led critics – most notably Martin Battestin[72] – to identify an overarching analogy between providential order and artistic creation, which serves to valorize the former. Another strain of criticism has, however, emphasized *Tom Jones*' implied skepticism. Leopold Damrosch rightly defines Fielding's attitude in relation to Defoe's: "when Defoe asserts providential pattern we may protest that we see his hand . . . But Fielding openly admits that his hand is behind the arras, and offers the great structure of *Tom Jones* as an analogue of

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[71] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* [London, 1749] (London: Penguin, 1985), 265. Further references will appear in the text.
[72] Martin Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, chap. 5.

God's structure, not as a literal instance of it."[73] And, as C. J. Rawson has pointed out, the characteristically Augustan ideal of order that Fielding's work dramatizes is cracking under the weight of history: *Tom Jones*'s fictional rendition of a providential order engenders "a sense of beleaguered harmony, of forms preserved under stress, of feelings of doom and human defeat."[74] Rawson's reflections suggest that *Tom Jones* could be seen as the "created totality" theorized by Lukács, a self-conscious construct that sketches an illusion of order in the absence of a stable sense that may orient human actions (a sense, one could add, that science is not yet able to provide, engendering a sense of ontological disorientation, undermining the coherence of the old metaphysical order).[75]

The absence of strong metaphysical foundations in *Tom Jones* is confirmed by the narrator's position. Despite his centrality, he does not claim hermeneutic authority entirely for himself, drawing attention to reading and interpretation as subjective practices (see for instance, Mrs. Fitzpatrick and The Man of the Hill's narratives, which demand a complex response from Tom and Sophia). And, although he flaunts his creative freedom, he also compares himself to a constitutional tyrant rather than a "*jure divino* Tyrant" (60). Presenting himself as a voice that exists to circulate in the public sphere, demanding debate and collective endorsement, *Tom Jones*'s narrator cannot present his manipulative ability as a perfect correlative of God's providential hand. Thus, there is not a unified, commonly shared interpretive system available to both narrator and readers: the knowledge of the fictional world, and of the real world which is partly analogous to it, is not produced on the grounds of a single, clear-cut

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[73] Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 289.

[74] C. J. Rawson, *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), ix. Another anti-providential reading can be found in Leo Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding and Gibbon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), see in particular 163.

[75] See György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 90.

world view. This becomes evident if one focuses on religious rhetoric in *Tom Jones*.

There are, true, moments in which Fielding seems to deploy typology: banned from

Paradise Hall, Tom is compared to Adam: "*The World,* as *Milton* phrases it, *lay all*

before him; and *Jones*, no more than *Adam*, had any Man to whom he might resort for

Comfort or Assistance" (267). Biblical allusions are, however, used inconsistently:

instead of informing the narrative on every level and contributing to establish its

general meaning, they appear occasionally, and are part of the great variety of

allusions and metaphors mobilized by Fielding. Everett Zimmerman notes that "like

The Pilgrim's Progress, *Tom Jones* foregrounds interpretive concerns, but they are

not resolved through a deep understanding of the Bible that introduces a totalizing

reality, but by a broad mixture of secular learning and experience in addition to sacred

learning."[76]

 Fielding's religious views, and his literary rendition of them, are explained by an

essay published in *The Champion* (22 Jan. 1739-40), a response to atheists and deists,

in which, however, Fielding seems to share basic assumptions of the arguments he

attacks. Enemies of faith, he complains, have erroneously regarded religion as a cause

of unhappiness, and mistaken ills for goods: "we have seen Religion represented as a

Grievance, and Vices very modestly called the chief Benefits to a Nation."[77]

Fielding's view is, however, marked by doubts. Despite the fact that he refers skeptics

to the works of Tillotson and Clerk, who have "so well proved the immortality of the

soul," he does not ground the importance of religion in metaphysical foundations.

Using the subjunctive, he leaves room for skepticism: "Was there no future State, it

would be surely the interest of every virtuous Man, to wish there was one; and

supposing it certain, every wise Man must naturally become virtuous" (136). The

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[76] Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986), 141.
[77] Henry Fielding, *Contributions to the Champion and Related Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136. Further references will appear in the text.

notion that there is life after death, implies Fielding with a stance that smacks of

latitudinarianism, is a guarantee of social stability. Then, psychologizing belief, he

adds: "what extatic pleasure must he [Man] feel in his Mind, when he presumes that

his Ways are pleasing to the All-powerful Creator of the Universe? . . . If this be a

Dream, it is such a one as infinitely exceeds all the paultry Enjoyments this Life can

afford." Thus, atheists' guilt consists not so much of opposing a holy tenet as of

bringing unhappiness to humankind – a disenchanted world would be too hard to be

borne: "How cruel would it be in a physician to wake his Patient from Dreams of

purling Streams and Shady Groves to a State of Pain and Misery?" Fielding's view

fully emerges when − inclining more and more towards the position he is contesting

− he reacts to those who deny the existence of divine providence:

> And, supposing that the Deist, nay the Atheist, could carry his Point, supposing
> that the Belief of a future State, nay of a very Deity, could be rooted out of the
> World, and men could be brought to believe that this vast regular Frame of the
> Universe, and all the artful and cunning Machines therein were the Effects of
> Chance, of an irregular Dance of Atoms. Suppose the Atheist could establish his
> Creed . . . nay, suppose the Deist could establish his, that we could believe the
> Deity a lazy unactive being, regardless of the Affairs of this world . . . What
> would be the advantage accruing to us? . . The ambitious, the Voluptuous, the
> Covetous, the Revengeful, the Malicious steering clear of human Laws only . . .
> might feast and glut their several Passions with the most delicious repasts they
> could Procure (137).

Fielding suggests that the faith in God's ability to intervene in human affairs is a

supreme fiction, necessary for common welfare. As Ronald Paulson has noted, this

view has immediate implications on the aesthetic level:[78] Fielding's fiction, informed

by the desire to provide a spectacular representation of the workings of providence,

can be seen as a subspecies of that broader fiction that is religious belief. It can be

seen as an instrument to foster readers' need for, and dreams of, social order, the

dramatization of providence providing both a consolation and an incentive for good

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[78] See Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding,* 115. See also 258, in which the *Champion*'s essay
is directly related to *Tom Jones*.

actions. Thus, *Tom Jones* makes two ontological systems coextensive in order to provide a reading experience that affords relief from conflicts acutely felt by contemporary audiences – but such relief is partly self-conscious, tinged with skepticism. In the light of the author's interventions, the providential order appears an artifice, and, by virtue of this, its latent incompatibility with *Tom Jones*'s empirically-oriented sense of historicity remains perceptible.

The fact that "realism" describes just one side of the history of the novel can be seen in *Amelia*, Fielding's most "realistic" work. *Amelia*'s narrator no longer uses the playful, self-reflexive devices of *Tom Jones*, explaining that "life . . . may be called an art," and that histories such as *Amelia* may be called "models of human life."[79] The analogy of art and life attends the definition of a new kind of fiction, no longer anti-mimetic and committed to a rationalistic, not to say mechanistic, understanding of human existence. But these premises, as well as the pseudo-scientific strategy of observation and explanation professed by the narrator, do not set the tone for the entire novel. Gradually, *Amelia* turns into something else: the main character foresees in a dream that she is restored to her estate; her profligate husband, Captain Booth, converts, and in prison one of the men who participated in the forgery of Amelia's mother's testament – thereby causing her ruin − confesses his guilt. By chance, the man who listens to him is Dr. Harrison, Amelia's trustworthy mentor and friend. This denouement seem to validate the Christian ethos of the novel – insistently formulated by Dr. Harrison, who at the end says to Booth: "Providence hath done you the justice at last which it will, one day or other, render to all men" (vol. IV, 276). Fielding's indictment of England's social evils turns out to be a Christian romance. For Terry

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[79] Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London, 1752), vol. 1, 3. Further references will appear in the text.

Castle, providence in *Amelia* can be demystified and identified as plot,[80] but the purposely staged – and absolutely non- playful − inability of *Amelia*'s narrator to gain access to all the information concerning his characters rather characterizes the providential resolution as an independent process, which transcends the narrator's mechanistic approach.[81]

The presence of a dual ontology attests to the novel's links with the tradition of the fantastic. One of the presuppositions for the emergence of the fantastic was a coexistence of independent world-views: the development of a system of rules able to describe empirical reality potentially contradicted the cosmology inherited from religious culture. The distance between the two cosmologies, broadened by the diffusion of print − which, through handbooks, travelogues, and reviews, provided representations of the empirical perspective increasingly independent of the overarching discourse of religion − enabled various forms of literary experimentation. While the fantastic appears as a compound structure – overtly incorporating empirical and non-empirical elements − the novel tends to integrate the empirical and the providential. There are, of course, nuances. Defoe's fiction oscillates between belief in a providential order and a materialistic view in a way that is similar to the ontological hesitation of the fantastic. In *Pamela*, in this respect the most ambivalent among canonic eighteenth-century novels, the providential plot is hard to extricate from the seemingly historical progression of the narrative, which does not dramatize its ontological variability. On the contrary, in *Tom Jones* it is presented as a machine contrived by the narrator, so that the boundaries between elements drawn from experience and the agency of supernatural forces are easily discernible.

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[80] See Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 232.

[81] On the relation between Amelia's narrator and providence in the novel see Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 203-204.

As we shall see in the next chapters, the fantastic responds to the same questions, but functions differently. In apparition narratives and, later, the Gothic, the supernatural is directly represented: the tension between the empirical (the world of everyday life) and the non-empirical (the ghosts that come to perturb it) is overtly staged in order to engender in both characters and readers a sense of hesitation that is ultimately superseded. Once the hesitation is over, the natural and the supernatural are reconciled. Similarly, imaginary voyages displace the supernatural and the monstrous on the spatial continuum, describing remote lands regulated by different natural laws. These lands are, however, part of the travelers' universe, destabilizing, but ultimately broadening, their conception of nature. Thus, the fantastic heightens the tension between the empirical world-view and the entities it should theoretically negate, and at the same time overcomes that tension, enacting a self-conscious mediation.

Chapter Three

From Empirical Demonology to Supernatural Fiction

In this chapter, I shall follow the movement from purportedly factual apparition narratives to supernatural fiction, retracing the transformation of apparition narratives into recognizably fictional texts, and the emergence of ontological hesitation, the fantastic's distinctive device. To do so, I shall first describe late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century collections of apparition narratives, which deploy a high number of seemingly reliable accounts and use them to exemplify theological and pseudo-scientific concepts. I shall focus in particular on the work of Joseph Glanvill – a theologian and demonologist affiliated to the Royal Society − assessing the modes and extent of its mediation between the materialistic world-view of empiricism and the traditional Christian cosmology. In comparison with similar works, such as *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691) by the Puritan theologian Richard Baxter, or the *Miscellanies* (1696) compiled by the antiquarian John Aubrey, Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1689) is, I shall argue, characterized by a sophisticated deployment of scientific protocols and a complex narrative organization. Using highly developed empirical codes to represent non-empirical entities, Glanvill's work established itself as a model for subsequent authors of apparition narratives.

I shall then focus on a second wave of collections, authored by writers such as George Sinclair, Nathaniel Crouch, and John Dunton, who started developing the narrative potential of apparition narratives, reworking accounts included in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. I shall argue that late-seventeenth-century apparition narratives disconnected themselves from pseudo-scientific and epistemological apparatuses, becoming autonomous. Developing a plot structure, they internalized

both the religious subtext and the empirical rhetoric mobilized by Glanvill. Though professing an explicit religious purpose, these works presented themselves as marketable, self-consciously entertaining, and designed to provide intense virtual encounters with the supernatural – all the more intense since the empirical mode of presentation lent to the supernatural an air of truthfulness. The emergence of a market-oriented paratext is inseparable from apparition narratives' emphasis on the emotional response that their representation of the supernatural can elicit, ghosts explicitly becoming causes of terror.

The emergence of apparition narratives as appealing, market-oriented texts, went along with the uneven emergence of ontological hesitation – which I shall retrace in various early- and mid-eighteenth-century texts. Originally intended as instruments to persuade skeptics of the reality of otherworldly entities, apparition narratives had a demonstrative inflection: they internalized the point of view of disbelievers. Ontological hesitation was initially an interpretive possibility, the verification of the supernatural staged by Glanvill and other authors, including Defoe, self-consciously inviting readers to question their materialism. Gradually and unevenly, however, ontological hesitation emerged as an explicitly dramatized attitude, apparition narratives staging the presence of an empirical subject that skeptically faces the supernatural and acknowledges its existence. The development of ontological hesitation derived, I shall argue, from both the increasing dominance of empirical skepticism and its ability to strengthen intrinsic functions of apparition narratives. Presupposing the existence of clear-cut boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, empirical skepticism foiled the latter's otherness, augmenting its affective potential and making its manifestation all the more astonishing.

I shall conclude by describing the novelization – and full aestheticization − of apparition narratives, which were recuperated and amalgamated with other genres in Gothic fiction. Gothic novels incorporated ontological hesitation, discarding apparition narratives' pseudo-factual mode of presentation and privileging a self-consciously literary novelistic style. This recuperation, I shall argue, went along with a shift in the cosmological implications of the supernatural, which marks the end of the fantastic's prehistory. While apparition narratives occasionally presented the aesthetic of terror that will become typical of the Gothic, they still tended to moralize the supernatural and to frame it as direct evidence of God's existence. Besides, they deployed recognizably empirical protocols. On the contrary, in early Gothic fiction the supernatural tended to be autonomous of clear-cut moral and scientific frameworks, constituting, it has been suggested, a representation of the numinous that emerged as a response to the rationalization of belief. The new functions of the literary supernatural did not displace its mediatory function, still present at a residual level, but sanctioned the end of its redefinition.

i. Empirical Demonology: Glanvill, Baxter, Aubrey

The seventeenth century saw a variety of contradictory attempts to reconcile the new focus on the empirical world with the traditional Christian cosmology; Latitudinarian Anglicans, for instance, embraced Descartes and Gassendi's mechanism, while Puritan sects were attracted by "immanentism, or the presence of God in things."[1] Not surprisingly, empirically-oriented theologians reacted against what they regarded as pernicious forms of enthusiasm, although, Margaret Jacob has argued, the instruments

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[1] See Thomas Harmon Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," *Isis*, 72, no. 3 (Sep., 1981), 345.

to do so became available only after the Glorious Revolution.[2] In fact, in the last decades of the century a new, distinctly Anglican, natural theology that opposed both atheists and enthusiasts took shape: its most representative figures were the Cambridge Platonist Henry More and the Oxford cleric Joseph Glanvill, who elaborated what Thomas Harmon Jobe has called "experimental demonology,"[3] which provided evidence, as well as directions, to verify the presence of spirits on Earth.

Combining a self-consciously empirical perspective with a specific attention on the spirit and its workings, More paved the way for Glanvill, who elaborated a complex demonological system supported by "empirical" data. The first version of Glanvill's work is *Some Philosophical Considerations touching Witches and Witchcraft*, published in 1666, which Glanvill later reworked; in 1682, after Glanvill's death, More expanded his work, entitling it *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. Glanvill's purpose derives from the program Henry More formulated in his *Antidothe against Atheism*: to explore the world of spirits with – in More's phrase − the "garb of the naturalist," a piece of advice Glanvill took seriously: in *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, he urged the Royal Society to undertake a systematic investigation of spiritual phenomena:

> *Indeed*, as things are for the present, the LAND OF ESPIRITS is a kind of *America*, and not well discover'd *Region*; yea, it stands in the *Map of humane Science* like *unknown Tracts*, fill'd up with *Mountains, Seas,* and *Monsters . . .* For we know not anything of the world we live in, but by *experiment* and the *Phaenomena*; and there is the same way of *speculating immaterial* nature, by extraordinary *Events* and *Apparitions*, which possibly might be improved to *notices* not *contemptible*, were there a *Cautious*, and *Faithful History* made of those *Certain* and *uncommon appearances*. At least it would be a standing evidence against SADDUCISM, to which the present Age is so unhappily disposed and a *sensible Argument* of our *Immortality*.[4]

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[2] See Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1687-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976).
[3] Thomas Harmon Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science," 345.
[4] Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (London, 1668), 115-117.

In an age in which travels of discovery have assumed an epistemological significance, becoming instrumental to the constitution of a new knowledge – in *New Atlantis*, Bacon regards exploration missions as a crucial activity of Solomon's House – equating the "land of spirits" with the new world entails valorizing it as a field for empirical investigation: Glanvill emphasizes the role of experience ("experiment"), and, perpetuating Bacon's exhortation to build up histories of all branches of human experience, regards "extraordinary events and apparitions" as acceptable empirical data. The crux of the above passage is, however, Glanvill's explanation of the purpose of this new body of knowledge, intended to provide a "standing evidence against Sadducism".[5]

The idea that the apparition of spirits entailed the existence of God was not new: in *A Treatise of Specters*, Thomas Bromhall saw ghosts as unmistakable evidence against skeptical arguments;[6] in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* Ralph Cudworth wrote: "if there be once any visible Ghosts or Spirits acknowledged as Things permanent, it will not be easy for any to give a Reason why there might not be one supreme Ghost also, presiding over them all and the whole World".[7] Henry More believed that "a contemptuous misbelieve of such like Narratives concerning *Spirits*, and an endeavor to making them all ridiculous and incredible is a dangerous Prelude to *Atheisme* it self,"[8] and the Anglican Benjamin Camfield remarked that disbelief in spirits "hath carried . . . to the dethroning of God, the supreme Spirit, and Father of

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[5] For a general outline of Glanvill's program see Moody E. Prior, "Joseph Glanvill, Witchcraft, and Seventeenth-Century Science," *Modern Philology*, 30 (1932), 167-93.
[6] Thomas Bromhall, *A Treatise of Specters. Or, an History of apparitions, oracles, prophecies, and predictions,* (London, 1658).
[7] Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), chap. 5, sect. 1, 114-115.
[8] Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheisme, or An Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Minde of Man, whether there be not a GOD* (London, 1652), 164.

Spirits".[9] However, all of these thinkers did not empirically support their arguments: Bromhall's work, for instance, is a collection of anecdotes drawn from classical and Medieval sources, incompatible with the protocols of the new science, while Camfield's mostly concentrates on the structure of the otherworld.

Given Glanvill's involvement in seventeenth-century scientific culture, his program is not surprising. As an undergraduate at Oxford University he had written an essay against the principle of authority, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, published in 1661, later recast as *Scepsis Scientifica*, and he was among the most active publicists of the Royal Society. The fact, however, that he authored a work entitled *Scepsis Scientifica* did not thwart his interest in demonology. And, on their part, the Royal Society "virtuosi" who were in touch with him did not disregard his work as visionary. Writing to Glanvill on 18 September 1677, Robert Boyle urged him to regard accounts of apparitions cautiously, but did not categorically negate their truthfulness: "we live in an age," he writes, "where all stories of witchcraft, or other magical feats, are by many, even of the wise, suspected; and by too many, that would pass for wits, derided and exploded."[10] He invited him to collect "well verified . . . testimonies and authorities" of hauntings and apparitions.[11] In spite of contemporary attacks on superstition (such as Sprat's), witches and ghosts could still be legitimate objects of investigation: in 1672, Boyle went so far as to send Glanvill a report concerning a witch whose powers he had personally verified, and his ideas about magnetism are not incompatible with Glanvill's theories on spiritual powers. Boyle

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[9] Benjamin Camfield, *A Theological Discourse of Angels and their Ministries. Wherein their existence, nature, number, order, and offices are modestly treated of* (London, 1678), 172.

[10] Boyle to Glanvill, 17. Sept. 1677, quoted in John Waller, *Leaps in the Dark. The Making of Scientific Reputations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

[11] See Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambrige: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35.

believed in the existence and agency of "a very agile and invisible sort of fluids, called spirits, vital and animal."[12]

Glanvill's work of mediation also draws, however, on models that transcend the body of contemporary empirical knowledge. As Philip C. Almond notes, his attempt to establish the material existence of the spirit had ancient philosophical roots, centering on the notion of the "vehicles of the soul," derived from neo-Platonism and adopted by various seventeenth-century thinkers.[13] According to Origen as well as Cudworth, More, and Glanvill, the soul was "hosted" by an ethereal body suitable to the material world. For Glanvill, souls were created in a state of purity – they inhabited high and remote areas of the universe, beyond Saturn − and were later united to their vehicles by virtue of an impersonal law that presided over the process: "the wise Author of all things . . . made them . . . as that by their own *internal spring and wheels*, they should orderly bring about whatever he intended them for, without his often *immediate* interposal".[14] Glanvill used the "vehicle of the soul" as a link between the empirical focus of modern science and traditional Christian cosmology.

But let us now turn to the elements that evince Glanvill's valorization of firsthand experience, focusing in particular on *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. In his preface, Glanvill states: "the Proposition I defend is Matter of Fact",[15] later adding that "Matters of Fact cannot be denied because we cannot conceive how they can be performed" (73); though valuing empirical data, he does not invoke rational disenchantment: "We cannot conceive how such Things [as witchcraft] can be performed; which only argues the *weakness* and *imperfection* of our *Knowledge* and

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[12] Quoted from Simon Schaffer, "Godly Men and Mechanical Philosophers: Souls and Spirits in Restoration Natural Philosophy," *Science in Context*, 1 (1987), 64.

[13] Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*, chap. 1.

[14] Joseph Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis* (London, 1682), 98.

[15] Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London, 1689), 62. Further references will appear in the text.

Apprehensions, not the Impossibility of those Performances." For Glanvill, an understanding of the laws of spiritual phenomena is not even necessary in the light of sensory verification. (His position look less daring if one remembers the logic whereby Newton supported the idea of the law of gravity: "Newton consistently replied to . . . critics that it need not concern us that gravity's 'Causes be not yet discover'd'. It only matters that the 'Truth [of gravity's existence] appear[s] to us by phenomena".)[16] In other words, the inexplicability of an event is not a reason for denying its existence; and, if asserted by many witnesses, who disinterestedly endanger their reputation, it constitutes evidence for that event's truthfulness: "The most absurd and unaccountable these actions seem, the greater confirmations are they of the truth of these relations" (71). Glanvill resorts to the "strange, therefore true" trope that characterizes much early empirical writing.[17]

At the same time, however, he also attempts a materialization and medicalization of the supernatural: witches, for instance, have a power of "fascination" that "acts upon tender Bodies . . . for the pestilential Spirits being darted by a spightful and vigorous Imagination from the Eye, and meeting with those that are weak and passive in the Bodies they enter, will not fail to infect them with a noxious Quality" (81). And in an appendix called "The true notion of a Spirit," he defines a spirit's properties: it is characterized by extension, penetrability, indivisibility. Contesting Descartes and Hobbes, Glanville refuses to define the spirit in exclusively corporeal terms, but in doing so he paradoxically brings the mechanical workings of matter into the metaphysical realm: "besides those Three Dimensions which belong to all extended things, a Fourth is also to be admitted, which belongs properly to Spirits (169). This dimension is an "essential spissitude," a notion that for us is inevitably paradoxical:

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[16] See John Waller, *Leaps in the Dark*, 34.
[17] See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 86.

"the extension of the spirit," writes Glanvill, is "a certain subtle and immaterial extension" (171).

The section of *Sadducismus Triumphatus* in which Glanvill's empirical outlook fully emerges is, of course, his collection of apparition narratives. Glanvill has put together a remarkable body of testimonies, mostly epistolary. As in much early natural history and in reports published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, the inclusion of not strictly necessary circumstantial information is a sign of truthfulness, both on the level of the entire collection and within single accounts. A report's inclusiveness is, first of all, a guarantee of its author's commitment to the production of reliable knowledge: in the narrative devoted to the apparition of the "Demon of Tedworth" – one of the most popular in *Sadducismus Triumphatus* − Glanvill lists all the people who witnessed the devil's manifestations in Mr. Mompesson's house: servants, neighbors, churchmen, friends. His narrative's credibility is not based on single testimonies, but on a variety of converging perspectives, including Glanvill's: he personally saw a demon in Mr. Mompesson's house, refraining from making his experience known before collecting further information, since "Single Testimony" is not sufficiently reliable.

Although Glanvill strove to establish a status of scientific credibility for apparitions and thereby found a new field of inquiry, *Sadducismus Triumphatus* seems to have influenced the subsequent literary, rather than scientific, tradition. In particular, the narrative of the "Demon of Tedworth" became very popular, escaping Glanvill's authorial intentions. It struck Pepys, Addison, and, centuries later, Edith Sitwell; Cotton Mather recuperated and further narrativized it in his *Memorable Providence, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*; as we shall see, George Sinclair reworked it in his *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, published in 1685, and John

Dunton drew from Glanvill for his *Apparition Evidence* and for the ghost stories published in the *Athenian Mercury*. In the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Louis Stevenson explicitly acknowledged Glanvill as a source of inspiration.[18] The success of the "Demon of Tedworth" is not difficult to explain. The story's tension builds up gradually and effectively. "An idle drummer" arrives in town with a counterfeited pass, and Mr. Mompesson obliges him to leave: while other narratives directly focus on the apparition, this one has a prologue which does not immediately indicate that a supernatural event is going to take place − an apparently prosaic opening that elicits inferences on the story's development. Further inferences are elicited when Glanville reports that Mompesson's wife heard noises at night, attributing them to thieves. These noises inaugurate a sequence of unsettling manifestations − perversely occurring as Mr. Mompesson's family goes to bed − culminating in the beating of a drum, which becomes unbearably threatening when the beds of Mr. Mompesson's children start shaking, following the drum's pace. More and more people witness the phenomenon, which now includes increasingly violent episodes of the poltergeist. Night by night, signs of a demonic presence emerge: after strewing ashes over his children's room, Mr. Mompesson finds sinister drawings: letters, circles, and a claw. Then Glanvill himself appears in the narrative, which suddenly turns into a first-person report ("about this time I went to the House, on purpose to enquire the Truth of those Passages, of which there was so loud a report"). In contrast to other narratives included in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, fewer layers seem to be interposed between the reader and the facts related: the representation of Glanvill's direct attempt to verify the demon's presence establishes a tension within the narrative; previous, indirect reports about the demon are contrasted with first-hand

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[18] On Glanville's reception, see Coleman O. Parsons's introduction to *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (Gainesville, FL.: Scholars' Facsimilies & Reprints, 1966).

experience. Glanvill accurately describes his inspection of the room, and of the poltergeists he witnessed: "There was no body near to shake the Bag, or if there had, no one could have made such a Motion, which seemed to be from within, as if a living Creature had moved in it" (277). His verification culminates when he interrogates the spirits and a voice responds: "In the name of God who is it, and what would you have? " (278). After describing other similar manifestations, Glanvill relates that when the drummer was caught and tried, apparitions ceased, and one Mr. Compton "who practiced Physick" managed to prevent the demon's return for good.

The narrative of "The Demon of Tedworth" presents features that will be typical of the tradition of the fantastic: first and foremost, the presence of a first-hand narrator who witnesses a supernatural phenomenon, trying to understand its nature. Although Glanvill's collection clearly argues for the existence of spirits, staging his personal verification of the demon's existence implies leaving room for doubts: implies a form of hesitation. Such hesitation is not self-consciously dramatized: it is, rather, part of a more and more pervasive attitude towards the supernatural that the narrative, informed by empirical skepticism, incorporates. Glanvill's representation of himself trying to verify the demon's presence unintentionally foregrounds common doubts on the supernatural – which are, of course, dispelled once Glanvill's narrative persona has collected evidence. The success of "The Demon of Tedworth" is probably due to this implied hesitation. Empirical skepticism works as a foil for the supernatural, whose exceptionality − and fundamental incomprehensibility – is highlighted by a viewpoint that privileges explanation and tends to see natural phenomena as regular. Glanvill's narratives are characterized by a feature that will become typical of the tradition of the fantastic: the presence of a self-consciously empirical outlook which contrastively defines the otherness of non-empirical events. The manifestation of such

otherness has a complex significance. It is, in fact, analogous to what theorists have framed as an aesthetic process, amounting to what Todorov calls "the marvelous." And in cultural terms − that is, taking as a backdrop the ongoing secularization and the condemnation of superstition that was promoted by Royal Society virtuosi – it constitutes a form of re-enchantment. Glanvill's disorientating but at the same time highly revelatory contact with the supernatural is based on an outlook that is empirical insofar as it valorizes first-hand experience – and, implicitly, the skepticism that enables it −; at the same time, however, it allows the natural and the supernatural to coexist in the tangible world. Such coexistence was increasingly negated by dominant strains of empirical epistemology, which regarded nature as a seamless continuum and assumed that the unknown could easily be assimilated to the known.

Needless to say, the reception of the "Demon of Tedworth" would have been unacceptable for Glanvill − but it would not have surprised him. As we have seen, his main purpose was demonstrating not just the existence of ghosts, witches, and demons, but also the existence of God. Apparition narratives were designed to appeal to readers' emotions: they had an affective potential that Glanvill was consciously mobilizing: "Nothing rouzes them [atheists] so out of the dull lethargy of saducism, as Narrations of this kind" (23). Afraid that *Sadducismus Triumphatus* could be read in the wrong way, he occasionally attempts to deromanticize its content: "I confess the Passages recited are not so dreadful, tragical, and amazing, as there are some in Stories of this kind, but they are never the less probable or true, for their being not so prodigious and astonishing" (338). Glanvill's protestations of non-literariness bespeak his uneasy sense that his narratives are, in fact, charged with literary functions; they have the ability to provide a virtual experience.

Before discussing the reception and transformation of Glanvill's narratives, it is useful to assess the extent and methods of his mediation by focusing on contemporary works that deployed similar strategies. A collection put together with the same intentions, although its author did not have Glanvill's scientific outlook, is Richard Baxter's *The Certainty of the World of Spirits*. Baxter was a Puritan theologian, and was not affiliated to the Royal Society, but, like Glanvill, he regarded ghosts and witches as empirical objects, and the demonstration of their existence as a weapon against "sadducists."

However, Baxter's work is noteworthy less for its attempt to conform to the protocols of empirical knowledge than for its combination of the former with a pervasive religious commitment. *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* shows how nuanced the range of possible interactions between religion and empiricism could be: while Glanvill sees the epistemological value of his collection as no less important than its effects on the minds of disbelievers, for Baxter empirical evidence is just a provisional instrument to assert Christian truth. In fact, Baxter regards intuition as a more reliable source of knowledge than understanding: God's existence can be apprehended even without embarking on a rational investigation – "We shall not need all the organic Parts of the Eye"[19] – but to those who unfortunately tend to privilege reason over intuition, apparitions can be much more convincing: "all confirming helps were useful, and among those of the lower sort, Apparitions, and other sensible Manifestations of the certain existence of Spirits . . . was a means that might do much with such as are prone to judge by Sense" (A4).

Furthermore, Baxter's perspective is distinctly moral; in a Protestant fashion, he emphasizes individual free will ("It is the free will of Men that giveth the Devils their

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[19] Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (London, 1691), A3. Further references will appear in the text.

hurting power"), focusing on the modes of intercourse between spirits and humans, and invites readers to follow the example provided by angels. The apprehension of the otherworld enabled by the text is presented as a redemptive activity: observing the "frame of divine government," its hierarchy, and angels' benign behavior should lead us to saving others as well as ourselves (8-9). Unlike Glanvill, who devotes many pages to a critique of Descartes, Baxter insists on the importance of active works. In other words, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* is self-consciously didactic: the contemplation of the world of spirits is presented as conducive to readers' moral improvement. And, more consistently than Glanvill, Baxter is careful not to turn his relations into entertaining texts, all the more because the episodes he includes are less substantial than those narrated in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* consists of fragmentary, plotless anecdotes, its lack of narrative complexity attesting to its purpose. In fact, it did not spawn the number of imitations inspired by Glanvill's work.

Focusing on the way in which empirical culture entertained a dialogue with late-seventeenth-century notions of the supernatural also entails highlighting the apparition narratives that were not regarded as compatible with standards of empiricism. Let us take, for instance, John Aubrey's *Miscellanies*, published in 1696. Aubrey was a cleric, an antiquarian, and a somewhat controversial member of the Royal Society.[20] In his *Natural History of Wiltshire*, he included a section on "Accidents, or remarkable occurrences," which also dealt with supernatural phenomena, an interest he developed in his *Miscellanies*, a collection of anecdotes on the supernatural that includes sections on "Omens," "Dreams," "Apparitions," "Blows Invisible," and similar topics.

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[20] On Aubrey's life and works see Michael Hunter, *John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning* (New York: Science History Publications, 1975).

Aubrey's program is different from Glanvill's: "The Matter of this Collection," he writes, "is beyond Humane reach: We being miserably in the dark, as to the Oeconomie of the Invisible World."[21] Although some of its manifestations are perceptible, the "invisible world" is not an accessible field of knowledge. Accordingly, Aubrey does not discuss the epistemological status of his narratives in the light of empirical standards. In fact, his *Miscellanies* affiliates itself to strains of ancient philosophy that do not have much to do with the new science: "*Natural Philosophy* hath been exceedingly advanced within Fifty Years last past; but methinks, 'tis strange that *Hermetick Philosophy* hath lain so long untoucht" (1). Besides, Aubrey's sources include Père Arnault's *Histoire Prodigieuse* and collections of visions and prophecies, and he does not seem to worry about protocols of truthfulness. Not surprisingly, chapter 6 of the *Miscellanies*, devoted to "apparitions," is a sequence of anecdotes drawn from St. Augustin, Philip Melancthon, travel writers such as Fiennes Morrison, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, and "the tradition": "There is a tradition, which I have heard from Persons of Honour . . ." (60). Aubrey's models are classical historians rather than contemporary scientists; his anachronistic cultural matrix was clearly detected by contemporary intellectuals, who did not take the *Miscellanies* very seriously. Aubrey was criticized by the scientist John Ray – who blamed his credulity − as well as by the Oxford antiquary Thomas Hearne, and the divine White Kennet regarded him as "The Corruption Carrier to the Royal Society;" in the *Biographia Britannica* of 1747-66 Aubrey was described as "somewhat credulous, and strongly tinctured with superstition."

In fact, the *Miscellanies* is a duodecimo volume, probably cheap, designed for a reading that does not center on rational and epistemological scrutiny. It is closer to

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[21] John Aubrey, *Miscellanies* (London, 1696), dedication to James, Earl of Abingdon, n. p. Further references will appear in the text.

"books of wonder" rather than scientific texts, also including anecdotes that directly exemplify the role of divine providence. Aubrey's broad focus on the supernatural shows, in other words, that his main interest is to acknowledge and document the presence of the inexplicable without necessarily determining its relation with scientific knowledge. The *Miscellanies* not only focus on ghosts and omens, but include virtually all the entities and phenomena which the new science is calling into question, such as "Visions in a Beril, or Glass" and "Second-Sighted persons." Aubrey's work's cultural matrix is fundamentally pre-scientific: this entails the absence of the contrast between the empirical and the non-empirical that is crucial in Glanvill's collection and makes it relevant for the history of the fantastic. This does not mean, however, that the *Miscellanies* are immune from the influence of empiricism. Although Aubrey is not epistemologically rigorous, his *Miscellanies* have, to a certain extent, a pseudo-empirical stance: in collecting as much information as possible on the supernatural to demonstrate its existence, they seem to aspire to the quantitative completeness of Baconian histories.

ii. The Autonomization of Apparition Narratives

One of the first works written in imitation of Glanvill's was George Sinclair's *Satans Invisible Work Discovered*. Sinclair too was interested in the new science: he was regent at the university of Glasgow, and in 1672 he authored a work that entertains a dialogue with Boylian natural philosophy, *Hydrostaticks*. No less fervently than Glanvill, he intended to wage a war against atheism: his intentions are stated in the title-page of *Satans Invisible World Discovered*, conceived as a "choice Collection of Modern Relations, proving evidently against the *Sadducees* and *Atheists* of this

present Age that there are *Devils*, *Spirits*, *Witches*, and *Apparitions*,"[22] a purpose that is further articulated in the preface. There is, however, something that indicates other, not necessarily pious, purposes: the work's title. While "Sadducismus Triumphatus" unmistakably declares Glanvill's commitment, "Satan's Invisible World discovered" centers not so much on the necessity of defeating atheism as on the phenomena that Sinclair is going to unveil for readers. Such phenomena, which he brings to our attention on the title-page, have a high sensational potential: "Satan's invisible world" is more terrifying than God's host of angels. The description of supernatural entities disconnects itself from the overarching epistemological framework that pervaded Glanvill's writings, emerging as the main reason for the text's appeal: Sinclair's narratives' work of mediation is no longer grounded in a highly developed philosophical apparatus, and the emotional response raised by apparition narratives implicitly tends to become an aim in itself. The manifestation of the supernatural appears inseparable from the elicitation of intense feelings that was taking shape as a reaction to rational self-control.

The "Preface to The Reader" is characterized by an analogous tendency. Apparition narratives still seem to be intended for a redemptive purpose, but are fully autonomous of theological doctrine, in a way that seems to bespeak an unflinching commitment to empirical truth, but in fact disconnects the stories from their explicit cosmological meaning. This partly derives from the anecdotal structure of apparition narratives, which makes them detachable, enabling their autonomous development and fruition. Besides, Sinclair's emphasis on sensorial perception goes along with his tendency to disregard speculation: "I judge they [atheists] are best convinced by proofs which come nearest to *Sense*, such as the following *Relations* are, which leave

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[22] George Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (Edinburgh, 1685). Further references will appear in the text.

a deeper impression upon minds and more lasting, than thousands of subtile *Metaphysical* Arguments" (A). Sinclair emphasizes that his work is going to provide not so much abstract reasoning as intense virtual experiences, he assimilates the act of reading about an apparition with the act of witnessing it. As we have seen, in his collection Baxter does something similar, but his emphasis on the emotions generated by the representation of apparitions is justified by an extensive doctrinal apparatus and by the admission that, appealing to senses, apparition narratives are not orthodox instruments for conversion – they are, rather, suitable to persuade inveterate sinners. In Sinclair's work, the representation of intense emotional experiences is no longer presented as a necessary evil: Sinclair overtly encourages the reader's direct identification with characters.

Satans Invisible Worlds Discovered's capacity to enable a contact with the supernatural seems to be belied by Sinclair's direct admission that his text does not include first-hand reports. Such acknowledgment of the collection's intrinsically textual nature is not, however, presented as detrimental to the ability to move readers. Sinclair declares that the main source of *Satans Invisible World Discovered* has been Glanvill's collection: "I have collected some of them from *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, that excellent Book composed by *Doctor Glanvill*, and *Doctor More*" (A2). Discussing the story of the "Devil of Glenluce," unjustly accused of being just "an *imposture* to amaze and wonderstricke simples and credulous persons," Sinclair states: "This one Relation is worth all the price that can be given for the Book." Thus, the book is presented as a commodity whose worth is proportional to the intensity of the virtual experiences it provides. Sinclair's collection defines itself not so much as an instrument for conversion, but as something which appeals to – and is therefore bought by − readers hungry for sensationalism. Eloquently enough, in *Satans Invisible*

World Discovered, apparitions narratives are not framed as parts of a single textual continuum, but as independent, detachable descriptions that can be read autonomously; this further weakens their links with the doctrinal apparatus, and implies that a collection's purpose is not just exemplary or demonstrative. The representation of the supernatural is more important than the moral message it is supposed to convey, irreducible singularity taking over quantitative completeness.

Justifying his decision to rework reports already included in *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, Sinclair suggests the aesthetic quality of his narratives – one more sign of their autonomy. The story of the "Devil of Glenluce," originally written by Sinclair himself and published in his *Hydrostaticks*, was then reworked by Glanvill. Later, Sinclair recuperated and further reworked it. The narrative is, as its title recites, "enlarged with several Remarkable Additions from *Eye* and *Ear* witness, a person of undoubted honesty" (75). This sounds like a protestation of veracity, which apparently serves to endorse Sinclair's manipulation of the original text, the incorporation of new material guaranteeing the story's reliability. But other reasons for this addition emerge: "this Story is more full, being enlarged with New Additions, which were not in the former, and ends not so abruptly, as the other did" (76). Sinclair implies that the original narrative's abrupt ending was detrimental to its quality, which means that he regards the story's ability to provide reliable information as no less important than its ability to entertain.

Various other works tried to exploit Glanvill's success. One of these is *Pandaemonium, or the Devil's Cloyster. Being a further Blow to Modern Sadduceism, Proving the Existence of Witches and Spirits* by Richard Bovet, published in 1684. In this work's title, the sensationalist appeal of the supernatural coexists with the need to persuade skeptics – but it is noteworthy that "Sadduceism" is mentioned only in the

subtitle. A more evident sign of the work's purpose is the specification that the "Authentic Relations of Daemons and Spectres" included in the second part of the collection have never before been printed. Late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts conceived for the market tended to declare their novelty in the frontispiece,[23] a self-advertisement strategy parodied by Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*. *Pandaemonium*'s title-page is arranged to attract potential purchasers: devil, witches, and apparitions are conjured up to sell a book. More overtly than in Sinclair's work, the potential for entertainment is no less important than pious purposes.

Bovet's "epistle dedicatory," dedicated to Henry More, acknowledges Glanvill's influence: a quotation from *Sadducismus Triumphatus* is intended to express the purpose of *Pandaemonium*: persuading skeptics by means of empirical data. While, however, in Glanvill's work the inclusion of circumstantial information concerning eye-witnesses was crucial, signifying a narrative's reliability, in Bovet's collection the facts related seem more important than their credibility. Bovet tends not to specify witnesses' names, using titles such as :"An account of one stripped of all his clothes while he was in Bed, and almost worried to death by Spirits."[24] He provides, of course, a justification for his omissions: "in point of Respect, I have omitted the Names of some; yet they will be Attested by many worthy, and unprejudiced persons, whose Testimonies are sufficient to rescue them from the Attempts of the most virulent detractors" (A5); but narratives rigorously committed to empirical values tend not to omit their referents – unless they have to impose a sort of censorship on their content, as in *Onania*, a tract on masturbation. As in fictionalized travelogues, and, later, in the novel, the language of empiricism tends here to be used in a more

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[23] On print's rhetoric of novelty see J. P. Hunter, *Before Novels, the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York, London: Norton, 1990), 103, 167.

[24] Richard Bovet, *Pandaemonium, or the Devil's Cloyster. Being a further Blow to Modern Sadduceism, Proving the Existence of Witches and Spirits* (London, 1684), 222. Further references will appear in the text.

economic fashion, the pleonastic accumulation of unnecessary data typical of early

empiricism being incompatible with the need to tell a captivating story.

Similar observations can be made about Nathaniel Crouch's *Kingdom of*

Darkness. Published in 1688, *Kingdom of Darkness* belongs to a large group of works

authored and printed by Crouch and fictitiously attributed to "Richard Burton."

Relatively cheap duodecimo books, Crouch's works − which number over two

hundred and cover a broad range of genres − were intended for a popular audience,

and composed by individuals who had no formal learning. As Robert Mayer notes,

their price (1s) places them "at the bottom of the seventeenth-century price scale for

books of this length." Besides, the crude woodcuts they included, which one also

finds in *Kingdom of Darkness*, resemble those included in chapbooks, with which

Crouch's works establish a continuity. Following Roger Chartier's reflection on the

rise of a modern popular book market, Mayer writes that "pictorial representations

like these eased the way for readers making the transition from chapbooks to longer,

more substantial texts."[25]

Most books authored by Crouch were attempts to popularize modern

historiography and to capitalize on the early modern interest in narratives that

displayed some sort of documentary value. At the same time, their links with

chapbooks also show that they aimed at their readers' entertainment. This is

particularly evident in *Kingdom of Darkness*, characterized, as the other collections I

have examined, by a sensationalist title-page:

> The Kingdom of Darkness: or The History of Daemons, Specters, Witches,
> Apparitions, Possessions, Disturbances, and other wonderful and supernatural
> Delusions, Mischievous Feats, and Malicious impostures of the Devil.

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[25] See Robert Mayer, "Nathaniel Crouch, Bookseller and Historian: Popular Historiography and
Cultural Power in Late Seventeenth-century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27, no. 3 (Spring,
1994), 399. See also Roger Chartier, "Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern
France," in *Understanding Popular Culture from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed.
Steven Kaplan and David Hall (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 243-250.

Containing near Fourscore memorable Relations, Forreign and Domestick, both Antient and Modern. Collected from Authentick Records, Real attestations, Credible evidences, and attested by Authors of Undoubted Verity. Together with a Preface obviating the common Objections and Allegations of the Sadduces and Atheists of the Age, who deny the Being of Spirits, Witches, &c. With pictures of several memorable Accidents.[26]

The work's title does not bring to the fore its ideological commitment, focusing on superstition rather than on legitimate theology, and on "evil" supernatural manifestations rather than on guardian angels. Prefiguring Gothic fiction and eighteenth-century theatrical representations of ghosts, these collections present themselves as sources not only of knowledge, but also of fear; the relations included are characterized as "memorable," an adjective evoking the narratives' ability to generate intense virtual experiences. As well as Bovet and Sinclair, Crouch focuses not so much on the events his relations should disclose as on the relations themselves, ancticipating, in a sensationalist fashion, the variety − and the malignity – of the supernatural entities they describe. The fact that the narratives are "memorable" eloquently precedes the specification of their documentary nature and ideological purpose.

Not surprisingly, in the body of the text Crouch tends not to specify his sources, nor to dramatize direct testimony ("At *Colchester* in *Essex*, there lived one Mr. Earl about 1630. A young man in those days, to whom the Devil did frequently appear in the Shape of some of his acquaintance" [21]). While Glanvill dwells on the circumstances of each apparition, Crouch tends to erase them: we are not told the identity of the witnesses, we are just given fulsome details ("Her Tongue was drawn out of her mouth to an extraordinary length, and now a Daemon or Spirit began

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[26] *Nathaniel Crouch,* The Kingdom of Darkness or The History of Dæmons, Specters, Witches, Apparitions, Possessions, Disturbances, and other wonderful and supernatural Delusions, Mischievous Feats, and Malicious Impostures of the Devil *(London, 1688). Further references will appear in the text.*

manifestly to speak in her" [29]): the presence of the demon is directly acknowledged,

thereby forestalling the ontological hesitation that is typical of the fantastic. But it is

useful to remember that, as well as the other collections I have examined so far, *The

Kingdom of Darkness* implies a skeptical audience: both the paratext and the preface

contain objections against unbelievers. Although Crouch does not really aim at his

narratives' full endorsement, his use of an empirical language, and the fact that he has

put together a substantial number of relations, implies a demonstrative inflection. The

hesitation is, therefore, not dramatized; it is, rather, a potential for skepticism that is

inseparable from the collection's persuasive stance. Trying, though not very

rigorously and consistently, to convince us, the text implies that we do not believe,

constructing a reader whose skeptical attitude is, in fact, a precondition for wonder.

Various other collections of demonological writings show how between the

sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries apparition narratives have become appealing

both for printers and readers, sensationalism definitely taking over pious purposes.

One of these collections is *A Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery, and Witchcraft*,

published in 1715 by Edmund Curll. The presence of Curll's name on the frontispiece

is a sign of this kind of books' appeal to contemporary readers. Ready to exploit the

occasions afforded by the early-eighteenth-century book market, Curll imitated or

pirated successful texts, including, as this collection shows, relations of supernatural

events.[27] The collection's title-page and preface, though less horrific than that of

many works I have examined so far, straightforwardly declare the text's aims:

> And for as much as several Tracts have been published upon these Subjects,
> several of which are too prolix, and are intermix'd with tedious Disputes, which
> are scarce necessary to prove Truths which are so apparent; in this Work we

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[27] On Curll's life and works, see Ralph Straus, *The Unspeakable Curll. Being Some Accountof Edmund Curll, Bookseller, to Which is Added a List of his Books* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1927).

have taken Notice only of such as appear to be of undoubted Credit and Authority, and may be entertaining and diverting as well as useful.[28]

The fact that previous tracts are "tedious" and "prolix," and that these defects derive from a useless engagement with "tedious Disputes," is a clear indicator of this collection's lack of epistemological apparatuses, also evinced by the cursory way in which the author deals with questions of credibility. He states that the truthfulness of the relations is self-evident: a common empirical trope which amounts, in this case, to an oversimplification of the problems posed by apparition narratives. By the same token, the author does not specify what the "undoubted Credit and Authority" of his narratives consist of. And, unfolding a meaning implied by the derogatory tones of the opening lines, which criticized "tedious" and "prolix" books, he finally states that his collection is going to be "entertaining" and "diverting." Accordingly, the relations included in this history have a narrative articulation and a lack of specificity that would not have been acceptable for readers such as Robert Boyle. Let us take, for example, the first lines of a relation concerning the "Possession, dispossession, and repossession of William Sommers:"

> William Sommers of Nottingham, about nineteen or twenty Years of Age, about the beginning of October 1597, began to be strangely tormented in his Body, and so continued for several Weeks, to the great Astonishment of those that saw him; so there were evident Signs of his being possessed with an evil Spirit (152).

The author omits the nature of William Sommers' suffering; he rather emphasizes the witnesses' reaction of astonishment, their uncertainty before Sommers's torment, which is "strange," that is, irreducible to a clear-cut causal model. After a few weeks, the signs of an evil presence become, of course, self-evident: the witnesses' wonder − clearly highlighting the ghost's terrifying otherness − has been superseded, and their

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[28] *A Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery, and Witchcraft . . .* (London, 1715), A3. Further references will appear in the text.

conception of the world has been enriched by evidence of the supernatural, ultimately neutralized in a fight between good and evil that obviously ends with the former's victory. In this narrative, the hesitation, that is, the witnesses' sense of "strangeness" and "astonishment," signals not so much the empirical credibility of witnesses as their fear – a function it will retain even in full-fledged, self-consciously literary, examples of the fantastic.

Collections of apparition narratives were so successful that even books intended as critiques of superstition reproduced their format, trying to appeal to readers they were in fact trying to convert. Reading the title-page of Francis Hutchinson's collection, published in 1718, one can easily infer that it contains apparition narratives, while in fact it contains the most extensive critique of them produced in those years: "An Historical Essay concerning WITCHCRAFT. With OBSERVATIONS upon MATTERS OF FACT; tending to clear the Texts of the Sacred Scriptures, and confute the vulgar Errors about that Point." Hutchinson's intentions emerge in the preface, in which he laments the deaths caused by superstition, regards most supernatural manifestation as Popish tricks, and condemns the "fantastick Notions" entertained by both laymen and clergymen. Hutchinson's critique of works on the supernatural is analogous to contemporary critiques of the effect of fiction on readers, foreshadowing Fielding's famous indictment of Richardson's *Pamela* in *Shamela*. As fiction's representation of vice turns out to be corrupting instead of edifying, replicating it in the world of the reader, so the representation of the supernatural tends to perpetuate superstition – seen as irrational and ultimately dangerous – instead of eradicating it. Framed in terms that are similar to those mobilized for novelistic experiments, apparition narratives emerge as a form of entertainment, whose didactical purposes are often perceived as dubious. In line

with these purposes, the body of the text contains evidence against famous sentences or against reports of apparitions: Hutchinson intends to show how superstition has penetrated and corrupted British institutions as well as the mind of the general public. From the point of view of the present study, the most relevant passage of Hutchinson's collection is a list of collections of apparition narratives followed by remarks about their success:

> These Books and Narratives are in Tradesmen's Shops, and Farmer's Houses, and are read with great Eagerness, and are continually levening the Minds of the Youth, who delight in such Subjects; and considering what sore Evils these Notions bring where they prevail, I hope no Man will think but they must still be combated, oppos'd, and kept down.[29]

These observations suggest that apparition narratives, both in collections and autonomously, had a relatively broad readership, and were read for "delight." Clearly enough, Glanvill and Baxter's project has not informed the production and the reception of these texts: apparition narratives are regarded – at least by Hutchinson – as dangerous, stimulating irrational attitudes. Hutchinson's critique is, of course, in line with major cultural developments. The Witchcraft Act, and the new science's attack on superstition show how, at least on the institutional level, belief in supernatural phenomena was increasingly condemned. Furthermore, the use of empirical language was soon stabilized: appealing representations of the supernatural such as Gothic novels (starting from *The Castle of Otranto*, which includes a full-fledged theory of "romance") did not purport to be true; the supernatural was incorporated into self-consciously fictional genres. But apparition narratives were still successfully produced throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. Even Defoe, who went down in history because he pioneered modern journalism and literary realism, tried his hand at ghost stories.

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[29] Francis Hutchinson, *An Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft . . .* (London, 1718), xiv.

iii. The Dramatization of Ontological Hesitation (I): *The Apparition-Evidence*

Extremely sensitive to trends in the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century book-market, John Dunton tried his hand at a variety of genres and styles, imitating, copying or pirating texts that could be potentially profitable. *The Athenian Mercury* (1691) and *The Athenian Library* (1725) exemplify Dunton's interests. Insistently looking for the new and the strange, cramming all his writings with emphatic claims of novelty, Dunton tended to reuse, or produce "digests of popular accounts of scientific discoveries and hypotheses, narratives of strange and surprising events of wonderful phenomena to be seen when traveling or to be discovered by some unique means at closer hand, essays that broached some hitherto unexplored topic or that employed a method altogether new."[30] As versatile as Defoe, Dunton was also interested in the supernatural: both the *The Athenian Mercury* and *The Post Angel* included ghosts stories. One of Dunton's apparition narratives, *The Apparition-Evidence*, included in his *Athenianism*, caught the attention of Sir Walter Scott, who discussed it along with Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* in one of his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*.[31] Scott's interest in the narrative, which he rightly regarded as "contrived," is due to the fact that *The Apparition-Evidence*'s organization is self-consciously literary, marking, with *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* – which I shall discuss later − a shift towards a full aesthetic deployment of the supernatural.

The first explicit purpose of *The Apparition-Evidence* seems to be a moral one, since the title presents the story in the following terms: "The Apparition-Evidence: Or, *A miraculous Detection of the unnatural Lewdness of Dr.* John Atherton,

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[30] J. P. Hunter, *Before Novels*, 103.
[31] See Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchraft* (Edinburgh: Carey and Hart, 1847), lett. X, 77.

(*formerly Bishop of* Waterford *in* Ireland) *by a Spectrum*,"[32] underlining the

degeneracy of one of the characters rather than the wonder brought by the apparition.

The "unnatural lewdness" – the bishop is guilty of incest − however, seems

structurally connected to the presence of a ghost: the narrative establishes an implicit

analogy between the manifestation of the supernatural and the emergence of

irrational, "unnatural" impulses, thereby enacting a two-sided reaction to reason and

its values. Such connection will become a formal principle of the Gothic, where the

disruption of rational, empirically-grounded notions of reality goes along with the

disruption of conventional social intercourse: as well as the Bishop, in the *Castle of*

Otranto Manfred is moved by incestuous desire, which emerges in concomitance with

the supernatural.

The narrative's exemplary function seems strengthened by its purported

documentary value, having been "attested by Sir George Farwel, Knight, the

Reverend Mr Buckley, and other Persons of Quality . . . The whole being an Original

Manuscript, (and very great Rarity) never printed before." Dunton merges the story's

claim to authenticity with the self-advertisement that is typical of printed texts (and

which is a trademark of his writings.) In fact, however, *The Apparition-Evidence*'s

relation to its alleged original is unclear, all the more since the narrative is not, as we

shall see, a simple letter, but a carefully crafted tale, which displays its literary, rather

than simply rhetorical, quality: "There be Three Scenes of this Tragedy, and we shall

pass over to them in their proper Order" (352). The "proper order" is an aesthetic one.

The first part of the story focuses on the return from the dead of "the widow of one

Mr. Leaky," who does everything she can to draw attention to herself (including

killing her own granddaughter) because she wants her daughter-in-law to indict her

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[32]John Dunton, *Athenianism: or, the new projects of Mr. John Dunton, . . . being, six hundred distinct treatises (in prose and verse) written with his own hand; . . .* (London, 1710), 351. Further references will appear in the text.

uncle, the Bishop, who impregnated his niece. In a monologue that is directly reported (a dramatic convention generally absent from apparition narratives) Mrs. Leaky relates the crime and confesses her own guilt: "I deliver'd her of a Girl, which as soon as he had baptized, I pinching the Throat of it, strangled it, and he smoked it over a Pan of Charcoal, that it might not stink, and we buried it in a Chamber of that house" (355). This is the climax of the first "scene," followed by a second apparition which is introduced in these terms: "And now we must shift and change our Scene, and remove from *Mynhead* in *Somersetshire*, to *Barnstaple* in *Devon*" (356). In the second scene, an apprentice called Chamberlin sees two ghosts: a young gentlewoman carrying a child and an old man, who leads him to some boxes and a pot. These contain clothes, linen, money, and, we shall discover later, the remains of the child that had been killed by the Bishop, who is finally apprehended.

The Apparition-Evidence presents two moments of ontological hesitation: one is implicit, and the other is explicitly dramatized, constituting in fact one of the first examples of the strategy that will become integral to the tradition of the fantastic. After Mrs. Leaky dies, the narrator states: "being dead and buryed, some time after, she is seen again, by Night, and at last at Noon-Day, in her own House . . . I shall give you some eminent Instances" (353). The presentation of examples entails the necessity of documenting the apparition by presenting (fictitious) witnesses, of convincing implied readers of the fact that a ghost has actually been seen. The narrator suggests, in other words, that he will bring evidence which will lead us to accepting the existence of the supernatural. In doing so, he generates a virtual state of uncertainty, which gives way to a full suspension of disbelief once one has entered *The Apparitions-Evidence*'s fictional world. There is, however, a more direct example of hesitation, achieved by staging the viewpoint of one of the witnesses:

> A Dr. of Physick, who liv'd at *Mynbead*, having been in the Country to visit a Patient, as he returned Home towards the Evening, meets in the Field, travelling on Foot to Town, an ancient Gentlewoman; he accosts her very civilly, falls into Discourse with her, and coming to a Stile, lends her his hand to help her over; but finds and feels her to be prodigiously cold, which makes him eye this Gentlewoman a little more wistly than he had done before; and observes that in speaking, she never moves her Lips, and in seeing never turns her Eye-Lids, nor her Eyes. This and some other Circumstances affright him, and suggests to his fearful Mind that it might be Mrs. Leaky (353).

The witness is more and more uncertain of the identity of the gentlewoman: he realizes that she is "prodigiously" cold – implying that her temperature may have been determined by super- or non-natural causes – then he regards her with close attention, to understand who, or what, the woman could be. He registers her unnatural facial movements, and is "affrighted" at the realization that he may be facing a ghost. He cannot, in fact, ascertain the woman's identity: he had heard in town that Mrs. Leaky's ghost had appeared, and suspects that he may be facing it. His inquisitive stance is further underscored by the fact that he is "a Dr. of Physick." In the light of his professional competences, his collection of data concerning the nature of the woman, and his fear at encountering something that challenges the laws of nature, appear fully motivated; his position prefigures that of the readers of later supernatural fiction: the more one's sense of the laws of nature is normative, the more a violation of those laws can result in wonder − and fear.

The dramatization of ontological hesitation goes along with the transformation of apparition narratives into fiction. As we have seen, the dialogical pole against which these texts tend to define themselves are "sadducists": skeptics who do not believe in the supernatural. These collections aim at persuading disbelievers by producing information cumulatively; their demonstrative tension, their extensiveness and redundancy, encourage their ideal reader to move from skepticism to belief, going through a revision of his or her world-view that can entail a state of hesitation. At the

same time, however, apparition narratives start emphasizing the intensity of the virtual experience they provide, and restrict the treatment of their moral and epistemological implications to small sections that are internalized by the text and no longer constitute its frame. The full emergence of ontological hesitation and the process whereby didactic discourses are refashioned more economically amount to the aestheticization of apparition narratives, increasingly characterized by a complex plot structure and rhetorical devices that enable identification. Once hesitation and its supersession are directly described by means of a subjective, but at the same time recognizably empirical, perspective, a space for virtual experience is built. This transformation has, as we have seen, various causes: first of all apparition narratives' function and affective potential, which are less and less compatible with scientific principles. As we shall see, the novelization of apparition narratives in the Gothic provides further evidence that their work of mediation becomes possible only in a recognizably fictional space – in a particular sphere of empirical culture where a temporary suspension of the natural laws is possible: the sphere of the aesthetic. The transformation of apparition narratives into recognizably fictional texts evinces a dual, highly contradictory, need: on the one hand, the need to escape the constraints of the empirical world-view by bridging the gap between the empirical and the non-empirical, on the other hand, the need to maintain solid boundaries between fact and fiction.

Thus, ontological hesitation emerges as the fantastic's main formal device. It is, in fact, instrumental both to a sensational, necessarily empiric, reinstatement of the supernatural, and to the elicitation of affective reactions – first of all, wonder and fear – which emerge as a response to the increasing emphasis on rational control. Ontological hesitation foregrounds the empirical attitude, and in doing so it both

enables a deeper identification and develops apparition narratives' dramatic potential. Characters like the doctor of Physic in *The Apparition-Evidence* examine the phenomena they encounter: the limits of their world-view are thereby highlighted, and the difference between the natural and the supernatural becomes fully visible, so that the latter can be staged more effectively.

iv. Defoe and the supernatural

Defoe wrote an apparition narrative, *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* (1706), and three demonological treatises: *The Political History of the Devil* (1726), *A System of Magick* (1727), and the *Essay on the Reality of Apparitions* (1727). The role of religion in his work and background has been treated in a variety of ways: Maximilian Novak sees his demonological tracts as fundamentally skeptical,[33] while Peter Earle has registered the "paradoxical" coexistence of a rational and a superstitious stance.[34] Both positions overlook the unstable, transitional world-view that characterizes Defoe's culture: his interest in the new science was not incompatible with an interest in demonology. Educated at Charles Morton's Puritan academy, Defoe learned the principles of empiricism, and at the same time embraced a natural theology inherited from the dissenting tradition, which sees providence, as well as the devil, as forces that can willingly influence nature's workings.[35] This is evident, for instance, in *Robinson Crusoe*, where Robinson and Friday embark on complex debates on the operations of the devil and their relation to God's volition and power, as well as in *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *The Storm* (discussing the origin of winds, Defoe writes: "'Tis apparent, that God Almighty seems to have reserved this, as one of those

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[33] See Maximillian Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 15.
[34] See Peter Earle, *The World of Defoe* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 42.
[35] On Morton's influence on Defoe, see Ian Bostridge, *Withcraft and its Transformations, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

secrets in Nature which should more directly guide them [natural philosophers] to himself.")

Among Defoe's works on the supernatural, the most relevant to literary history is *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, one of the most popular early-eighteenth-century apparition narratives, reprinted many times and in 1707 appended to Charles Drelincourt's *The Christian Defense Against the Fears of Death* (mentioned in the narrative itself.) Other accounts were written on the ghost of Mrs. Veal, but Defoe's careful editing and mastery as a storyteller made his version more successful.[36] However, *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal, the next Day after her Death to one Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury* cannot be blamed for easy sensationalism: Defoe does not evoke the power of the devil, nor does he promise "memorable" reading experiences; seemingly, his main end is documentary truth. The title-page professes the relation's absolute veracity: "This relation is Matter of Fact, and attended with some circumstances as may induce any Reasonable Man to believe it."

But *Mrs. Veal*'s short preface is less similar to the theological apparatus that characterized Glanvill's work than to the conventions of contemporary fiction influenced by empiricism – in particular Defoe's fiction, which often internalizes the didactic rhetoric in a way that does not interfere with entertainment and plot. Discarding theological arguments – too complex and problematic – and establishing a cautionary perspective, Defoe refashions apparition narratives' didacticism, harmoniously connecting it to an autonomous narrative structure. In *Mrs. Veal*, narrative is no less important than doctrine, and the preface works in a way that recalls the editor's advertisement at the beginning of *Robinson Crusoe*: it is intended to provide general interpretive lines and sanction the text's moral and social

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[36] See Manuel Schonhorn, *Accounts of the Apparitions of Mrs. Veal* (New York: Ams Press, 1965).

relevance, underlining "that there is a Life to come after this, and a just God, who will retribute to every one according to the Deeds done in the Body."[37] In other words, the narrative is not intended to exemplify a doctrine: it is, rather, a text that exists independently and has to be actively interrogated and interpreted.

In fact, departing from a typical convention of apparition narratives, *Mrs. Veal*'s preface does not even condemn skeptics. This does not mean, however, that it does not acknowledge the existence of unbelievers. *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* is, conventionally enough, informed by a demonstrative inflection, internalizing the point of view of those who do not believe in the supernatural – and enabling a form of ontological hesitation that gestures towards the fantastic. In the "Preface", the editor writes that "the whole Matter, as it is here Related and laid down, is what is really True; and what She [one of the editor's sources] her self had in the same Words (as near as may be) from Mrs. Bargraves own mouth, who she knows had no Reason to Invent and publish such a Story, nor any design to forge and tell a Lye." And in the opening lines the narrator states that "this thing is so rare in all its Circumstances . . . that my Reading and Conversation has not given me any thing like it." The narrative incorporates information on – or simply anticipates – its reception, evincing and emphasizing its potential questionability: Mrs. Bargrave, who claims to have seen and talked with Mrs. Veal's ghost, has been regarded as a liar – although, the narrator says, "there is not the least sign of Dejection in her face" (1).

Thus, Defoe begins his narrative by summarizing the reactions generated by the story's previous versions, emphasizing Mrs. Bargrave's sincerity but at the same time framing the apparition as something "rare." While, collecting redundant information, late-seventeenth-century collections tended to naturalize the supernatural, *The*

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[37] *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal . . .* (London, 1706), "The Preface." Further references will appear in the text.

Apparition of Mrs. Veal is organized to stress its exceptionality. Mrs. Veal's trivial behavior − very different from the uncanny attitude of Mrs. Leaky's ghost in Dunton's narrative − in fact renders her even more scary, since she looks recognizably "real," − and readers can easily identify with Mrs. Bargrave, described as the average "objective" person. In other words, Defoe stages Mrs. Veal's exceptionality by building up an absolutely natural setting. In doing so, he both conforms to the writing practices of the Royal Society and prepares a foil for the ghost: Mrs. Bargrave hears "a Knocking at the Door; she went out to see who it was there, and this prov'd to be Mrs. *Veal,* her old Friend, who was in a riding habit" (2). The narrator does not even indicate that Mrs. Veal is a ghost, adopting Mrs. Bargrave's focus in a way that strengthens the story's aura of factuality − instead of reading Mrs. Bargrave's report, we see a reconstruction of it, in the style of a TV documentary − and thereby makes the apparition more realistic and uncanny.

The *Apparition of Mrs. Veal* has, however, a moment of empirical verification. Mrs. Bargrave goes to Mrs. Veal's brother's house, and she produces private information concerning Mrs. Veal's inheritance: only Mrs. Veal herself can have told her what she knows (6). In other words, *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* leads from a state of uncertainty to a state in which empirical evidence seems to suggest that ghosts actually exist: a movement reducible to Todorov's model, which theorizes a shift from a state of ontological hesitation to a full realization of the supernatural. This realization is, however, not fully enabled by *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, which allows conjectures until the end. As we have seen, John Dunton's *The Apparition-Evidence* works in a similar fashion: an apparition says something that is later verified. But Dunton's work does not incorporate a skeptical perspective so explicitly as Defoe's. *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* suggests that apparition narratives are

commonly questioned; as a result, clearer boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are established. (Ontological hesitation is, needless to say, based on our sense of such boundaries: it consists in the oscillation from a stable, conservative natural ontology to a supernatural ontology that undermines or complicates it, an oscillation informed by a skeptical attitude typical of modern empiricism, which Defoe's text has fully internalized.)

Defoe did not write other apparition narratives, but towards the end of his career he authored various demonological writings. Although they do not experiment with narrative and therefore do not belong in the genealogy of the fantastic, these works − *The Political History of the Devil* (1726), *A System of Magick* (1727), and the *Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727) − are worthy of interest because they are good indicators of both Defoe's and eighteenth-century readers' attitude towards the supernatural. Written in the wake of Defoe's novels, these tracts are often ironic, and seem to have been put together to tell – and sell − good anecdotes rather than to sort out complex demonological issues or to persuade of the existence of the spirit world. Still, they attempt a mediation between the natural and the supernatural that evinces their author's preoccupations: in a paradoxical fashion, they acknowledge the existence of the supernatural, at the same time displacing it on the spatial and chronological continuum. In doing so, they enact a "soft" disenchantment, which restricts the range of the supernatural without debunking it.

The Political History of the Devil marks a shift from the first stage of Defoe's career, which is useful to retrace briefly. In 1711, in his *Review*, Defoe publicly endorsed the belief in witchcraft, writing that "there are, and ever have been such People in the World, who converse Familiarly with the Devil, enter into Compact

with him, and receive Power from him." [38] His position had a political significance.

Defoe was working for Robert Harley, and they both regarded witchcraft as a good

instrument for Tory propaganda and for the defense of the ministry: implying the

existence of supernatural forces, the belief in Witchcraft ran counter to Whiggish

irreligion, appealing to both dissenters and churchmen. [39] *The Political History of the*

Devil performs a different task. According to Ian Bostridge, "it is impossible to

extract anything like a line from the miscellaneous jumble of ironies which go to

make up *The Political History of the Devil* and the anything but systematic *System of*

Magic."[40] For Bostridge, both works are skeptical and satirical, attempting to banish

the supernatural from the material world or to debunk it by means of a sustained

irony. In *The Political History of the Devil*, Defoe suggests that evil forces do no

longer act directly, displaced by party politics, which is even more devilish: "t' would

be hard to prove that there is or has been one Council of State . . . down to the year

1713 . . . where the *Devil* by himself, or his Agents in one shape or another, has not

sat as a Member, if not taken the Chair."[41] Thus, demonology unmistakably gives way

to satire. By the same token, in *A System of Magick*, Defoe asserts that in recent ages

the power of the Devil has been limited, so he is no longer capable of trusting Party

Leaders and Political Scheme-Makers . . . with the power of doing Mischief as they

desire it."[42]

The idea that the devil does no longer act in the physical world, however, does

not necessarily imply its non-existence: originally able to influence idolaters, the

devil's agency seems to have been progressively restricted to the human mind (see in

particular section X): the devil's power is a seductive one, it is responsible for men's

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[38] Daniel Defoe, *Review*, 8/90, 20 oct. 1711, facsimile bk. 20, 363.
[39] See Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformation*, 108-138.
[40] Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformation*, 136-137.
[41] Daniel Defoe, *The Political History of the Devil* (London, 1726), 9.
[42] Daniel Defoe, *A System of Magick* (London, 1727), 216. Further references will appear in the text.

illegitimate ambitions. Defoe suggests that in recent times the struggle between good and evil has become a struggle between reason and irrational inspirations produced by the devil (II, III), who can still manifest itself, although his existence is now mostly psychic: he tends, for instance, to act through dreams (II, IX). In a similar fashion, in *A System of Magick*, after retracing the history of magic arts, Defoe sees demons as forces that act in human minds, but his tone suddenly shifts towards satire. He states that every man is now "his own demon" (336), and describes social types that embody such change. Suddenly turning from a demonological tract into a piece of social criticism that recalls *The Spectator*, *A System of Magick* sketches, like *The Political History of the Devil*, a process of historical supersession of the supernatural. The devil seems to have stopped manifesting itself through a disruption of physical laws, acting, instead, through human consciousness. (This notion was even more straightforwardly expressed in an issue of *The Review* not yet shaped by Defoe's party affiliations: "in Ancient times, the Devil had frequent Communication with Men"[43] – which implies that now things have changed.)

However, the historical trajectory Defoe evokes is not fully delineated: both *The Political History of the Devil* and *A System of Magic* do not clearly state that the supernatural is no longer part of human experience. The banishment of the prince of darkness from the physical world and the disappearance of magic are suggested, but not described. *A System of Magick* self-contradictorily ends with a condemnation of fake magicians, but contains an appendix that focuses on good spirits, and Defoe's description of the devil's powers in *The Political History of the Devil*, despite marginalizing their role in the modern world, does not restrict their range to a remote past. Both tracts acknowledge the progressive disappearance of the supernatural and

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[43] "The Little Review, or, an Inquisition of Scandal," no. 14, 20, July 1705, in Daniel Defoe, *Review*, facsimile bk. 5, 55.

the emergence of a purely human dimension without sanctioning the supernatural's end. As has been noticed, they elude the problems their subject unavoidably implies.[44] Defoe's tracts are informed by the necessity of, and at the same time a resistance to, disenchantment: they suggest that the supernatural is no longer a tangible presence in human life, but, instead of denying its existence, they displace it onto the past.

Defoe's ambivalent stance, as well as his ability to produce marketable books, also characterize *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*. In the frontispiece, the book's function and intended audience are made explicit: the text includes "a great Variety of Surprizing and Diverting Examples, never Publish'd before." The tract's ability to entertain, as well as its novelty, are immediately publicized. Defoe's end is, however, higher. Since testimonies have already demonstrated the existence of spirits, whose reality is confirmed by "a Cloud of Witnesses,"[45] Defoe does not want to embark on disputes similar to those between "Mr. Glanville and his Antagonists" (5). His purpose, is, rather, an extensive redefinition of spiritual phenomena: "The Question therefore before me is not so much whether there are any such things as Apparitions of Spirits; but WHO, and WHAT, and from WHENCE they are" (6). Such redefinition is, paradoxically enough, tinged with skepticism, and with a keen awareness of the role of the mind in the perception of both actual and imagined spirits – which reminds of Locke's reflections on revelation in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (IV, XVIII). Most of the apparitions we see are, Defoe argues, delusions: "I believe we form as many Apparitions in our Fancies, as we see really with our Eyes, and a great many more; nay, our Imaginations sometimes are very diligent to embark the Eyes (and the

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[44] See B. McInelly, D. C. Paxman, "Dating the Devil: Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* and *The Political History of the Devil*," *Christianity and Literature*, 53, no. 4 (2004), 435-455.

[45] Daniel Defoe, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (London, 1727), 6. Further references will appear in the text.

Ears too) in the Delusion, and persuade us to believe we see Spectres and Appearances" (2). Defoe exemplifies the human tendency towards self-delusion through a collection of pranks (chap. XV). Such tendency depends on the fact that apparitions do not manifest themselves physically. Our conversation with spirits involves not so much our senses as the faculties of our mind: it is "neither tied down to Speech or to Vision, but . . . conveys its Meaning to our Understandings, its Measures to our Conceptions," and "deals with our Imagination" (3).

Defoe's redefinition of the spirits' substance and agency takes on an even more markedly skeptical tone when, running counter to most apparition narratives, Defoe argues that ghosts cannot come back from the other world. He contests the belief that souls manifest themselves at the moment of one's death, contradicting Glanvill's arguments and resorting to the authority of the Bible, which states that after death there is judgment, so no return is possible. Psychologizing the experience of the supernatural, Defoe argues that most apparitions derive from fears raised by conscience; if the souls of those who want to have justice done returned, the world would be filled by them (100-101). Combining the authority of scriptures with empirical skepticism, he fervently concludes that belief in ghosts is absolutely irrational:

> The very thoughts of it are so mean, so low-rated and base, that 'tis unworthy of our Reason, but especially of our Christian reasoning Powers, to entertain them. I take this absurdity indeed to be much of the Cause of that just Ridicule, which the wiser Part of Mankind have put upon most of the Stories which are told among us about Witchcraft and Apparitions; for that they are told with such evident Inconsistencies, that they cannot go down with rational People: Who can believe what cannot be true? who can make a serious thing of a piece of ridiculous Nonsense? (293)

Breaking the ontological conventions of the genre to which it apparently belongs, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* tends to broaden the gap between the natural and the supernatural, placing spirits in a extra-human realm whose

characteristics Defoe reconstructs conjecturally. Spirits (Defoe mostly focuses on good angels) probably inhabit other planets (if God created them, they have to serve a purpose) (27-29), and their social organization is probably analogous to that of human society (54). The interaction between their dimension and our world is, however, minimal: spirits give us misgivings through dreams (chap. XI), while the devil's agency seems to be restrained by the overarching power of divine providence.

As in *The Political History of the Devil* and *A System of Magick*, Defoe affirms the existence of the supernatural, but at the same limits the time range of its manifestations, suggesting that supernatural interventions in the human world are no longer necessary. After reviewing biblical examples of apparitions, he states that after the Coming of Christ there is no longer need for direct intercourse between spirits and men as in the past (chap. II). By displacing the supernatural both on the spatial and on the chronological continuum, and by restricting its agency to a purely mental sphere, Defoe finds a way to preserve it and at the same time to affirm an empirically based notion of the physical world. This kind of mediation bespeaks the increasing autonomy and cohesion of the new world-view, its resistance to a full accommodation of the supernatural.

v. The Dramatization of Ontological Hesitation (II): The Duncan Campbell Narratives

Duncan Campbell was a deaf-and-dumb seer, well known in early-eighteenth-century London, who inspired a number of books and pamphlets, in which his life and works were romanticized. *The Spectator* (no. 560) mentions him in these terms: "The blind Tiresias was not more famous in Greece than this dumb artist has been for some years past in the cities of London and Westminster." The most significant titles of the

production centering on Campbell are *The Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* (1720), and *The Friendly Daemon* (1726) – as well as Eliza Haywood's *All Discover'd: Or, A Spy upon the Conjurer* (1724) and *The Dumb Projector* (1725). These texts mostly center on "second sight" rather than apparitions, defining a different kind of supernatural events; as we shall see, however, in a particular case Duncan's powers put him in touch with a mysterious otherworldly entity, different kinds of supernatural bleeding into each other.

For a long time attributed to Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Duncan Campbell* and *The Friendly Daemon* have recently been eliminated from his canon (the former was probably by William Bond).[46] Printed for Edmund Curll, *The Life and Adventures* is, rather, an example of the latter's commercial strategy. Apparently structured as a biography of the famous seer, it is a highly digressive and heterogeneous text, seemingly put together to exploit the popular interest in Campbell's exploits and powers: it includes a body of irrelevant material, probably intended to make the book bigger and, as a result, more expensive. There is even a digression, which includes a table, on the language of signs,[47] and a historical digression on Monmouth's rebellion, part of the story of Duncan's father's life (60). Furthermore, most episodes related to Duncan's life are not directly relevant to what was framed – and the book itself frames – as his main characteristic: his "second sight." Duncan is sometimes described as a romance hero (128), and the story includes love-plots such as the story of Urbana and Cristallina, typical romance characters (144). Conscious of the work's loose texture, the narrator states that he has arranged the story so that "there may be variety in the entertainment" (242).

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[46] See P. N. Furbank, W. R. Owens, *Defoe's De-Attributions: A Critique of J. R. Moore's Checklist* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 141, 154.
[47] William Bond, *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* (London, 1720), 38. Further references will appear in the text.

The work's main theme remains, however, Duncan's powers, and the definition of their nature. The epistle dedicatory, signed by Campbell himself, is conceived as a critique of superstition, whose objects are opposed to the typically Scottish − and, according to the author, empirically verifiable − faculty of "second sight." Superstition is here identified both as "tricks" (v, xi) and "preternatural mediums" and "diabolical influences" (xvii). Superstition has a dual identity, including both irrational beliefs in "cheats and impostors" and actual demonic manifestations ("black arts," xvii). The epistle dedicatory's attack on both fake and real magic opens up a new space for Duncan's powers, which seem to belong to an uncertain ontological realm: are they natural or supernatural? Duncan calls himself "a living practical system or Body of new Philosophy" (3), defining his predictions as "experiments" (4), and using an empirical terminology which suggests the "naturalness" of second sight. The natural quality of second sight, however, is not immediately explained: readers face the mystery of the "new Philosophy" embodied by Duncan, and of its relation with their view of reality.[48]

The definition gradually and self-contradictorily takes place as the narrator retraces Duncan's life and development. His father is of noble Scottish descent, while his mother, endowed with second sight, is from Lapland, which is characterized as even more primitive and superstitious than Scotland – the middle term between England's rationality and Lapland's primitiveness. Duncan's birth was prognosticated by his mother and accompanied by signs (25-27). Later, relating episodes of Duncan's life, the narrator discusses his powers more closely: Duncan constitutes "a species by

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[48] William Bond's rendition of second sight as "natural" is different from famous descriptions of the phenomenon, like Samuel Johnson's (reported in Johnson's *Journey to Western Islands of Scotland* and in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*), which did not try to disenchant second sight. On Johnson's and on other eighteenth-century testimonies of second sight see Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience, Scotland's "Romantick" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 141-159.

himself alone in the Talent of Prediction" (67). To specify the nature of his powers, the narrator identifies three types of predictions: those enabled by "spirit and genii," by "second sight," and by the "arts of magic" (68) (To shore up his taxonomy, he also reports various cases of apparitions, some of which are drawn from Glanvill's work [80-100]). Then, self-contradictorily, he explains that Duncan's powers have been determined by a friendly genius (104). Despite his inconsistencies, however, the narrator clearly regards "second sight" as the main source of Duncan's powers, and gives an account of the phenomenon that purports to be based on documentary information: he explains the mode in which predictions are perceived (usually through symbols [177]) and reports the geographical distribution of second sight in Scotland (184), as well as a list of "real" people who have it (187).

The text's inconsistent rendition of Duncan's second sight seems both a result of the rapidity with which the text was put together and a self-conscious attempt to overcome the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural by producing a middle term between them. The formal dynamics of such an attempt are compatible with those described by Todorov's model. According to Todorov, the fantastic gives way to the marvelous after ontological hesitation is superseded and new laws are revealed, enriching the world-view initially posed by the narrative. Aestheticized apparition narratives work, as we have seen, in a similar fashion, reintroducing the supernatural into the world, thereby undermining the skeptical perspective that they tend to imply. The kind of marvelous apparition narratives engender, the "new" laws they reveal, are however, familiar parts of well-established beliefs. *The Life and Adventures of Duncan Campbell* goes in a different direction. The epistle dedicatory elicits inferences – and hesitations − on the specific nature of second sight: as we have seen, Duncan states that a "new philosophy" could explain his powers. This

"philosophy" seems close to natural knowledge (the manifestations of Duncan's powers are called "experiments") but it cannot be easily assimilated to empiricism. In fact, the narrator never fully explains how second sight works. The "new philosophy" remains unspecified until the end. Apparently participating in empirical knowledge, but in fact resisting disenchantment, the presentation of Duncan's second sight gestures towards, but never generates, a marvelous that is less familiar than that of apparition narratives.

A kind of ontological hesitation that seems compatible with Todorov's theory can be found in Eliza Haywood's *All Discover'd: Or, A Spy on the Conjurer*, which reproduces the rhetoric of the sentimental novel and the secret history that informs most of Haywood's works, but can also be incorporated into the genealogy of the fantastic. Apparently, *All Discover'd* does not affiliate itself to the genres I have examined so far: it does not directly engage with epistemological problems, and presents itself as a form of pure entertainment. *All Discover'd*, says Haywood in her short introduction, is *not* necessarily intended to persuade its ideal reader, the Lord to which it is dedicated, of the reality of the supernatural: "In the Course of my Observations on him [Duncan Campbell] for these twenty four Years last past, there are many diverting, as well as surprizing Occurrences; which, if they cannot convince your *Judgment*, will certain entertain your *Fancy*."[49]

However, the collection of anecdotes Haywood included in *All Discover'd*, some of which are comic, some of which draw from sentimental literature, are presented as a long demonstration of Duncan's abilities, and are interspersed with digressions on second sight and its workings, which, however, never go so far as to illuminate its nature. In most of these anecdotes, Duncan's powers are described as a source of

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[49] Eliza Haywood, *All Discovered: or a Spy on the Conjurer* (London, 1724), 1. Further references will appear in the text.

uncertainty for his customers, although they are ultimately verified. A shift from hesitation to certainty also informs the first chapter, in which the narrator herself stages her first encounter with Duncan. At first, she explains, she was highly skeptical of second sight ("whenever any of my Acquaintance told me of the surprising Solutions which Mr Campbell had given to the most intricate Questions propounded to him, and his amazing Art of writing the names of People at first Sight . . . I could not forbear laughing in my Sleeve, and wondering at their Folly" [2]), so she decided to discover how Campbell could deceive so many people.

After witnessing Duncan's sensational display of his supernatural perceptions (he relates specific details of a young woman's sentimental life) she starts suspecting that his powers may be real: "I must confess to your Lordship, that I was so much surpriz'd at what I had seen and heard, that when the long expected Minute was arriv'd in which he was to consult his Genius on my Account, I trembled with the apprehension of being told something displeasing to me" (11). She has entered a different cognitive state: she does not consciously believe in second sight, but, facing Duncan's powers, she is in awe of them; she has entered, in other words, a state of hesitation, verging on the acknowledgment of the reality of the supernatural: "I had the Apprehension of being told something displeasing to me, for I was already more than half convinced that there was a Knowledge in him infinitely superior to what I had believed". She becomes fully certain when Duncan writes "the dear fatal Name" of a man who destroyed her peace (13). This is just the first proof she provides: another woman enters the room praising Campbell for having foreseen her happiness with the man she married (16). In *All Discover'd*, the ontological hesitation experienced by the narrator is based on the internal focalization that is typical of the fantastic: a character directly experiences the supernatural, and, initially unable to

transcend her materialist world-view, resists explanations that are not empirically grounded.

While Haywood's *A Dumb Projector* is just a collection of short anecdotes concerning Duncan's powers, which presuppose knowledge of the character, *The Friendly Daemon*, written by anonymous, presents another original deployment of ontological hesitation. Like *All Discover'd*, it is characterized by internal focalization, consisting of two letters, the first by Duncan Campbell, the second by his addressee, a physician: both, as we shall see, regard the supernatural problematically, ultimately acknowledging its existence. Duncan's letter recapitulates his characteristics for the reader, and retraces the development of a sickness that deprived him of his ability to communicate. In a coffee-house, Duncan started suffering from tremendous convulsions that prevented him from writing, and gradually lost his sight. Duncan's rendition of his illness is ambivalent: it is initially presented as an unexplained physiological process, then he states that a "tormenting demon" possessed him.[50] By the same token, he first resorts to natural cures, which prove completely useless, and is finally healed by a "Genius or guardian angel" (9). Dressed in white, the angel holds a "label" which contains Duncan's cure: by combining a loadstone with a particular powder, Duncan will be delivered of his mysterious illness. Duncan's reaction is one of skepticism and surprise: he has "a great Struggle with his natural Reason" (10), that is, he enters a state of ontological hesitation, then he becomes fully confident of providence and sets out to collect the ingredients prescribed by the spirit. His acknowledgment of the reality of his guardian angel is based on the same pseudo-empirical logic that informed late-seventeenth-century collections of apparition narratives: subordinating his rational doubts to direct experience − "having thus

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[50] *The Friendly Daemon, or The Generous Apparition* (London, 1726), 6. Further references will appear in the text.

subjected my Reason to my Senses . . ." (1) – he privileges sensory data over rational

skepticism. His belief is further endorsed by a verification of the apparition's

existence and powers: combining the loadstone with the other ingredients Duncan has

put together, he finally recovers. Duncan's "rational" doubts seem to imply an

antinomy between reason and experience, but, paradoxically, they depend on the same

attitude subtending his verification of the supernatural: his idea of "reason," which

implies a set of ontological expectations, is based on empirical common sense.

The ontology of Duncan's story is more complex than that of apparition

narratives: not only does he face doubts about the spirit that cured him, but also about

the cure the spirit prescribed, whose nature is, until the end, uncertain. In fact, the

second letter, a reply written by a physician to whom Duncan, astonished, related his

experience, oscillates between skepticism and belief. "Too great a student of Physick

and natural Philosophy," the physician tends not to believe in miracles, but he is self-

contradictorily ready to admit "that the Power of Healing is in the Hands of

Providence" (13); he cannot express a judgment on the miraculous prescription, since

Duncan, following his guardian angel's orders, cannot divulge it. The physician is

inclined to regard apparition narratives as trustworthy, and includes reports

concerning evil spirits and guardian angels. Then, in a geological digression that

focuses on the virtues of loadstones (27), he suggests that his knowledge is unable to

explain Duncan's particular use of the ingredients: "upon what Reason in Nature,"

writes the doctor, such a new System can be founded, seems very remote from my

present understanding" (30). *The Friendly Daemon* presents therefore two different

forms of ontological hesitation, both leading to re-enchantment. Duncan encounters

his guardian angel, a tangible embodiment of the divine providence, and the doctor

faces the impossibility of understanding the nature of the medicine that healed

Duncan, regarding it as the foundation of a new system, irreducible to his knowledge. As in late-seventeenth-century narratives, re-enchantment paradoxically derives from direct experience.

In the consciousness of both readers and writers, however, the natural and the supernatural are increasingly difficult to reconcile, so the claim to direct experience inevitably goes along with the display of a skeptical attitude that demands verification. As we have seen, Duncan's rational stance initially prevents him from believing in the apparition even though he has a direct experience of the supernatural, and throughout his letter the physician tries to rationalize the mysterious medicine's powers on empirical grounds. Nevertheless, both wind up acknowledging the existence of supernatural − rather than simply providential − forces. Their ontological hesitation results from the prevalence of materialist explanatory models and related skeptical attitudes, which tend to reproduce themselves in fictional discourse. However, the re-enchantment enacted by literary texts is not only the temporary suspension of a well-established model of causality, it is also the full explicitation of a "superstitious" attitude that persists in spite of the empirical world-view: one should not forget, for example, that in his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* Samuel Johnson fully acknowledges the existence of second sight.

vi. The Shift to the Gothic

The role of apparition narratives in the development of the Gothic has often been thrown into relief by scholars:[51] "apparition narratives provided a stepping-stone from a largely oral and popular culture of ghost stories to a new literary tradition led by

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[51] See the pioneering articles by C. O. Parsons, "The Interest of Scott's Public in the Supernatural," *Notes and Queries*, 185 (1943), 92-100, and "Ghost-Stories before Defoe," *Notes and Queries*, 201, (1956), 293-298. The most recent book that explicitly focuses on apparition narratives and the rise of the Gothic is E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

enthusiastic consumer demand".[52] The Gothic resulted, in fact, from the amalgamation of various genres: apparition narratives, eighteenth-century poetry, Elizabethan drama, and the novel − which provided the framework within which all these styles were organized, as well as new standards of psychological verisimilitude. To assess the role of apparition narratives in the emergence of the Gothic, it is therefore necessary to sketch the models that influenced its representation of the supernatural.

Each of the genres I have mentioned seems to have set up a specific function for the new kind of fiction. Much eighteenth-century poetry presents a self-conscious aesthetic of terror that only intermittently emerges in early-eighteenth-century apparition narratives – it is absent, for instance, from *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*. Poets such as Mallet, Broome, Watts, and Parnell describe witches, ghosts, and demons as causes of fear, equating the numinous with the horrific, preparing settings, themes, and effects later developed by the Gothic.[53] The sense of the numinous characterizing much of this poetry is, however, different from the supernatural terrors of the Gothic, being still contained within orthodox belief. In poems such as Isaac Watts's "The Day of Judgment" and "Song for Children," or Thomas Parnell's "The Gift of Poetry," horror and fear are instrumental to the apprehension of God's power: they have, in other words, a moral function. Let us take, for instance, an early work by Edward Young, "The Last Day" (1713):

> Horrours, *beneath*, darkness, Hell
> Of Hell, where torments behind torments dwell; . . .
> Enclos'd with horrous, and transfix'd with pain,
> Rolling in vengeance, struggling with his chain:
> To talk to fiery tempests; to implore

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[52] E. J. Clery, Robert Miles, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 5.

[53] On eighteenth-century poetry of horror see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Insistence of Horror. Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusets: Harvard University Press, 1962).

> The raging flame to give its burnings o'er
> To toss, to writhe, to pant beneath his load
> And bear the weight of an offended God.[54]

An analogous view of the divine as the source of a horror that enables moral regeneration can be found in the first theories of what was later called the sublime. In his *Spectator* paper 110 (July 6, 1711), Addison regards the ruins of an abbey surrounded by a dark forest as conducive to imaginary terrors: "I do not at all wonder that weak Minds fill it with Specters and Apparitions".[55] In the first part of the paper, Addison, posing as a skeptical thinker, seems to disregard superstition, considering the supernatural as an effect produced by particular circumstances, but he later criticizes those who, "contrary to the Reports of all Historians sacred and profane, ancient and modern, and to the Traditions of all Nations, think the Appearance of Spirits fabulous and groundless" (I, 455). He concludes by reporting a story from Josephus about the ghost of a husband who returned to admonish his wife. Addison does not have a clear stance on the reality of apparitions, but he certainly thinks that witnessing and fearing the supernatural can have a moral and spiritual function, strengthening one's belief. By the same token, in "The Usefulness of the Stage" and "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,"[56] both published in 1704, John Dennis argues that the excitement of passions elicited by the manifestation of the supernatural can be morally beneficial.[57]

At the same time, the supernatural, and the emotional effects it entails, were read as distinctive features of a pre-rational past, whose supreme literary achievement was

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[54] Alexander Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper* (London: J. Johnson, 1810), vol. 13, 375-376.

[55] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 1, 453.

[56] John Dennis, *The Critical Works*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1939), vol. 1, 351, 356.

[57] On early theorizations of the sublime and their relation to the Gothic, see Robert F. Geary, *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief, and Literary Change* (Lewiston, N. Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), chap. 1.

Elizabethan drama, in particular Shakespeare's work. Condemning the use of the supernatural in contemporary literature, Johnson found it acceptable in Shakespeare's plays because of the different beliefs of his audience.[58] By the same token, critics such as Thomas Warton and Richard Hurd tended to regard belief in, and representations of, the supernatural as characteristic of precedent stages of human and social evolution.[59] The same attitudes characterize a particular strain of eighteenth-century poetry: in his "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland," William Collins displaces superstition onto the geographical distance of Scotland, often characterized as pre-modern.

The founding work of the Gothic took on a similar attitude: in his preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole purports that the story has been written by a twelfth-century Italian monk, who used his art "to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions."[60] (However, Walpole's authorship was soon revealed, and a new preface was written, formulating a new theory of fiction: *The Castle of Otranto* presents itself as an attempt "to blend the two kinds of romance: the ancient and the modern." The past and its beliefs turn out to have been recreated artificially, by means of a recognizably modern narrative technology). Walpole established a model: most Gothic novels tend to be set in a dark past or in countries such as Italy and France, where modernization lagged behind.

Thus, the Gothic is based on a conflation of genres that, on various levels, engage with the supernatural: more or less directly influenced by the poetry of the supernatural, it includes romance, drama (*The Castle of Otranto* is divided into five

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[58] See Samuel Johnson, "General Observations on the Plays of Shakespeare," *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1787), vol. 9, 315.
[59] See Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry* (London 1775-1781), vol. 2, 462, and Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (London, 1762), 97.
[60] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and the Mysterious Mother* [London, 1765] (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003), 59. Further references will appear in the text.

parts, which correspond to five acts, and in the preface Walpole calls the protagonists "actors" and calls his work "a performance"), and, of course, apparition narratives, from which *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as *The Monk*, derives its ontological hesitation: the apparition of the helmet is followed by hypotheses concerning its nature and the supernatural agency behind it, and necromancy is invoked as a possible cause for its materialization (76). By the same token, the causes of other apparently supernatural phenomena, such as the door closed by a bodiless hand or the animation of the portrait of Manfred's grandfather, are unspecified. At the end, the gigantic ghost of prince Alfonso appears, explaining his purpose, as well as the nature of the phenomena we have witnessed so far. He wanted to restore the rightful heir to Otranto, who turns out to be the young Theodore, unwittingly involved in the castle's events. The ghost finally ascends towards St. Nicholas, in heaven, suggesting that all might have been part of the providential plan.

However, the kind of supernatural that characterizes *The Castle of Otranto* does not seem compatible with traditional notions of divine providence, although in his first preface Walpole formulates a religious moral that is obviously questionable from a Christian viewpoint: "The sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation" (61). This is not enough to justify the death of Manfred's son, the innocent Conrad. In *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as in Gothic novels in which the supernatural is intrinsically evil, the presence of the devil is more directly tangible than that of God. The dramatization of the supernatural tends, in other words, to be disconnected from the providential framework of orthodox religion, and does not have any evident moral purpose.

In the light of its unorthodox moral quality, the Gothic's representation of the supernatural has been read as a reemergence of the numinous, of a religious feeling

that is not informed by a rationalized social ethos. Taking Rudolf Otto's analysis of

the sense of the numinous in primitive religions as a subordination of the self to an

"overpowering absolute might of some kind," Robert Geary reads the representation

of an incomprehensible, a-moral supernatural in early Gothic fiction as a response to

the restriction of God's agency and volition that took place throughout the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Geary,

> the movement away from 'enthusiasm' in the late seventeenth century could be
> described in Otto's terms as a containment or refinement of such relatively
> numinous doctrines as predestination and divine judgments, doctrines which so
> exalted the otherness and power of God as to seem to many irrational, fanatical,
> and insulting to the holiness (in the moral sense) of God, to say nothing of being
> threats to social stability.
> The Gothic novel stands as literary manifestation of the . . . possibility . . . that
> the numinous may break free from an inherited doctrinal context, returning now
> as a pleasing shiver, now as a primitive dread.[61]

For Geary, the representation of the numinous in the Gothic emerges as a

response to a rationalist conception of God's agency: the dread and awe that used to

be inseparable from religious practice reemerge in aesthetic representation. Their

return is, however, ambivalent, since the numinous is not directly presented as a

manifestation of God's agency, emerging as a semi-autonomous force that is partly

informed by aristocratic ideology. Thus, the supernatural in the Gothic tends to be

different from the supernatural staged by apparition narratives. As we have seen,

apparition narratives generally have a clear-cut moral framework. Although the

agency of demons and ghosts is sometimes no less arbitrary than in Gothic fiction (but

in many cases – let us think of Mrs. Veal – such behavior is unmistakably moral) their

actions tends to be irrelevant in the light of the order they entail. Even the emphasis

on the demonic that characterizes some of the collections on which I have focused is

never separate from the emphasis on the ordering presence of the divine, because

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[61] Robert F. Geary, *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction. Horror, Belief, and Literary Change*
(Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 19, 21.

demons' manifestation occasions a battle between good and evil, bringing God to this world, conferring men with a holy mission. The Gothic's implicit cosmology is more ambivalent. In *The Castle of Otranto*, an a-moral, hardly explicable supernatural serves to stage the aristocratic rule as an ineluctable, but at the same time obsolescent, force. In *The Monk* the supernatural is at the service of a sexual and psychological subtext, the disruption of the natural order being inseparable from the disruption of the moral order. Lewis describes demonic figures roaming freely on Earth and interacting with humans in complex ways (Matilda, an alter-ego of the devil himself, corrupts the main character by having sexual intercourse with him); their corruptive action does not seem to be regulated or compensated for by a benevolent God. In the universe of *The Monk*, the supernatural is evil, and seems intrinsically non-human.

The supernatural of apparition narratives and that of early Gothic fiction are, therefore, different: the moralized re-enchantment enacted by early-eighteenth-century narratives is at odds with the morally ambivalent re-enchantment that characterizes pioneering works of the Gothic.[62] Both, true, are characterized by ontological instability. In late-seventeenth-century apparition narratives, however, ontological instability is highlighted through the internalization of a self-consciously empirical, inevitably skeptical, perspective. That is, they pretend to entertain a dialogue with scientific culture, to provide reliable information on supernatural phenomena. This is not, clearly enough, the case of the Gothic, whose internal epistemic modalities are radically different (characters such as Manfred have not been trained in empirical skepticism). Although the protagonists of Gothic novels hesitate

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[62] We should not forget, of course, the attempts to moralize the genre made by Radcliffe and other authors in the decades that followed: these attempts, however, entailed either the elimination of the supernatural, as in Radcliffe's fiction, or the re-instatement of a providential Christian cosmology that ignores the conflict between the empirical and the non-empirical, as in Reeve's *The Old English Baron*.

over the nature of the supernatural phenomena they confront, their hesitation is not informed by a pseudo-scientific attitude.

In other words, in the Gothic ontological hesitation is transformed into a literary convention. Its development is analogous to that of the realistic codes that belong to the tradition of the novel. In early-eighteenth-century texts like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, an aura of realism is evoked by faithfully reproducing the rhetoric of empirical writing (notably, travel writing and criminal biography). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, no other work of fiction will utilize *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*'s apparatus of quantitative information or their empirical claims to historicity (although, from a broad perspective, the novel distinguishes itself from older forms precisely for its abundant use of circumstantial, though not strictly quantitative, information). The circumstantial rhetoric with which they build up their verisimilitude will be assimilated, and reworked, into a distinctly literary idiom, which abounds with names, dates and concrete details, but is not recognizably pseudo-scientific. This is what happens in the Gothic too. The Gothic incorporates a device that gradually took shape in apparition narratives, detaching itself from the pseudo-scientific attitude that characterizes apparition narratives. This process was probably enabled by two factors. First, a novelistic code had taken shape, and the boundaries between empirically-oriented factual and fictional writing were clearer than in the early eighteenth century: the novelization of apparition narratives entailed their assimilation into a recognizably literary language. Second, in spite of the unabated belief in ghosts, the empirical skepticism which subtends ontological hesitation had become a dominant attitude, so there was no need to characterize it as recognizably scientific.

Thus, the emergence of the Gothic can be read as the moment in which ontological hesitation, the main device of that strain of the fantastic constituted by supernatural fiction is "novelized" and incorporated into a distinctly aesthetic genre. Considering the common, stable features of the supernatural fiction produced in the last three centuries, and assuming that the fantastic is recognizably novelistic, the emergence of the Gothic can be seen as the stage at which its prehistory ends and its history begins; in fact, in the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole provides a theory of the new form that emphasizes its use of novelistic devices. Besides, formal change entails semantic change. In the Gothic, the workings of apparition narratives are put to new uses. No longer directly connected to the epistemological questions that enabled their formation, they reincarnate in a new genre, which retains their original function – mediating between the empirical and the non-empirical − but at the same time subordinates them to new perspectives, the Gothic overtly engaging with aristocratic ideology and issues of gender and sexuality.

vii. Early Theories of the Fantastic

Along with the emergence of aestheticized ghost stories goes the development of a critical discourse on the literary supernatural. To retrace its formation, it is useful to go back to the beginning of the century, to Addison's essay on "Ghost Stories," in the *Spectator* no. 12 (March 14, 1711), in which the practice and effects of apparition narratives are exemplified through the narrator's experience. Addison recounts that he chanced to listen to ghost stories told by several young girls of the neighborhood, noticing the intense terror of a boy present in the audience. He draws attention to the emotional appeal of tales of the supernatural, implying that the representation of ghosts is associated with a liberation of passion that defines itself against rational self-

control. In fact, he later declares that in order to avoid such fears, one should be able to discern absurdity, taking a rationalist's stance. But he is not willing to overcome his own belief in the supernatural, and ends up acknowledging its existence, keeping in mind that God has established an order for both material and immaterial beings:

> For my own Part, I am apt to join in Opinion with those who believe that all the Regions of Nature swarm with Spirits; and that we have Multitudes of Spectators on all our Actions, when we think ourselves most alone: but instead of terrifying myself with such a Notion, I am wonderfully pleased to think that I am always engaged with such an innumerable Society, in searching out the Wonders of Creation, and joining in the same Consort of Praise and Adoration.[63]

According to Addison, the knowledge of incorporeal beings can enhance one's perception of God's power and creativity, an idea in line with the aesthetic theories he formulates in his papers on "The Pleasures of Imagination." For Addison (*Spectator*, no. 419, 7 July 1712) the representation of the supernatural, regardless of its actual existence, provides a cognitive training: the impression of novelty it engenders ultimately leads to a virtual apprehension of the divine power. And, as in his paper on ghost stories, Addison ends up emphasizing that there are "many intellectual Beings in the World besides ourselves, and several Species of Spirits, who are subject to different Laws and Economies from those of Mankind; when we see, therefore, any of these represented naturally, we cannot look upon the Representation as altogether impossible".[64] Addison's focus is, however, mostly aesthetic: he does not try to define the supernatural on scientific and theological grounds, but on the grounds of readers' response. He also acknowledges that superstitious beliefs are, often, false, and, pointing out that we find them so pleasant as to be easily deceived, he acknowledges that they provide mere aesthetic pleasure: "many are prepossessed with such false Opinions, as dispose them to believe these particular Delusions; at least, we have all

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[63] Joseph Addison, "Ghost Stories," *The Spectator*, no. 12, 14 March 1711.
[64] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 419, 1 July 1712.

heard so many pleasing Relations in favour of them, that we do not care for seeing through the Falsehood and willingly give ourselves up to so agreeable an Imposture." Addison suggests the fictional status and aesthetic potential of supernatural entities, whose existence, impossible to verify, is more discursive than physical. In combination with the cognitive training provided by one's imaginary apprehension of the supernatural, this is enough to preserve ghosts and fairies in the sphere of the fictive.

Addison's dual perspective – he discusses apparitions both as actual and as virtual phenomena − did not set the tone for all subsequent discussions of the supernatural in literature, which tended to relegate it to the realm of the aesthetic. As we have seen, the definition of the supernatural as a specific aesthetic object went along with the definition of novelistic realism, and it is not surprising that those who established themselves as canonical novelists defined their standard of realism by criticizing literature that indulged in a supernatural marvelous. Deeply conscious of the variety of forms that circulated in the market, most of which he had parodied in *Jonathan Wild*, in *Tom Jones* Fielding discusses the supernatural in depth. The introductory chapter to book 8 – the longest in the novel − contains a reflection on the marvelous in which even Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* is mentioned. Although a true historian should always report attested events, says Fielding, narratives such as "the story of the ghost of George Villiers, which might with more propriety have been made a present of to Dr. Drelincourt, to have kept the ghost of Mrs Veale company," could easily be "sacrificed to oblivion in complacence of the skepticism of the reader."[65] For Fielding, the presence of ghosts is possible only if an author does not mind readers laughing – these remarks highlight the systematic satire

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[65] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (Oxford: Oxford Classics, 1998), 349. Further references will appear in the text.

of superstition that takes place throughout the novel itself. He also provides a more
general definition of the supernatural's status:

> As for elves and fairies, and other such mummery, I purposely omit the mention
> of them, as I should be very unwilling to confine within any bounds those
> surprizing imaginations, for whose vast capacity the limits of human nature are
> too narrow; whose works are to be considered as a new creation; and who have
> consequently just right to do what they will with their own (348).

Fielding's reflections amount to a negative theorization of the fantastic, which
goes along with a redefinition of the range and functions of human imagination.
Imagination occasionally transcends experience, and produces "new creations,"
evidently opposed to the kind of fiction Fielding has written, which is based on the
actual possibilities of human nature ("Man therefore is the highest subject . . . which
presents itself to the pen of our historian, or of our poet; and in relating his actions,
great care is to be taken that we do not exceed the capacity of the agent we describe"
[348]). Fielding's emphasis on the scope of human imagination assumes that
creativity should be regulated by a focus on the empirical world; in the absence of
this, imagination becomes uncontrollable, comparable to Don Quixote's tendency to
take windmills for giants. Fielding stigmatizes the literature of the supernatural by
characterizing it as the product of a completely autonomous faculty, which has no
moral or cognitive function. While Addison's theory, defining imagination as a venue
to virtually explore both the metaphysical and the actual world, prefigures
Romanticism, Fielding's condemnation seems close to contemporary critiques of
romance, which saw reading and writing as expressions or consequences of
pathological states – his theory of fiction (see also *Joseph Andrews*, III, i) in fact
restricts the range of the aesthetic imagination to the physical world. Fielding's
derogatory view of the supernatural becomes more evident in the body of *Tom Jones*,
through which runs a sustained parody of apparition narratives that is also a satire of

superstition. Insistently and ridiculously, Partridge sights or fears ghosts (397, 581, 752), which leads the narrator to remark that "the days of superstition have passed," so there is no need for him to say "whether Beelzebub or Satan was about actually to appear in person, with all his hellish retinue"(581). By playfully staging the need to disclose the nature of an apparition, Fielding seems to imply that a main device of the literature of the supernatural is an uncertainty concerning the entities it portrays. Such uncertainty, he suggests by projecting his own skepticism onto *Tom Jones*'s readers, cannot appeal to those that have liberated themselves from old beliefs.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, various other theorists discussed the supernatural as an aesthetic object rather than as a model of causality, implicitly relegating it to the realm of the fictive. As we have seen, Richard Hurd thinks that it should not be perpetuated in literature in an age in which superstitions have been exploded; nonetheless we should be lenient towards the great literature of the past: being skeptics, we can regard it as an agreeable imposture. Hurd suggests that the supernatural, which includes both romance supernatural and superstition, is now restricted to literary representation. In the meanwhile, however, English readers were losing themselves in the Gothic; it is not surprising, therefore, that in 1773, in her "Essay on the Pleasure Derived by Objects of Terror," Anna Laetitia Aikin emphasizes the sense of amazement engendered by the supernatural:

> though we know before-hand what to expect, we enter into them [scenes of artificial terror] with eagerness, in quest of a pleasure already experienced. This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps in on the stretch; and where the agency of invisibile beings is introduced, "of forms unseen, and mightier far than we," our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy co-operating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.[66]

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[66] John and Anna Laetitia Aikin, "Essay on the Pleasure Derived by Objects of Terror," in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook. 1700-1820* ed. E. J. Clery, Robert Miles, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 129.

Aikin's theory gestures towards an appreciation of ontological hesitation. Although already "experienced," because part of a set of generic conventions, the apparition of the supernatural is nonetheless "new and wonderful," "strange and unexpected." (Aikin is conscious that the pleasure of reading entails preventing the memory of previous books from interfering with the enjoyment of a new one: that memory is alive, but it does not forestall one's reaction to a virtual perception, regardless of how similar such perception is to others already experienced.) Unlike the marvel of old romances, where there are no rigid boundaries between the possible and the impossible, the supernatural Aikin describes seems to demand a more intense cognitive participation: it "awakens the mind," keeping it "on the stretch," a state of tension that implies the need to determine the nature of a new experience, still undefined, which lasts until the supernatural fully manifests itself, and the mind enters "a new world." Aikin does not present hesitation as a neat oscillation between worldviews, nevertheless she highlights the mind's need to understand, and, like Todorov, describes the perception of the marvelous as an outcome of ontological uncertainty. In other words, Aikin's theory registers the cognitive tension, and the intense wonder, enabled by an empirically oriented attitude, which fiction has fully internalized. The ecstasy Aikin describes, and associates to an aesthetic, therefore imaginary, experience, is made possible by the presence of clear-cut intellectual and sensory boundaries, which can be crossed in the reading experience provided by the fantastic. Ironically enough, the perceptive state Aikin theorizes is informed by the skeptical outlook, but at the same time constitutes an escape from it: in fact, Aikin valorizes not so much empirical doubts as the possibility to transcend common experience and revive faculties such as curiosity, passion, and imagination. Emma Clery rightly suggests that a similar attitude informs Burke's thoughts on the sublime,

whose perception helps the mind transcend the "stale unaffecting familiarity" of everyday life.[67] In both Aikin and Burke's theories – emphasizing, in terms that border on the physiological, the productivity and necessity of non-rational faculties – empiricism poses the conditions for its own temporary supersession.

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[67] See E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 81-82. See also Edmund Burke, *Enquiry*, pt. 4, sec. VI, and pt. 4, sec. VII.

Chapter Four

The Rise of Imaginary Voyages

As we have seen, the fantastic is based on the juxtaposition of the empirical and the non-empirical, the latter including a variety of elements (the supernatural, biological aberrations, magic) that are potentially in conflict with the scientific perspective, which tends to imply a materialistic, experience-bound model of causality. On the formal level, such a juxtaposition is achieved by means of ontological hesitation − typical, as we have seen, of apparition narratives − and ontological accretion, particularly developed in imaginary voyages. In texts such as *Gulliver's Travels*, an ontological level that is presented as analogous to what is commonly perceived as "reality" – and which is rendered in self-consciously empirical terms − coexists with ontologies that are recognizably "unreal" or, at least, highly problematic.

Apparently, no clear-cut separation between apparition narratives and imaginary voyages exists: although characterized by a highly developed ontological accretion − which contemplates a great variety of non-empirical entities − imaginary voyages tend to deploy ontological hesitation. As we shall see, their use of ontological hesitation depends on both their dramatized empirical attitude (derived from travel writing) and the confrontation with otherness they tend to stage: the sudden appearance of a monster can raise questions concerning it matrix − is it natural or divine? However, while in apparition narratives the non-empirical specifies itself as the supernatural, imaginary voyages are inflected in a different direction. On the ontological level, their focus is not exclusively on the relation between the natural and the supernatural, but also on the relation between an empirically-oriented world-view and a residual, pre-modern cosmology that is less and less compatible with it. In spite

of the fascination with anomalies that characterized early empirical culture, natural philosophers tended to regard the existence of monsters and prodigies as questionable. The empirical world-view became inseparable from a skeptical attitude that, although emphasizing direct experience, assumed a continuity between old and new experience − according to a tacit probabilistic logic, new entities, such as the plants and animals of the New World, could not be too different from known ones. Thus, the existence of ghosts and giants became problematic, and pre-modern, mostly Christian, cosmological models were called into question. Responding to this conflict, imaginary voyages perpetuated the mediatory task originally performed by genres such as early-empirical travel writing and the literature on monsters. In doing so, they bridged the gap between an empirically-grounded conception of nature and the pre-modern or transitional ontological formations that empiricism tended to question. Over the course of the eighteenth century, their mediatory work was subsumed within a self-conscious aesthetic framework, which highlighted the distance between the real and the unreal.

In this chapter, I shall focus on imaginary voyages' fictional worlds, built by combining recognizably empirical entities with a distinctly non-empirical set of entities that vary from text to text. My analysis will be articulated on two levels. On one level, I shall show how the interaction of the natural and the non-natural serves to achieve a re-enchantment: imaginary voyages restore a pre-modern conception of nature – which survived, as we have seen, in early-empirical culture, but was increasingly questioned. On another level, I shall retrace imaginary voyages' separation from the tradition of factual travel writing, the definition of a distinctly fictional identity – accelerated by *Gulliver's Travels* and its imitations. Bringing the circumstantial language of empirical travelogues into Menippean satire and utopia (in

part already influenced by travel writing), the authors of imaginary voyages forged a new genre.

In doing so, I shall also sketch a periodization in the development of the imaginary voyage. A first, experimental phase, sees the direct influence of empiricism. Suspended between the factual and the fictional, imaginary voyages such as *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.*, *English Merchant* ambivalently replicate conventions of empirical travel writing − even in this period, however, there are texts, such as *The Blazing World* and *Iter Lunare*, that frame themselves as recognizably fictional. Things radically change with Swift. The sophisticated reflection on fundamental problems of empirical culture enacted by *Gulliver's Travels* goes along, I shall argue, with an unambiguous use of pre-empirical conventions that – paradoxically enough − characterize the text as unmistakably fictional. Combining epistemology and wild entertainment, Swift's work emerges as a model: *Gulliver's Travels* epitomizes, and fully exploits, imaginary voyages' ability to reconcile an empirical stance with residual ontologies inherited from pre-modern visions. However, the development of imaginary voyages goes in a direction that Swift – a fervent anti-colonialist − would not have approved of. After 1750, new works that center on colonial expansion are produced. In these works, monsters become instruments to figure the Other and frame its relation to the colonial subject.

The ideological transformation of imaginary voyages, whose characteristic devices – notably ontological hesitation − can be inflected in opposite directions and used for new purposes, signals their full emergence as a form, their disembedding from the epistemological context that shaped them. While pioneering texts were mostly shaped by cosmological concerns, which determined their themes and workings, later texts subordinate their fantastic representation to the treatment of

particular ideological issues. In other words, while in imaginary voyages such as *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.*, *The Blazing World*, *Iter Lunare*, and even *Gulliver's Travels* ideology was implied either by satiric analogy or implied by epistemology, the ideological stance of *Peter Wilkins* and *William Bingfield* is defined through ontological hesitation. The distinctive devices of the fantastic have coalesced into a form that can be put to new uses.

i. Precursors: *The Man in the Moone* and the Marvels of the New World

The first empirical imaginary voyage written in England is *The Man in the Moone*, by Francis Godwin (1638). Unlike subsequent works, however, *The Man in the Moone* does not engage with epistemological problems generated by the advent of the new science; it is, rather, pervaded by the enthusiasm that attended the exploration of the new world. As we shall see, its elaboration of a new aesthetic, which is intended to stimulate readers' cognitive faculties, is instrumental to the promotion and valorization of empirical science. In his *Epistle to the Reader*, Godwin analogizes the moon with America, underlining that as the novelty of America was only partly perceived by Columbus, so the novelty of the moon could superficially seem insignificant, but both can provide Europe with a new body of knowledge. Godwin intends to stimulate his readers' ability to conceive of new worlds, taking the moon as a concrete example of the "strange, therefore true" trope: "That there should be *Antipodes* was once thought as great a *Paradox* as now that the Moon should bee habitable."[1] Godwin's analogy implies that something that radically violates a reader's expectations should not be ruled out as false because the human ability to conceive of novelty is intrinsically limited − in the light of our

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[1] Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moone* (London, 1627), *The Epistle to the Reader*, A3. Further references will appear in the text.

experience in the New World, Godwin suggests, what looks strange should be regarded as true. By resorting to analogy, however, Godwin also underlines that our understanding of the new is anchored in our experience of the old, thereby implying his faith in the empirical approach.

Godwin's use of analogy deserves particular attention, being instrumental not only to an epistemological reflection, but also to an aesthetic theorization. The particular kind of invention characterizing *The Man in the Moone* − an invention self-consciously merging the real and the unreal – is, Godwin suggests, conducive to the apprehension of new cosmological notions:

> Thou has here an essay of *Fancy*, where *Invention* is shewed with *Judgment*. It was not the *Author*'s intention . . . to discourse thee into a beliefe of each particular circumstance . . . thou hast here a new discovery of a new *world*, which perchance may finde little better entertainment in thy opinion, than that of *Columbus* at first, in the esteeme of all men . . . But the knowledge of this may seeme more properly reserv'd for this our discovering age: In which our *Galilaeusses*, can by advantage of their spectacles . . . gaze mountains in the *Moon* (i).

Though a self-conscious mixture of "invention" and "judgment," Godwin's narrative encourages a virtual knowledge that resembles the new science built by explorers and natural scientists and at the same time envisions a new body of technology, represented by Gonsales's peculiar vehicle. The instrument through which Godwin lays out his innovative conception of literature is analogy. He assimilates, as we have seen, the actual New World to the new world described in the narrative, and suggests that readers may react to the latter's representation as skeptically as the Europeans who first heard of Columbus's discoveries. However, he also emphasizes that both he and his readers live in a "discovering age," which should reorient one's attitude towards experience and novelty. This fully validates the analogy Godwin has established and further justifies the aesthetic view he is

trying to sketch. By equating actual and virtual experience, Godwin suggests that *The Man in the Moone*'s mixture of the empirical and the non-empirical (the texts is not intended to "discourse" us "into a beliefe of each . . . circumstance") can train our imaginations to conceive of entities and technological solutions that transcend common knowledge. For Godwin, *The Man in The Moone* can help develop readers' conjectural outlook, opening up a vision unrestrained by old dogmas: it can teach us that what could at first sound strange is, very often, true.

Thus, *The Man in the Moone* analogizes knowing the fictional world of the Moon with knowing the actual New World − it assimilates aesthetic and cognitive response. The former emerges as an imaginative activity grounded in experience, and the latter as an intellectual activity that is to a certain extent similar to reading a work of invention. In fact, Godwin presents scientific exploration as a source of marvel, and devises a literary form able to provide an experience of discovery. *The Man in the Moone* frames Domingo Gonsales's travels in a way that we would now call realistic: we are given Gonsales's biographical background, and his trip to the moon is preceded by a variety of other, more plausible, travels. Events shift towards the fantastic when Gonsales finds and tames a flock of birds called gansas, the engines through which he will overcome gravity and reach the moon. As in science fiction, however, improbable events convey a reflection on technological progress, seen as both analogous and instrumental to geographic discovery. Gonsales's vehicle is informed by his mechanical talent; he invents a device able to exploit the kinetic energy of the gansas: "I took some 30 or 40 young ones of them, and bred them up by hand partly for my recreation, partly also as having in my head some rudiments of that device, which afterwards I put in practice" (23). His proto-scientific outlook is also evinced by his description and explanation of his trip to the moon, which

mobilizes astronomical notions (51-53), and by his penchant for geographical knowledge (57). Posing as Vespucci, he calls the moon "the new world."

The description of the moon's inhabitants, however, tends to transcend empirically-oriented verisimilitude – and interrupts Godwin's reflections on knowledge and exploration. They abhor "Lying and Falshood," (77) and, "the taller people are of Stature, the more excellent they are for all indowments of mind, and the longer time they doe live" (78). On the moon, physical characteristics and moral standing are equated; while in the actual world, Godwin implies, the material and the spiritual are discrepant, in the imaginary world he is describing they are closely correlated. A non-empirical, recognizably pastoral, utopia − whose distance from reality is implicitly emphasized − Godwin's moon is obviously not intended as a workable moral standard, but as a symbol of what Europe inevitably lacks: it is characterized by an efficient way to assess men's value and intentions, which entails a complete absence of social mobility. Soon, however, Godwin's focus narrows again to natural phenomena: to how, like owls and bats, the moon's inhabitants fall into a state of lethargy when the satellite is illuminated by the sun, to the direct correlation between one's stature and one's ability to endure the warmth of the lunar day; to stones that are able to store and emanate sunshine and render a body incredibly light. But the natural characteristics of the moon turn out to have social implications: the moon is incredibly fruitful, so there is no envy, avidity, and hunger – and in the event that someone imperfect is born, he is sent to the Earth – a typically utopian procedure (104). The moon is, in other words, a teeming Arcadia, where "there is never any raine, wind, or change of the Ayre, never either Summer, or Winter, but as it were a perpetuall Spring, yielding all pleasure, all content, and that free from any annoyance at all" (109).

By deploying pastoral and utopian conventions, *The Man in the Moone* replicates an attitude typical of early modern travel writers: it accommodates the unknown into a familiar perspective. True, by conflating the factual – that is, those parts of the moon that resemble the actual new world − and the imaginary, Godwin intends to broaden his readers' conception of nature, thereby undermining the image of an endocentric universe; but his cognitive project is not yet uncompromisingly empirical. This has significant implications on the formal level. *The Man in the Moone* does not imply a fully developed ontological hesitation: Gonsales's attitude is not sufficiently skeptical, and the need to demonstrate that European knowledge can easily be expanded, that radical novelties can easily be conceived of, is not conducive to the kind of wonder that will characterize both apparition narratives and imaginary voyages − in particular *Gulliver's Travels*. As we have seen, in fully developed works of the fantastic, wonder is enabled by the dramatization of an empirical attitude: characters confront phenomena that contradict previous experience, and accurately describe their puzzlement.

Godwin's empiricism is, besides, far from self-conscious: *The Man in the Moone*'s enthusiastic treatment of the new science does not seem to be informed by a keen awareness of the ethical and theological questions brought about by epistemological change (and deeply felt by subsequent thinkers): Godwin does not see that the new knowledge may easily result in disenchantment. The new world explored by Gonsales does not call into question the Christian world-picture, nor does *The Man in the Moone* investigate the relation between the natural and the supernatural explored by other authors of imaginary voyages. *The Man in the Moone* is, in other words, animated by an unproblematic search for wonders that bespeaks a reaction to – but not a full displacement of − the Medieval cosmology.

Domingo Gonsales's adventure is the result of a new intellectual climate generated by proto-scientific tracts such as John Wilkins's *The Discovery of a New World, or a Discourse Tending to Prove that it is Probable there May be Another Habitable World in the Moon* (which strongly influenced Fontenelle). In fact, Wilkins's description of America and of the way it was perceived is analogous to Godwin's: he emphasizes that common opinions are often based on dogmas, and that for centuries scholars refused to believe in the existence of the antipodes. Both Godwin and Wilkins's works amount to self-conscious instances of the "strange, therefore true" logic typical of early-empirical culture. In Wilkins's case such self-consciousness challengingly responds to the theological problems raised by the image of an open universe. *The Discovery of a New World* appropriates arguments against Copernicanism – such as the nobility and incorruptibility of the heavens − turning their view of the latter's implications into actual features of the universe: for Wilkins each planet is constitutively imperfect, and the Earth, made of impure matter, occupies a marginal position, far from the heavenly spheres.

However, Wilkins's description draws not only from Galileo and Kepler's astronomical discoveries, but also from a number of classical sources, and tries to broaden the boundaries of the Christian universe without radically undermining them. Developing the Bible's suggestions, Wilkins goes so far as to discuss paradise's location – in doing so, however, he subtly perpetuates the spatial logic that subtends his astronomical theses. Thus, his argument only intermittently assumes a subversive viewpoint: more often than not his conclusions rely on ancient authorities. Wilkins tends to accommodate the new into the old, and tries to demonstrate that the existence of an open universe does not contradict well-established articles of faith –

he tries, in other words, to accommodate innovative elements – derived from modern astronomy – to the Christian cosmology.

Inspired by Wilkins's work, *The Man in the Moone* assumes a similar sense of continuity: Gonsales's journey lacks the cognitive perspective that will characterize *Gulliver's Travels*. In spite of the fact that they are incorporeal, the inhabitants of the moon are not radically different from the Europeans: surprisingly enough, they believe in Jesus Christ. Godwin was probably afraid of cultural relativism and reduced the disruptive potential of his work by endorsing the Christian world-view. Commentators have shown that Gonsales is in fact reluctant to accept Copernicanism, although he seems skeptical of the Ptolematic vision too.[2]

Nevertheless, *The Man in the Moone* innovatively blends an empirical attitude that owes much to early-empirical travel writing – he is eloquently characterized as an "eye-witness" − the dramatization of controversial scientific hypotheses – which in fact enable cosmological, rather than simply ontological, hesitations − and wild inventions − which were, however, inspired by Lucian's *True History*: Lucian has his Menippus reach the moon by means of feathers that prefigure Gonsales's gansas.[3] By virtue of its latent ontological tensions (minimized, true, by Gonsales's lack of empirical skepticism) *The Man in the Moone* established a model that subsequent authors could fruitfully develop.

ii. Precursors: The Natural and the Supernatural in Cyrano's *Voyages*

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[2] See Robert M. Philmus, "Murder Most Fowl: Butler's Edition of Francis Godwin," *Science Fiction Studies*, 23, no. 2 (1996), 260-69.

[3] On *The Man in the Moone*'s relation to contemporary astronomy, see Sarah Hutton, "*The Man in the Moone* and the New Astronomy: Godwin, Gilbert, Kepler," *Etudes Epistémè*, 7 (2005), 3-13.

A text that engages more deeply and problematically with early modern cosmological issues is Cyrano's *Histoire comique des états et empires de la Lune* (1656) – which polemically presents a universe populated by a variety of inhabited worlds − a universe whose image evinces the influence of Campanella, Gassendi, Neoplatonism, the Cabal, Democritus, Epicurus, Galileus, Kepler.[4] The stunning variety of world-views incorporated by Cyrano connects the *Histoire Comique* to the tradition of Menippean satire – which is, as we have seen, a precursor of the fantastic − as well as to the subsequent tradition of imaginary voyages. Unlike Godwin's, Cyrano's attitude is complex and ambivalent. In spite of his fascination with modern rationalism,[5] he resists attributing to matter a complete autonomy, and mobilizes doctrines such as vitalism and panpsychism. This has subversive implications: representing an ontologically variable universe, Cyrano uncompromisingly rejects religious dogmas. At the same time, however, he deploys the *Voyages*' mixed ontology to reconcile a materialistic, empirically-oriented conception of nature with the Christian supernatural; in doing so, he inaugurates the mediatory attitude that characterizes most imaginary voyages.

The extent of the *Histoire Comique*'s mediation can emblematically be seen in Cyrano's approach to debates over the nature of the soul, in particular the debate opposing Gassendi and Descartes.[6] While the former argued that the soul was material and mobile, the latter argued for its immateriality, as well as for the dualism of soul and body. As has been noted, Cyrano uses the word "soul" in various ways,

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[4] See Paolo Rossi, *The Birth of Modern Science* (London: Blackwell, 2001), 116-117.
[5] Documented both by the mechanistic component of his *Voyages* and by a fragment included in *Nouvelles Oeuvres de Cyrano de Bergerac* (1662), entitled *Physique ou science des choses naturelles*, which evinces the influence of Descartes and sketches an empiricist psychology. See J. S. Spink, *French Free-thought from Gassendi to Voltaire* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 62-63.
[6] On Cyrano's treatment of the soul and its philosophical roots, see Margaret Sankey, "The Paradoxes of Modernity: Rational Religion and Mythical Science in the Novels of Cyrano the Bergerac," in *Religion, Reason, and Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Robert Crocker (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 117-138.

regarding it both as the center of man's physiological functions and as the incorporeal entity described by the Christian tradition. Before the Governor of New France, Cyrano ambivalently analogizes the soul, which is eternal, with matter, which is infinite, suggesting their similarity and emphasizing their common matrix.[7] In the Earthly Paradise on the Moon, the soul is, however, depicted in terms that are recognizably Cartesian: it exists independently of the body (22). Apparently dead, the protagonist is saved by a miraculous juice that calls his soul back. And a third image of the soul appears: in the Earthly Paradise the narrator meets Elijah, who compares Prometheus to Adam and assimilates the soul to heavenly fire (27). Elijah describes it as a material entity that preserves itself after death, migrating to new bodies, but at the same time participating in the nature of heaven. The soul as described by Elijah constitutes a compromise between Descartes's and Gassendi's conceptions. Similarly, in the description of the moon's funereal rituals the soul has mixed characteristics: it is said to be composed by "natural heat," which does not entail its pure materiality, since in the purification process entailed by the Lunar funereal rites it ascends towards heaven (124).

The *Histoire Comique* contains various other descriptions of the soul's nature and existence, in which the boundaries between the material and the immaterial, the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural often tend to be blurred. Cyrano does not pose clear-cut antitheses between these terms, but freely amalgamates, severs, and recombines them. On the moon there is, for example, a method of burial that is reserved to philosophers. A dead man's body is eaten by his friends, who immediately afterwards copulate with young women, so as to propagate and renew his life (125). The soul remains attached to the philosopher's body,

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[7] Cyrano de Bergerac, *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the Worlds of the Moon and the Sun* (London, 1687), 14. Further references will appear in the text.

retaining his identity, but at the same time sharing the properties of matter. Even in this case, the soul occupies an intermediate ontological position that bridges the gap between this world and the next – and between Gassendi and Descartes. The conflation of the physical and the transcendent, which is to say, of the natural and the supernatural, has, however, a dual effect: not only does it amount to a mediation, it also enables a form of ontological hesitation. Depending on the way one approaches Cyrano's text, the representation of the soul assumes a different meaning: its mixed characteristics blur ontological boundaries, but, from the standpoint of a normative empirical approach, they also make it impossible to attribute to the soul a specific status: Cyrano's amalgamation of the natural and the supernatural in fact assumes their increasing separation, and elicits – but at the same time frustrates − a clear-cut cognitive response.

The relation between the Earth and the Sun similarly entails a reduction of the contrast between the physical and the transcendent. When men die, their fiery souls migrate to the sun, which purifies, and is at the same time nurtured by, them, in a continual exchange of incandescent bodies. Such a process is accurately explained by Campanella, whom the protagonist meets. The sun, explains the philosopher, is like a living being, that derives its strength from the souls of the dead and at the same time prepares them to inhabit new bodies, in a cyclical movement. The purification of the souls is equated with human digestion:[8] Cyrano's corporeal imagery assimilates metempsychosis to a material process. At the same time, however, the soul appears to have a non-earthly, celestial nature (171); although located in our universe, and

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[8] A similar imagery can be found in *Paradise Lost*, which blurs the boundaries between spirit and matter by means of pseudo-physiological processes such as digestion. In book V (388-505), Raphael explains that the spirit feeds on lower substances, digesting and "purifying" them. This imagery derives from Renaissance vitalism, which strongly influenced Milton − see John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) chap. 4 − as well as Cyrano – see Madeleine Alcover, *Le Pensée philosophique de Cyrano de Bergerac* (Paris-Geneva, Librarie Droz, 1970).

made of what can be unmistakably recognized as matter, it is fully autonomous of the body, belonging to a sphere that transcends human experience.

Many other strains of thought intertwine in Cyrano's voyages. Not only does Cyrano reduce the gap between the physical and the transcendent, but also between the animate and the inanimate, the two binaries partly overlapping – which attests to the *Histoire Comique*'s tight texture. For example, in one of the mythological stories the text incorporates, the flesh of the lovers Orestes and Pilades impregnates the Earth, generating trees that are subsequently burned and in turn generate iron and the magnet, whose reciprocal attraction renews the lovers' attraction (154). Influenced by Renaissance panpsychism, which postulated that all matter was endowed with the ability to think and perceive, the *Histoire Comique* presents matter as animated, which guarantees the universe's cohesion and compensates for the radical atomism Cyrano often seems to endorse.[9] Like other seventeenth-century freethinkers, Cyrano is fascinated with extreme materialism, but at the same time retains pre-scientific conceptions, mostly derived from Campanella's philosophy. In fact, despite – or, most probably, because of – the rise of empiricism, seventeenth-century philosophers elaborated cosmologies informed by spiritual and vital principles that prevented a full autonomization of matter.[10]

Thus, the *Histoire Comique*'s playful cosmology dramatizes Cyrano's radical epistemology − first and foremost his Copernican view − and libertine stance: Cyrano's political position is implied in his epistemological ideas, which are, clearly enough, progressive and anti-dogmatic. However, Cyrano's *Voyages* are not completely subversive: they envision the soul as a principle of cohesion that serves to preserve cruxes of the traditional world-view. As we shall see, the *Voyages*'

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[9] On Cyrano's panpsychism and its roots, see J. S. Spink, *French Free-thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*, chap. 3.

[10] See J. S. Spink, *French Free-thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*, 7-8.

mediatory representation of the soul inaugurates an attitude that informs most subsequent imaginary voyages.

iii. *The Adventures of Mr. T. S*: Empiricism, Monsters, and the Wrath of God

Let us now focus on seventeenth-century British culture, notably on the transition from fictionalized travelogues to imaginary voyages. In a list of travel accounts compiled for scholars and navigators, the Churchill brothers, authors of a collection of travel accounts published in 1704, also include *The Adventures of Mr. T. S., English Merchant*, published in 1670. They provide a disconcerting description of the text, which is said to contain not only "a short account of *Argier* in the Year 1648," but also "very strange Metamorphoses of Men and other Creatures turn'd into Stone." The supernatural elements, however, do not seem to compromise the reliability of the account, which is, according to the Churchills, "plain and without artifice."[11]

From our point of view, *The Adventures of Mr T. S.* is a highly unstable text: it starts as a puritan spiritual narrative, deploying tones immortalized by *Robinson Crusoe* (the story begins with the narrator's evocation of his youthful disobedience), then turns into a captivity narrative. In imitation of empirical travel writing, it includes long descriptive sections ("It is a City not so large as populous, fortified by Art and Nature; the Walls are 60 foot high, in some places 70 and 80; they are built with square Stone and Flints: they are about 12 and 13 Foot broad. The City is not above a Mile round"),[12] and a separate section of hydrographical and navigational remarks, authored by the sailor Richard Norris (also author of a tract entitled *The manner of Finding of the True sum of the Infinite Secants of an Arch*). However, the

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[11] J. & A. Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1704), vol. 1, 109.

[12] *The Adventures of Mr. T. S., English Merchant* (London, 1670), 41. Further references will appear in the text.

presence of empirically-oriented representations does not prevent T. S. from smugly recalling his picaresque adventures at the court of Argier, where he pretended to be a cook and managed to find a lover, nor from telling facts which run counter to his professions of rationality (conveyed by his persistent critique of middle-eastern superstitions).

As we shall see, *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* can be regarded as one of the ancestors of the British imaginary voyage, exemplifying and prefiguring some of its features – first of all, an enchanted, but at the same time empirically-oriented, representation of nature, which juxtaposes natural and supernatural phenomena. Seen by George Starr as one of the many fictionalized travelogues produced in seventeenth-century Europe,[13] *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* significantly deviates from the pattern of common travelogues: its paratext evinces, for instance, a purpose that is not strictly documentary.

Let us first focus on its format. *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* is a sextodecimo volume, presumably cheap, certainly cheaper than most travel accounts published at that time, which seldom appear in sextodecimo. It looks like a book intended to be consumed rather than studied: it does not seem to have been designed to be set on a desk. Ian Watt famously noticed how throughout the eighteenth century there was an increasing production of portable editions, which went along with the expansion of the reading public and the fall of prices.[14] On the grounds of mid-eighteenth century library and booksellers' catalogues, one can add that more and more texts, including scientific ones, gradually came to be printed in the duodecimo format, characteristic of "modern" genres (such as technical handbooks) than the folio format, associated with an older, less pragmatically- and empirically-oriented, knowledge. However,

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[13] See G. A. Starr, "Escape from Barbary: A Seventeenth-Century Genre," *HLQ*, 29 (1965), 35-52.

[14] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 42.

between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries things were slightly different: the old humanist hierarchy of books, according to which the folio was the most prestigious and the most scientifically creditable format (even because the spread of the new science had not yet taken place)[15] still persisted.[16] In the second half of the seventeenth and in the first decades of the eighteenth century, good scientific books tended to be more expensive – and, more often than not, considerably large: the *Philosophical Transactions* were quarto volumes, and so was, for instance, Boyle's *Continuation of New Experiment Physico-Mechanical*. Browsing the English Short Title Catalogue, one finds that travel accounts produced between 1660 and 1720, texts both appealing to the readers and useful to scientists, tended to be octavo volumes, but in the last twenty-five years of the seventeenth century the amount of folio and quarto travel books was still substantial.[17]

All this suggests that a book such as *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* – a sextodecimo text − would not have been regarded as a conventional travel account. Such hypothesis seems even more probable if one considers the identity and works of the *Adventures*'s publisher, Moses Pitt. According to Adrian Johns, Pitt was a creditable scientific publisher, aware of how deeply sources and paratextual conventions mattered in empirical works.[18] Pitt would have never endangered his reputation by publishing an unreliable scientific work, unless such work was recognizably fictional.

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[15] See Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Margaret C. Jacob and Larry Stewart, *Practical Matter. Newton's Science in the Service of Industry and Empire, 1687-1851* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[16] On the humanist order of books see Armando Petrucci, "Alle origini del libro moderno: libri di banco, libri da bisaccia, libretti da mano," *Italia medievale e umanistica*, 12 (1969), 295-313.

[17] It is only after the 1690s that octavos exceed them by far. If the Churchills' *Collection of Voyage and Travels* (1704), modeled on Hakluyt's *Principall Navigation* and intended for scientific use, was a folio volume, other rigorous as well as marketable travel accounts, such as Sir John Narborough's *Account of several late Voyages and Discoveries to the South and North towards the Streights of Magellan* (1694), and the beautiful and successful *New Voyage Round the World* (1697) by William Dampier, were in octavo.

[18] See Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 86, 451-54.

And, in fact, the *Adventures*'s paratextual apparatus reveals elements that seem to self-consciously undermine the text's empirical committment. In the preface, the editor writes:

> they [the *Adventures of Mr T. S.*] contain many Useful Observations, adorned with variety of most pleasant ADVENTURES: They may appear very strange to such as have seen nothing but their Cradle; with them they may obtain the Credit of a well humoured *Romance*: But Sir, you are sufficiently acquainted with the integrity of the AUTHOR, to cause you to put a higher value upon this Relation; and I know that you are well informed of the Proceedings of the African People, that you will not find in it such incredible Wonders as prejudiced persons may imagine. Two or three passages look like Miracles, but they may be confirmed by several of our Nation, both Merchants and Travellers, that have seen in those parts the things related (iv, v).

The author, the printer, or the editor has tellingly decided to capitalize "adventures" and "author" rather than "useful observations", and to italicize "romance"; that is, he has highlighted the genre whose functions *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* is intermittently perpetuating, as well as the text's fictitious elements – including its author. The word "adventures" exudes a fictional aura which extends to T. S. himself: generally, travelogues, biographies, and autobiographies (one thinks of Mary Carleton and Francis Kirkman's biographies, but also of the spiritual autobiographies produced throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries) were not anonymous, the historicity of their author/protagonist being the main reason for their relevance. Just on this basis, one could regard T. S.'s gratuitous anonymity as a signal of his non-existence (a signal that seems to work analogously to the initials "H. F." in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*), even more forcefully indicated by the capitalization of the word "author," which establishes its relation with "adventures" whose status is dubious by admission of the editor himself.

Thus, developing an interpretive possibility afforded by most travelogues, *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* encourages a virtual experience of adventure and wonder. Using a technique typical of the fantastic, the first part of *The Adventures* establishes a

realistic setting that will be complicated by the emergence of the supernatural. In early imaginary voyages the world of travel writing is enriched by monsters and supernatural events that, on a level, re-enchant the genre, and at the same time create a *new* genre. In the *Adventures*, re-enchantment is announced by the Preface: the editor says that "This Age in which we live is apt to discredit what it understands not, or sees not acted before its Eyes." In doing so, he both asserts the primacy of the empirical approach in the establishment of truth, ambivalently asserting the reliability of his report, and prepares readers for the marvels of T. S.'s narrative, which challenge common understanding.

To make such marvels all the more surprising, the narrative's opening sequence avoids the supernatural, privileging "realistic" adventures – which, however, smack of romance. After being taken prisoner, T. S. spends some time in the court; then he is sold to a Turkish woman, becomes her lover and guardian of the *bagnio*, and enters the service of a new master, a soldier who participates in a military campaign against rebellious Arab tribes in the inland. Then, while crossing the desert, T. S. finds himself in a space no longer governed by empirical common sense:

> as we passed, I saw a Flying Serpent, about the bigness of an ordinary Dog, with a Long Tail, and a Head like an Ape, with a larger mouth, and a long Tongue, the Body had about four Foot in length; we shot at it, but could not kill it: It threatened some of our men when they ventured to come near it, and could not be obliged to depart until a great number of us were arrived at the Place. I saw it near a pleasant Fountain that did rife in one side of the Furthermost Grove. I enquired of the Name, but could not learn it; it had Wings of diverse Colours, the Chief were red and white: it hovered long over our heads, and had not the Noise of our Guns frighted it away, I think it had ventured amongst us again. I could not distinguish of what substance the Wings were; they were bigger than those of our winged Fowls; all the Birds that saw it at a distance were glad to fly. I imagined it to be a kind of Basilisk, a desperate Serpent, and extraordinary Venomous. This sight was no less wonderful to the rest than to me; for all professed to have never seen the like: That made me believe it was some In-land Creature not usually seen near the Sea-Coast. (80)

Later, T. S. comes across a chameleontic lamb and discovers a "perfect statue of a man buggering his ass" (87-88): an inveterate sinner, T. S. is told, petrified by Allah while committing his crime. Initially perplexed, T. S. remembers finding similar statues during his travels, and, lost in devotional thoughts, momentarily suspends his war against superstition: God, he concludes, is in fact capable of inflicting such punishments, of altering so radically the course of nature.

Enacting a mediation between the natural and the supernatural, *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* incorporates various kinds of superstitious and legendary stereotypes, and regards them from an empirical viewpoint. The reading experience afforded by T. S.'s narrative seems intended to minimize the gap between pre- or non- empirical cultural formations and the empirical world-view, which should theoretically negate them – in fact, framing the Other as pre-rational, T. S. insistently criticizes the Arabs' superstitious beliefs and customs. On one level, the text assumes a sceptical stance, and on another level it contradicts that stance by indulging in, and endorsing, the representation of various kinds of seemingly supernatural entities: T. S encounters both monsters such as the flying serpent or the chameleon lamb – whose matrix is unclear − and actual prodigies created by God's hand. At the same time, however, some of the prodigies encountered by T. S. are so grotesque or overtly bizarre – certainly more bizarre than the monsters portrayed in most seventeenth-century pamphlets − that the text's stance seems to be latently ironic. True, the absence of a clear-cut generic framework, which would imply a more evident detachment from the text's pre-modern models, forestalls a consistently critical perspective; but the paratextual signs of *The Adventures*'s fictional component suggest that the experience the text provides is only virtual, and that in the real world monsters do not exist.

Imaginary voyages' internalization of an empirical attitude makes them functionally analogous to apparition narratives: they often – and *The Adventures* in particular – deploy ontological hesitation. For instance, after going through the petrified village, T. S. is doubtful whether it could have been created by God's providential hand, and oscillates between a natural and a supernatural explanation. Like a good Baconian traveller, T. S. tends to focus mostly on a purely immanent dimension, and to be sceptical of the supernatural, unless it manifests itself directly. Imaginary voyages develop and dramatize ontological hesitation independently of apparition narratives: staging encounters with otherness, and equating the supernatural and the monstrous with that otherness, they also dramatize the inquisitive stance of empirical travellers, confronted with a broad range of irreducible novelties. And, as in apparition narratives, in *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.* ontological hesitation is a necessary presupposition for wonder: re-enchantment is not possible in the absence of a doubting, inquiring attitude.

iv. *The Blazing World* and the Power of Fancy

At the roots of the tradition of imaginary voyages in England one finds a work that violates what was emerging as a main convention of the genre: the deployment of an empirical frame of reference. Directly inspired by Cyrano's *Voyages*, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) constitutes a unique imaginary voyage also by virtue of its self-consciously unrealistic quality: Cavendish defines her work as a product of "fancy," free from the restraints that characterize her serious writing. *The Blazing World* enacts a two-sided mediation: on one level, it performs the typical tasks of imaginary voyages, accommodating both the new science and medieval monsters. At the same time, however, it addresses, and provisionally solves,

contradictory aspects of Cavendish's own epistemological reflection. (Cavendish's thought is characterized by a tension, charged with political implications, between the valorization of individual agency in the production of knowledge − partly inspired by empiricism − and a more conservative view, which values authority and rejects an excessive reliance on experience). As we shall see, *The Blazing World*'s mediation – achieved through an original interpretation of the doctrine of vitalism – emerges as a product of its fictional quality. The paradoxical ontology of the Blazing World self-consciously enables Cavendish to elude the constraints of epistemological discourse.

The first woman in modern history to write extensively on scientific problems, in her *Philosophical Letters*, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* and *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* Cavendish criticizes the main natural philosophers of her time: she challenges Hobbesian mechanistic materialism, Cartesian realism, Paracelsianism, and Cambridge Platonism.[19] Her position in seventeenth-century scientific culture is, however, ambivalent: for instance, she shares Hobbes's hostility towards Cartesian philosophy and experimental science – her husband, the Duke of Newcastle, was Hobbes's patron – but she disagrees with Hobbes over the constitution of matter and free will. In her *Philosophical Letters*, she defines her own cosmology, inspired by the vitalist movement, active in England in the 1650s and influenced by Paracelsian natural philosophy.[20] According to Cavendish and to

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[19] See Lisa T. Sarasohn, "Leviathan and the Lady: Cavendish's Critique of Hobbes in the *Philosophical Letters*," in *Authorial Conquests. Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. L. Cottegnies and N. Weitz (London: Associated University Press, 2003), 40-58. See also Sarah Hutton, "In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy", *Women's Writing*, 4, no. 3 (1997), 421-432.

[20] For a reconstruction of the history and influence of vitalism see John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution. Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*. Rogers explores the political meanings of science, identifying the egalitarian implications of vitalism. Cavendish's fascination with vitalism, he argues, derived from her desire to escape gender constraints. On Cavendish and vitalism see also Steven Clucas, "The Duchess and the Viscountess: Negotiations between Mechanism and Vitalism in the Natural Philosophies of Margaret Cavendish and Anne Conway," in *In-Between: Essays and*

vitalist natural philosophers, matter is a living entity, whose movements are internally determined: vitalism endows the physical world with a form of free will, rejecting the super-individual rational necessity postulated by Hobbes. Reworking the main tenets of vitalism – and thereby laying the ground for *The Blazing World* − in her *Letters* Cavendish posits the existence of three types of matter – rational, sensible, and inanimate – intermingled in an organic whole. Within this whole, which constitutes the natural world, the rational matter is preponderant and works as an all-pervading organizing principle: the world is, therefore, "alive" and constantly in motion. For Cavendish everything – man, animals, stones – possesses a soul.

Inseparable from Cavendish's ontological conceptions is her epistemological approach. Regarding the whole as more important than its single parts, and valuing spirit over matter, Cavendish mistrusts empirical protocols. In her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, she debunks experimental knowledge as useless, privileging speculation to experience:

> Reason must direct first how sense ought to work, and so much as the Rational knowledge is more noble than the sensitive, so much is the speculative part of philosophy more noble than the Mechanical . . . art must attend reason as the chief mistress of information, which in time may make her a more useful and profitable servant than she is; for in this time she is become rather vain than profitable, striving to act beyond her power . . . [21]

Cavendish harshly condemns the use of investigatory instruments such as the telescope or the microscope (she criticizes Robert Hooke's observation and description of insects) regarding it as unproductive, as all "art" − that is, technology − ultimately is. Her devaluation of the material world and exaltation of the cognitive

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Studies in Literary Criticism, 1-2, no. 9 (Mar-Sept., 2000), 125-36; Richard Johnson Sheehan, "Margaret Cavendish, Natural Philosopher: Negotiating between Metaphors of the Old and New Sciences," in *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in Their Lives*, *Work, and Culture*, ed. Linda Troost (New Yorsk: AMS Press, 2001), 1, 1-18.

[21] Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 196, 201. Further references will appear in the text.

powers of an uncorrupt reason bespeak a resistance to empiricism that is religious

and, to a certain extent, political. (Her political preoccupations become fully visible

if one takes into account her Royalist commitment and reads her scientific texts in

the light of *The Blazing World*, which brings to the fore the problem of cultural

fragmentation and points to its social consequences). Cavendish finds the notion of a

purely immanent universe rife with unsettling moral implications:

> it is a great error in man to study more the exterior faces and countenances of
> things, than their interior natural and figurative motions, which error must
> undoubtedly cause great mistakes, insomuch as man's rules will be false,
> compared to the true principles of nature; for it is a false maxim to believe, that
> if some creatures have power over others, they have also power over nature; it
> may as well be believed, that a wicked man . . . has power over God . . . (203)

However, Cavendish's attitude towards the new science is ambivalent: her work

bespeaks a deep awareness of the inevitability of epistemic change. Though

contradictorily, she interacts with the scientific culture of her time, and by resorting

to vitalism she in fact tries to reconcile a materialistic and a transcendent world-view,

engaging with the most problematic questions brought about by the rise of the new

science, such as the relation between spirit and matter. Furthermore, her emphasis on

an individual speculation unrestrained by the tenets established by philosophers

perpetuates the reaction to ancient authority that characterizes empirical

epistemology. Cavendish's ambivalence is exemplified by this passage from her

preface to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, which frames her

participation in the production of knowledge – namely, her vitalist mediation and,

paradoxically enough, her epistemological critique − as potentially dangerous:

> It is probable, some will say, that my much writing is a disease . . . I confess,
> there are many useless and superfluous books, and perchance mine will add to
> the number of them; especially it is to be observed, that there have been in this
> latter age, as many writers of natural philosophy, as in former ages there have
> been of moral philosophy; which multitude, I fear, will produce such a

> confusion of truth and falsehood, as the number of moral writers formerly did, with their over-nice divisions of virtues and vices, whereby they did puzzle their readers so, that they knew not how to distinguish between them. The like, I doubt, will prove amongst our natural philosophers, who by their extracted, or rather distracted arguments, confound both divinity and natural philosophy, sense and reason, nature and art, so much as in time we shall have, rather a chaos, than a well-ordered universe (7-8).

Cavendish is suspended between a fascination with, and mistrust in, the new science's valorization of the individual. On the one hand, she is trying to elaborate an innovative epistemology independent of the authority of ancient philosophers; on the other hand, she fears the overproduction of knowledge (notably of "natural philosophy") which derives from empirical individualism. Her position appears conservative and, needless to say, rather self-contradictory: she is afraid that natural philosophers may "confound . . . divinity" and that subjective perspectives may proliferate, ultimately obfuscating our perception of reality. In a tone that recalls Christian thinkers' condemnation of empiricism and modern materialism, Cavendish laments that the multitude of empirically-oriented arguments that have been recently formulated may be conducive to cosmological and ethical disorder.

The tension between the need for epistemic freedom and the nostalgia for a stable, recognizable order is, as we shall see, crucial in *The Blazing World,* which engages with, and at the same time self-consciously supersedes, some of the problems of its age, as well as Cavendish's own contradictions. Its range and purpose are evident in the preface, where Cavendish emphasizes its links with her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (published in the same volume), acknowledges its models, and vindicates its originality, suggesting that the world she has created transcends the limits of the material world:[22] "I chose such fiction as

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[22] Sarah Hutton, "Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*," in *Authorial Conquests. Essays on Genre in the Writings of*

would be agreeable to the subjects treated of in the former parts; it is a description of a *new world*, not such as *Lucian*'s, or the French-man's world in the moon, but a world of my own creating."[23]

In fact, *The Blazing world* seems overtly uncommitted to empirical truth. Its opening pages bespeak a fascination with gold and diamonds probably derived from pre-modern travel writing (one thinks of Mandeville's travels and Marco Polo's description of Kublai's court), and the monsters described by Cavendish seem to be radically "other," even according to the standard of romances – in *The Blazing World* there are not dragons, giants or enchanters, but spider-men. These monsters are, furthermore, instrumental to Cavendish's critique of empiricism: their scientific conversations with the Empress – they are the blazing world's natural philosophers – do not seem to be intended to achieve a closure; they are rather intended to objectify the modes of rational debate and undermine them through an effect of indeterminacy, through the sense that empirical investigation is ultimately useless and divisive (140-150). *The Blazing World* dramatizes the critique of empiricism included in the *Observations*, without immediately gesturing towards an alternative epistemology. More often than not, the Empress is not described as having a particular scientific knowledge or insight; her privileging a particular theory derives from a subjective, unmotivated perception; she is represented as one who searches rather than one who knows, and her inquisitive stance does not serve so much to establish her authority as to undermine that of the natural philosophers she questions.[24] (Even the vitalist subtext is, at first, not fully authoritative: the spirits' explanation of vitalism's basic

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Margaret Cavendish, ed. Jacqueline Pearson (London: Associated University Press, 2003), 161-178. On Cavendish and the utopian tradition see also Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[23] Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, in *The Blazing World and other Writings* [London, 1666] (London: Penguin, 1994), 124. Further references will appear in the text.

[24] On the self-deconstructive strategies of *The Blazing World* see Jay Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *Studies in English Literature*, 36, vol. 3 (June 1, 1996), 527-546.

principles is not valorized or underlined by the empress's reactions [170-180]). If one

reads the preface to *The Blazing World*, however, the absence of a consistent

scientific reflection does not come as a surprise:

> If you wonder, that I join a work of fancy to my serious philosophical
> contemplations; think not that it is out of a disparagement to philosophy . . .
> *fictions* are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he
> pleases, without regard, whether the thing he fancies, be really existent without
> his mind or not; so that reason searches the depth of nature, and enquires after
> the true causes of natural effects; but fancy creates of its own accord
> whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work . . . (123)

The Blazing World is self-consciously fantastic, theorizing the full freedom of

imagination and its creations. The aesthetic autonomy of the world Cavendish has

created attests to the emergence of the fantastic as a recognizably literary mode that

highlights, and shortens, the distance between the empirical and the non-empirical.[25]

In fact, Cavendish aims less at explaining the workings of the universe than at

playfully reanimating it: the stars have tails, spirits inhabits the depths of the world,

matter is alive. *The Blazing World* is an ontological labyrinth, where the natural and

the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate, bleed into each other, causing a

perpetual hesitation over the laws that govern the blazing world and, indirectly, our

own world, which exists in a contiguous space. This hesitation is, granted, not

anchored in an intra-textual perspective, but is engendered by the *Blazing World*'s

ontological oscillations and epistemological interest: the text raises questions over

the structure of the universe, and puzzlingly amalgamates different entities and

phenomena, so that no clear-cut answers appear possible. At the same time,

Cavendish accomplishes a self-conscious, highly provisional, mediation. *The Blazing

World's* fictional dimension accommodates a pre-scientific marvelous, occasionally

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[25] And, in a broader perspective, attests to the emergence of new conceptions of the "fictive" that, in
spite of their didactic commitment, assume a distance between the real and the unreal. Both the
fantastic and the novel tend to present themselves as self-conscious aesthetic objects.

harmonizing it with elements drawn from empirical culture; in her war against England, for instance, the Empress deploys supernatural objects in a way that presupposes a technological outlook. *The Blazing World* condenses potentially contrasting elements: the bear-men, the fish-men, and the various other hybrids figuring in the narrative strongly resemble medieval monsters, which epistemologists condemned as mere inventions, but they also represent the scientists of the Royal Society, who are quintessential empiricists. *The Blazing World* accommodates not only a satire of empiricism, but also a portrayal of its applications, which coexists with the representation of entities that empiricism tends to reject.

However, *The Blazing World*'s mediatory work is more specific than that, closely involving Cavendish's own epistemology. As we have seen, Cavendish values cultural – as well as social – authority, but, paradoxically enough, she also seems to value one's ability to transcend the constraints of traditional, ossified knowledge. This is visible in the *Blazing World*'s discussion of the Cabbala, Plato, Epicurus and Aristotle (as well as in the Empress and Duchess's reflections on art): all these philosophies or modes of interpretation, Cavendish suggests, imply the individual mind's unproductive subordination to rules. Cavendish is a proponent of an almost absolute epistemic freedom, of an unrestrainedly abstract speculation on nature, which transcends time and place; in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she writes:

> this study [of natural philosophy] is a great delight, and pleases the curiosity of mens minds, it carries their thoughts above vulgar and common Objects, it elevates their Spirits to an aspiring pitch; it gives room for the untired appetites of man, to walk or run in, for so Spatious it is, that it is beyond the compasse of time; . . . neither doth it bind up man to those strict rules as other Sciences do,

it gives them an honest liberty, and proves temperance is the greatest pleasure in nature.[26]

But if, on the one hand, Cavendish ostensibly valorizes individuality, singularity, and freedom, on the other hand she fears the cultural disorder generated by unrestrained scientific inquiry, and epitomized by the divorce between "art" and "nature," a fracture informing both her *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* and *The Blazing World*. In both works, "art" has a broad sense: it means aesthetic production, scientific and technological practice, and, implicitly, every kind of individual product. All manifestations of human creativity potentially participate in the uncontrolled proliferation of perspectives that Cavendish criticizes in her *Observations on Experimental Philosophy*; although not explicitly condemned, even artistic production is potentially disruptive: as we shall see, most of the Empress and the Duchess's attempts to create new worlds by means of their imagination result in chaos. Conversely, "nature" indicates all those entities that coexist harmoniously in a whole, entities that are first and foremost characterized by their role in, and subordination to, a system. (In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* Cavendish states that nature has the form of "one Body . . . ordering her self-moving parts with all facility and ease, without any disturbance, living in pleasure and delight, with infinite Varieties and Curiosities, such as no single part or Creature of hers can never attain to" [48]).

In a crucial moment of *The Blazing World*, the contrast between art and nature is reconciled: a completely free creativity is able to lead to a final understanding of the basic principles of the vitalist cosmology, which finally emerges as a consistent, and

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[26] Margaret Cavendish, "An Epistle to the Reader, for my Book of Philosophy," *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), sig. A-A2. I draw the quotation from Oddvar Holmesland, "Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*: Natural Art and the Body Politic," *Studies in Philology*, 96 (1999), 473.

authoritative, epistemic structure. This happens when the Duchess decides to create *her own world* by means of her imagination, an action which seems to replicate Cavendish's composition of *The Blazing World*. The Duchess's world rests on principles that are totally individual; she discards Thales, Pythagoras, Epicurus, and Hobbes's philosophies because her mental representations of the world they depict plays out a fundamentally flawed logic, unavoidably resulting in chaos, monstrosity, and destruction. While these philosophers describe aberrant universes, the Duchess's world is stable:

> At last, when the Duchess saw that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world, she resolved to make a world of her own invention, and this world was composed of sensitive and rational self-moving matter; indeed, it was composed only of the rational, which is the subtlest and purest degree of matter; for as the sensitive did move and act both to the perceptions and consistency of the body, so this degree of matter at the same point of time (for though the degrees are mixed, yet the several parts may move several ways at one time) did move to the creation of the imaginary world; which world after it was made, appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed, that it cannot possibly be expressed by worlds, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own (188).

This world is harmonious but accommodates variety, therefore also singularity and individuality – this constitutes another level of mediation − it is created by imagination, and it amounts to a sublimated version of the vitalist cosmos described by the spirits (176). In other words, individual creativity enables an almost complete apprehension of what appears to be the truth – the Duchess's stable world retroactively endorses the spirits' obscure but seemingly authoritative words, a self-referential validation that is further strengthened if one is conscious of Cavendish's own belief in vitalism. Thus, Cavendish's cult of unrestrained speculation and creativity is reconciled with her desire for a well-ordered universe and a no less ordered cosmology. This would seem avant-la-lettre Romantic irrationalism were it

not that in her epistemological writings Cavendish does not seem to regard fancy as a

cognitive tool: "fancy" is central only in *The Blazing World*. The duchess's creation

of a world that mirrors and to some extent uncovers the basic principles of the "real"

one rather represents art's ability to provisionally overcome the problems posed by

"reason," and to overcome the ontological hesitation engendered by previous

sections of the text. Not surprisingly, *The Blazing World* has been described as

"metafictional" and self-consciously aesthetic.[27] In fact, the aesthetic theory that

Cavendish sketches in her preface to the *Blazing World* establishes that the creations

of fancy are free from the constraints of reason. *The Blazing World* is intended to be

not epistemologically reliable but purely fantastic.

v. *Iter Lunare*: Imaginary Voyages as Conjectural Literature

Little is known about David Russen, who, besides *Iter Lunare*, *or a Voyage to the

Moon* (1703), authored a tract entitled *Fundamentals without Fundation, or a True

Picture of the Anabaptists in their Rise, Progress, and Practice* (1698). As a result,

Iter Lunare, a highly ambivalent text, has posed a variety of interpretive problems.

Presenting itself as a commentary on Cyrano's work, and seemingly reading his

Voyages as a serious reflection on space travel, *Iter Lunare* has been seen by some

critics as an avant-la-lettre work of space engineering, a "modernist" text that

envisions voyages to the moon as a concrete technological possibility.[28] It does not

seem plausible, however, that any mentally healthy savant could have regarded

Cyrano's work as a handbook for empirical projectors: the ironies and contradictions

of *Iter Lunare* – and the preface's acknowledgment of the "diverting thoughts" that

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[27] Richard Nate, "'Plain and Vulgarly Express'd': Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science," *Rhetorica*, 19, vol. 4 (Autumn, 2001), 414-415.

[28] See Aaron Parret, *The Translunar Narrative in the Western Tradition* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) and Mary Elizabeth Bowen's introduction to the most recent edition of *Iter Lunare* (Boston: Gregg, 1976).

are scattered throughout the text[29] − rather make it a piece of mock-commentary which opens up Borgesian complexities.

The opening pages of *Iter Lunare* ironically evoke the tone of empirically-grounded works. The preface contains a playful variation of the "strange, therefore true" trope. Russen criticizes the moon-blind intellects who are unable to understand his book, implying, like *The Man in the Moone*, that conceiving what lies beyond the scope of common experience requires an imaginative effort. Then he emphasizes that, although they may seriously question that the moon is inhabited, his readers have known the story of the man in the moon since their infancy. This throws a light of irony on his seemingly serious treatment of Cyrano − Russen calls Cyrano's work a "treatise" and "a most rational history of the Government of the Moon" (6).

Russen's actual intentions are conveyed by the artful self-contradictoriness of his arguments, which echo crucial ontological questions. The "invisible spirits" that, according to Cyrano, inhabit the moon, constitute, he states, evidence (which is in fact unavailable) against "sadduces," that is, skeptics (12-13). By taking entities whose existence cannot be directly perceived as proofs of the divine order, Russen seems to parody the logic that underlies empirical demonology, and highlights the rhetorical strategies of much contemporary literature (including, as we have seen, imaginary voyages). By the same token, Russen's overview of possible techniques of space-travel seems a parody of projectors' ambitions. After describing Cyrano's way of ascending to the moon, he proposes that the ascent could be made easier by travelling on a serene day, and that, like Domingo Gonsales, one could facilitate one's trip by climbing to the top of a mountain; a pipe connected to Earth could be used to breathe. Russen also discusses Domingo Gonsales's use of birds as vehicles,

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[29] David Russen, *Iter Lunare, or a Voyage to the Moon* (London, 1703), Preface. Further references will appear in the text.

dwelling on birds' habits (including the legendary Ruck), and concludes by considering the efficiency of full-fledged artificial wings and of flying chariots propelled by a spring. But the veil of irony suddenly drops: these reflections are invalidated by the unexpected admission that Gonsales's journey is in fact an invention, and that all reports of voyages to the moon, including Cyrano's, are "fake relations, which teach probable, yet doubtful, principles" (61). Suddenly assuming an anti-modernist stance, Russen states that the limits of human agency have been established by divine providence, which forbids moon-travelling (62).

What looks like a conservative twist introduces, however, an unorthodox perspective on religion that complicates the meaning of *Iter Lunare*. Russen valorizes the limits God has established for human knowledge, but immediately afterwards he says that the church should acknowledge the existence of a plurality of worlds. Fascinated with Cyrano's ontological imagination (and, very likely, with Fontenelle's *Conversation on the Plurality of Worlds*, published in 1686), Russen tries to harmonize a devotional attitude with the notion of an open, ontologically variable universe that religion regarded suspiciously since its bold formulation in Giordano Bruno's work. His stance becomes even more unorthodox – not to say flippant − when he playfully equates the values of the Scriptures with that of Cyrano's voyages, quoting both to prove the existence of spirits (92). He concludes, however, by firmly emphasizing the primacy of faith over reason: divine providence has, he argues, driven the development of science (95).

Despite his belief in the power of divine providence, Russen is ultimately unable to take a neat position on modern science. *Iter Lunare* evinces a deep fascination with the freedom of thinking upon which the new science is based, but at the same time it does not fully agree with its purposes, methods, and, above all, its optimism.

Russen refuses to embrace empirical epistemology, regarding senses as unreliable instruments of knowledge (102). A few pages later, however, he invokes epistemic freedom, exalts Descartes and Copernicus, and emphasizes that Cyrano's voyage ends in Rome, the place where the principle of authority is more oppressively enforced. By the same token, he seems skeptical of superseded forms of learning, such as Stoic theories on the structure of the universe (130), and alchemy (144), implying a deeper trust in empiricism and its methods. But he ultimately does not believe in progress; the reason that moon-travelling is impossible is also that people are too slothful and covetous to build efficient machines (44) and all civilizations are doomed to collapse (50). Besides, he asserts that sporadic moments of historical progress have been determined not by man, but by spirits.

Thus, in spite of his oscillations, Russen establishes clear limits for human knowledge, subordinating it to divine providence, and he sees history as anything but progressive. At the same time, however, he attacks scholastic dogmatism, partly sharing the rationale of modern science. If, resorting to early eighteenth-century categories, one tries to contextualize *Iter Lunare* in terms of the polemic between the ancients and the moderns – which was to explode soon − Russen seems to side with the ancients, but at the same time demonstrates a deep fascination with the values of the moderns. For Russen, however, this fascination cannot be channeled into actual scientific and technological progress. The possibility of a knowledge able to explore and chart other areas of the universe such as the moon – which, as we have seen, he believes to be ultimately unreachable – can be pursued not so much by empirical investigation as by literature. For Russen, Cyrano's *Voyages* are "feigned relations . . . that teach us probable, yet doubtful principles" (61), principles that can never be brought to the test of experience. In books such as Cyrano's, one can explore a

plurality of worlds that is otherwise unknowable, and develop a conception, but not a real sense, of both God and nature's creativity.

In other words, *Iter Lunare* ends up theorizing imaginary voyages, attributing to the literature of the supernatural the ability to provide a virtual apprehension of the divine, as Addison does. While, however, for Addison aesthetic experience enables one to conceive of the divine agency and the diversity of its creations, for Russen it restricts itself to pure immanence. It enables us to imagine a distinctly spatial dimension in which other worlds exist, and other natural laws manifest themselves, constituting a compensation for a rational inquiry that is fundamentally impossible. In what could be regarded as an early theory of the fantastic, Russen views what we would now call the aesthetic as the space where one's interest in the perspectives that the new science has opened up can unrestrainedly range. (As Paul Alkon has noted, for Russen "the space voyages are a literature of conjecture that is based often enough upon scientific extrapolation rather than mere fantasy to be aptly described either by his term 'rational history' or by our term 'science fiction'").[30]

At the same time, the space of the aesthetic enables a liberation from the limits established by *both* the new science and religion, the conjectural literature inaugurated by Cyrano and Godwin actually constituting a way to provisionally transcend ideological and epistemological constraints. Though intermittently, *Iter Lunare* tries to engender a sense of liberation. In fact, Russen's accurate discussion of the possibility of moon travel does not easily enable readers to perceive his skepticism: he devotes long descriptions to technological solutions he ultimately does not believe in (Russen's long discussion of space travel is seemingly intended to demonstrate its feasibility and only retroactively invalidated), and to unreliable

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[30] Paul Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 57.

cosmologies, spending more energy on their evocation than on their critique − for more than half its length, *Iter Lunare* dwells on all kinds of conjectures, sketching parallel worlds inhabited by spirits. This entails a temporary hesitation over the nature of the universe, which at times seems governed by physical principles, at times seems entirely subordinated to supernatural forces. The sense of indetermination engendered by Russen's shifting treatment of its subjects is, however, gradually reduced: an orthodox Christian cosmology emerges, and the text's ontological hesitation gives way to a stable perspective. Russen's playful consideration of Cyrano's work as a reasonable set of cosmological hypotheses amounts, in other words, to a transitory – and fantastic − redefinition of the boundaries of our universe, ultimately undermined by the text's self-consciousness. In fact, *Iter Lunare* highlights the difference between a conjectural literary representation and an unknowable reality, between the aesthetic and the scientific.

vi. *The Consolidator*: Fantastic Representation as Allegorical Satire

Unlike the works I have analyzed so far, Defoe's *The Consolidator: or Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon* (1705), is a full-fledged voyage to the moon − intended as a satirical representation of contemporary politics, religion, and, to a certain extent, science – clearly inspired by Cyrano's *Voyages*. Defoe wrote his imaginary voyage as a response to church and state politics from 1660 to 1705, focusing in particular on the War of Spanish Succession and on High-Church policy towards dissenters.[31] *The Consolidator* is based on a one-to-one series of allegorical signifiers whose connection with political events is so direct as to obfuscate the text's fantastic representation, which is not so sophisticated and autonomous as that

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[31] On *The Consolidator*'s political correspondences see Michael Seidel's introduction to Daniel Defoe, *The Consolidator* (New York: AMS Press, 2001).

of other imaginary voyages, critique taking over enchantment. In other words,
Defoe's work lacks the sophisticated apparatus of verisimilitude that will
characterize another great allegorical satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. As we shall see, this
narrows the range of its functions, and places it in a marginal position in the
genealogy of imaginary voyages. (Such genealogy is, inevitably, based on a self-
conscious teleology "that defines all study that investigates the past sources of
present entities – i. e., that knows its end in advance;"[32] − this entails highlighting
that some of the objects studied are less close to that end).

In spite of its interest in science, *The Consolidator* does not have an optimistic
view of history. A gentleman-tradesman skeptical of the potential of human nature
who likes travelling and collecting knowledge (Defoe inflects the figure of the
Baconian traveler in a relativistic direction) reaches China and is astonished at its
progress, which predates the European Enlightenment. The Chinese have a vast array
of devices: a machine for remembering, one for making copies of documents, one for
recording and transcribing speech, and one to read people's thoughts. Besides, they
possess a highly developed understanding of the workings of human physiology:
they know, for instance, the material processes underlying thinking. At first, China's
technological primacy seems the product of "ancient" ingenuity (*The Consolidator*
also alludes to, and takes inspiration from, *A Tale of a Tub*),[33] but turns out to have
derived from the Moon − to a large extent, with a patent anachronism, an analogue of
early-eighteenth-century England.[34]

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[32] Michael McKeon, Introduction to the Fifteenth Anniversary Edition of *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2002), xix, n. 7.

[33] See John Ross, *Swift and Defoe: A Study in Relationship* (Folcroft: Folcroft Press, 1940), 37-38.

[34] On *The Consolidator*'s representation of early-eighteenth-century culture, in particular of the new science, see Narelle L. Shaw, "Ancients and Moderns in Defoe's *Consolidator*," *SEL*, 28, vol. 3 (Summer, 1998), 391-400. According to Narelle Shaw, *The Consolidator* is informed by a "modernist" ideology. But the skepticism and relativism that are integral to the form Defoe deploys make *The Consolidator* radically different from his main works.

The primary source of China's knowledge, the so-called "vice-admiral of China," came from the Moon two thousand years before the flood. To explore the Lunar civilization, the protagonist decides to travel through space by means of a vehicle designed by the admiral and called "Consolidator," made of wings powered by an "ambient flame." The appearance of this improbable star-craft marks the beginning of the allegory, which is not, however, based on a correlation of fictional and real characters, as in secret histories, but on an arbitrary, counterintuitive, correspondence, each feather of the spacecraft symbolizing a member of Parliament. The Consolidator's feathers number 513, and they all have the same physical dimension except "one extraordinary feather."[35] The workings of the Consolidator, determined by their quality and number, are further equated with those of the Parliament in a sequence of allegorical allusions that evoke the history of England in the previous 50 years. For instance, the narrator recounts how poorly chosen feathers caused the ship to crash, thereby beheading the king who was travelling to the Earth (an allusion to the execution of Charles I) (38-39).

On the moon, new technological devices are revealed to the protagonist, most of which are described with an idiom that echoes late-seventeenth-century scientific prose. The descriptions of the Cogitator, the Elevator, and the Concionazimir are mild parodies of the language of mechanical science and seem to be based on the oratorical machines of *A Tale of a Tub*. The Concionazimir is "a hollow Vessel, generally octagonal in Figure . . . very mathematically contriv'd" (73). These descriptions, however, serve a more immediately relevant satirical purpose: the Concionazimir potentiates one's rhetorical skills, while the Elevator generates an enthusiasm that very easily leads to self-deception, both symbolizing how

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[35] Daniel Defoe, *The Consolidator*, 2nd edition, (London, 1705), 37. Further references will appear in the text.

consciousness, enhanced – and informed − by mechanical workings, can be manipulated by means of artifices. Lunar technology is also characterized by a variety of optical devices, which, it has been suggested, represent's Locke's "ocular empiricism,"[36] the visual element preponderant in the new science and its epistemology (epitomized by Hooke's microscope and the descriptive style prescribed by the Royal Society). "Tis no strange Things," says the narrator, "that they should so much out-do us in this sort of *Eye-Sight* we call General knowledge" (61). Optical instruments enable inhabitants of the Moon to convert concepts into visual representations: "First we were informed, by the help of these Glasses, strange Things, which pass in our World for Non-entities, to be seen, and very Perceptible: for example, *State Polity*" (73). This playful transfiguration of modern science's characteristics − which is not so critical and problematic as *Gulliver's Travels*'s epistemological reflexion − turns out to be an instrument for satire, helping perceive the ills of English society, including misapplication of taxes and international warfare. *The Consolidator*'s satirical perspective seems to imply a purely materialistic view of human nature: men are assimilated to machines in a way that suggests their corruptibility and malfunctioning: the devices invented by the Lunarians, intended to enhance human faculties and senses, also show how these faculties are intrinsically limited.

The most evident satirical subtext in *The Consolidator* centers on the political events that inspired Defoe's *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. The protagonist meets a "grave philosopher" who represents Defoe himself, and who authored a book entitled *The Shortest Way with the Criolians*. Social conflicts on the moon are modeled on conflicts over the role of dissenters, ferociously attacked in Parliament,

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[36] See Aaron Parret, *The Translunar Narrative in the Western Tradition*, 77.

in particular in relation to the possibility of occasional conformity, that is, the possibility dissenters had to occupy public offices by opportunistically taking communion in the Church of England. When the Lunarians' optical instruments also prove capable of looking into the future, a possible solution for England's struggles is – rather vaguely − envisioned. A new consolidator is under construction (it will be built without the feathers that caused the last one's ruin) and this will enable a union on Earth similar to that achieved on the moon between "Nolunarians" and "Solunarians." Reflecting Defoe's own attitude, the protagonist intends to write a full account of the advantages of such a union, which, he believes, will guarantee the rights of the Criolians and of the entire kingdom − the parallel between Criolians and dissenters becoming, at this point, explicit.

As the political subtext becomes dominant, the allegory loses its semblance of realism, no longer sustained by a consistent verisimilitude: the feathers and the members of parliament are conflated, so that the narrator suddenly refers to the feathers as if they were sentient beings (331). Unlike most imaginary voyages, *The Consolidator* does not attempt to build a credible world, Defoe does not present the moon according to criteria of verisimilitude that imply a sustained analogy between our world and the world he describes, the workings of the Consolidator itself transcending the logics of seventeenth-century mechanics. Flying feathers were already utilized as a spacecraft by Menippus in Lucian's *True History*: Defoe deploys a conventional, recognizably literary artifice without grounding it in conjectures or conceptions of contemporary science. *The Consolidator*'s representation of the moon is, in other words, instrumental to something else, shifting readers' focus from the signifier to the signified. Most imaginary voyages based their work of mediation on their empirically-oriented verisimilitude: the world

can be re-enchanted because monsters are presented as if they were real. *The Consolidator* is therefore useful not so much to understand the workings of the fantastic as what the fantastic *is not*. In fact, *Gulliver's Travels* will become a pervasive model precisely because of its ability to balance allegorical meaning and circumstantial language, to make critique coextensive with wonder.

vii. "All Criticism Was Lost in Wonder"*: The Marvelous in *Gulliver's Travels*

What *Don Quixote* was for the novel (especially in England), *Gulliver's Travels* was for imaginary voyages, establishing a thematic scope and a set of conventions that would become integral to the genre: first and foremost the scientific subtext. While *The Blazing World* and *The Consolidator*'s reflections on empirical epistemology are only intermittent, *Gulliver's Travels*'s performs a great variety of functions. It operates, firstly, on the strictly narrative level, substantiating Gulliver both as a character and as a narrator (unlike all the characters we have encountered so far, he is, and writes like, a full-fledged Royal Society traveler), in a way that, furthermore, calls into question the strategies of authentication mobilized by empiricism. Secondly, it operates on the level of content, participating in a specific critique of various kinds of scientific practice: book III highlights the limits of experimental science, focusing on the work inspired by the Royal Society virtuosi.

But the implications of Swift's elaborate use of scientific prose go far beyond the satire of empirical epistemology. As its enormous success shows – let us think of its abridged editions – the satirical subtext of *Gulliver's Travels* does not impair its ability to portray a convincing world; in fact, the book's success has been totally independent of Swift's elaborate satirical allusions, obscure to most readers. *Gulliver's Travels* is no doubt the most "realistic" imaginary voyage produced in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, incorporating maps, providing latitudes and longitudes, and describing alien societies with a precision that surpasses Defoe's. Swift's verisimilitude also informs the representation of the vast array of non-empirical entities that populate Gulliver's narrative. Examining the contemporary reception of *Gulliver's Travels*, one suspects that the book's enormous success was due not so much to its disturbingly complex social and ideological subtexts as to the vividness of its fantastic representation. Johnson commented that when *Gulliver's Travels* was first published, the audience's reaction was one of enthusiasm and wonder.

> This important year [1727] sent likewise into the world *Gulliver's Travels*, a production so new and strange, that it filled the reader with a mingled emotion of merriment and amazement. It was received with such avidity, that the price of the first edition was raised before the second could be made; it was read by the high and the low, the learned and illiterate. Criticism was for a while lost in wonder . . . [37]

Swift's ability to describe non-empirical objects as if they were real − though at the same time he paradoxically invalidates the truthfulness of the narrative − became one of the salient features of *Gulliver's Travels* (which laid the ground not only for philosophical science fiction but also for adventure romance, Gulliver being the forefather of both *Flash Gordon* and Chris Kelvin in *Solaris*). Although, as we have seen, various other imaginary voyages experimented with scientific rhetoric, Swift's verisimilitude was more closely modeled on travel writing (notably on William Dampier's style)[38] and perceived as more elaborately and self-consciously empirical. What impressed *Gulliver's Travels*' readers was, in other words, the way in which this style was used. Lord Monboddo wrote

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[37] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), vol. 2, 261. Quoted from Kathleen Williams, *Swift: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), 202.
[38] See Arthur Sherbo, "Swift and Travel Literature," *Modern Language Studies*, 9, vol. 3 (Fall, 1979), 175-196, and Dirk Friedrich Passman, "Full of Improbable Lies," *Gulliver's Travels und die Reiseliteratur vor 1726* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987).

> I will venture to say, that those monstrous lies so narrated, have more the air of probability than many a true story unskilfully told. And, accordingly, I have been informed, that they imposed many when they were first published . . . I would therefore advise our compilers of history, if they will not study the models of the historic style which the antients have left us, at least to imitate the simplicity of Dean Swift's style in *Gulliver's Travels*, and to endeavour to give as much the appearance of credibility to what truth they relate as he has given to his monstrous fictions . . .[39]

Monboddo's reflections on *Gulliver's Travels*'s ability to lend an air of probability to "monstrous lies" suggests that, in the view of contemporary readers, Swift's work was able to combine, and minimize the tension between, what was perceived as a radical violation of rational common sense and the truthfulness of empirical language. In *Gulliver's Travels*, what is self-evidently unreal paradoxically looks real. On one level, this makes *Gulliver's Travels*'s fictional quality more evident. No other imaginary voyage mobilizes such a great array of monsters and marvels, which are, furthermore, stylized according to a principle of complementarity that evinces an artificial organization: *Gulliver's Travels* accommodates, for instance, both tiny and gigantic creatures. The generic ambivalence of early imaginary voyages – whose structure was less accurately formalized than *Gulliver's Travels*'s, resembling that of actual travelogues − is superseded, and framed in a perspective that is clearly aesthetic, and constantly on the verge of parody.

On another level, the coexistence of extreme improbability and extreme precision, and of causal relations that tend to reflect those of the empirical world, serves to accomplish a mediation. In *Gulliver's Travels*, what Monboddo sees as the "monstrous" consists of a set of entities that populated old travel accounts: giants, gigantic birds, and talking beasts, which Swift places in a world that is analogous to ours, thereby restoring nature's capaciousness and creativity. Though more and more

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[39] James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, *Of the Origins and Progress of Language*, 2nd edn., (London, 1786), vol. 3, 195-6. I draw the quotation from Kathleen Williams, *Swift: The Critical Heritage*, 192.

accustomed to conceiving of a set of regular proportions that informs the development of living beings, the astonished readers of Gulliver's narrative explore surprising ontological domains that are rendered with absolute precision. Especially in books I and II, these domains are partly analogous, but have nonetheless clear boundaries. The essential qualities of the entities Gulliver encounters, radically violating common sense, are restricted to particular realms, populated by seemingly anomalous beings. Though ultimately part of the natural world, each of those realms seems to contain different ontological presuppositions.

As in other imaginary voyages, ontological accretion entails ontological hesitation: reading *Gulliver's Travels* one wonders what kind of creative forces produced the immense variety of entities Gulliver encounters. In fact, Gulliver is constantly puzzled by the "prodigious" nature of what he sees, which frustrates his reliance on previous experience. On his arrival in Brobdingnag, he thinks that "it might have pleased fortune, to have let the Lilliputians find some nation, where the people were as diminutive with respect to them, as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious race of mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the world, whereof we have yet no discovery".[40] Puzzlingly facing the Houyhnhnms, he suspects that they may be magicians "who had . . . metamorphosed themselves"(209): directly experiencing ontological hesitation, he resorts to a patently non-empirical model of causality. And, although God is hardly mentioned by Gulliver, *Gulliver's Travels* appropriates the imaginary of Medieval travelogues, evoking their cosmological view. An ontological pattern derived from ancient, distinctly Christian, models persists residually in Swift's empirical narrative, which

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[40] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin, 2003), 83. Further references will appear in the text.

incorporates and condensates an entire tradition of travelogues, staging a variety that was previously taken as a sign of God's boundless creativity.

The ontological variability that characterizes *Gulliver's Travels* perpetuates in the aesthetic realm – as opposed to the realm of epistemology – a resistance to the regularization of nature that, as we have seen, characterizes various strains of empirical culture in the late seventeenth century. Though pioneers of the new science, including Newton, insisted on the pervasiveness and consistency of physical laws, at the same time they tended to acknowledge the existence of domains that transcended them, and of forces that were not necessarily reducible to the models of empirically-based physics. Nature was often seen as a flexible, not entirely knowable, entity, and anomalies were often thought to reveal more than the norm derived from everyday experience. Strengthening an attitude integral to the newborn tradition of the fantastic, and thereby establishing a fundamental model, *Gulliver's Travels* portrays a nature that seems to resist explanation in spite of the presence of an explanatory apparatus. Such an apparatus is more strongly present in *Gulliver's Travels* than in previous imaginary voyages or fictionalized travelogues, which do not engage with empiricism with the same depth and self-consciousness. Gulliver seems more empirically committed than Robinson Crusoe, whose scientific vocation – which in fact derives from late-seventeenth-century scientific culture – is not overtly embraced and explained. Unlike Robinson, Gulliver intends to carry his findings to Gresham College; furthermore, his narrative is integrally modelled on empirical travelogues, while Robinson's narrative oscillates between spiritual biography and travel writing, resembling a scientific account only in the sections on the island.

As the tradition of apparition narratives also shows, the full development of the fantastic goes along with the internalization of an empirical perspective, which

produces a sense of the impossibility of certain phenomena and at the same time makes them tangible, enabling a deeper astonishment. As we have seen, this internalization is fully accomplished in *Gulliver's Travels*, whose workings epitomize those of the fantastic in general. An empirical viewpoint enables a new kind of wonder, confronting explorers with phenomena they cannot fully understand, and simultaneously lending to what they see an air of credibility (let us think of Gulliver's curiosity for the flying island: "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," [155]). Paradoxically enough, the view prescribed by the new science underlies the formal and semantic workings of the fantastic. Ontological hesitation fully emerges when a character's cognitive approach recognizably implies a materialistic worldview whose boundaries can be challenged − and expanded.

viii. Gulliver's Epigones

Gulliver's Travels's enormous success redefined imaginary voyages, establishing conventions, settings, themes, and techniques that subsequent authors tended to recuperate, inevitably characterizing their works as fictional. Regarding the works of Swift's epigones can help ascertain the extent of *Gulliver's Travels* innovation and influence, and retrace the stabilization of the fantastic as a recognizable literary genre. At the same time, an assessment of these works can also help us understand why *Gulliver's Travels,* able to combine the satirical and the marvellous, established itself as a model and survived contemporary trends and tastes. As we shall see, Swift's imitators reproduced the satirical subtext of *Gulliver's Travels*, but were unable to fully reproduce what Lord Monboddo perceived as Swift's main ability: to confer a

fictional narrative with "more the air of probability than many a true story unskilfully told."

One of the first imitations of *Gulliver's Travels* is Samuel Brunt's − Brunt is the name of the book's fictitious author − *Voyage to Cacklogallinia*, published in 1727, which, however, does not go so far as to reproduce or complicate Swift's system of verisimilitude and empirical commitment. Brunt finds himself in a land inhabited by monstrous creatures: gigantic hens endowed with seemingly human intelligence form a society that turns out to be a Whig dystopia. In fact, the Cacklogallinian society is characterized by all the evils that, in the view of Tories, attended unrestrained mobility. Brunt represents social mobility as quickly progressing to monstrousness: the more a hen is rich and powerful, the bigger it becomes by eating its inferiors − he suggests the "animal," irrational nature of the ambition that fuels Whig social climbers.[41] The satirical allegory becomes even more explicit when Brunt describes the speculation and corruption generated by the Cacklogallinian project of publically financing an expedition to the moon. The purpose of the expedition is, of course, profit: the moon is believed to contain gold mines. In a long digression which constitutes the most elaborate fantastic representation in the book – it is a full-fledged piece of conjectural literature, where the fascination with space travel coexists with satire − Brunt reviews various technological projects. But the main purpose of this section is to expose the events connected to the South-Sea Bubble (119-120, 130): the prime minister tries to manipulate stock prices, and the preparation of the voyage is attended by a frenzy of investments.[42]

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[41] Samuel Brunt, *A Voyage to Cacklogalliania* (London, 1727), 36, 41. Further references will appear in the text.

[42] The target of Brunt's satire has been identified many times, most recently by Srinivas Aravamudan in *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1744* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 367, n. 26.

A Voyage to Cacklogallinia enacts a transparent satire. The allegorical signifier often obliterates itself to make visible the objects of satire, in a one-to-one correspondence that prevents a full empirical rendition of the non-empirical world explored by Brunt. The lack of an elaborated system of verisimilitude forestalls wonder, possible only at that moment of juncture where the travel writing style opens up to accommodate gigantic birds, which are, at first, only partly visible, eliciting conjectures on their elusive nature. This amounts to a moment of ontological hesitation whose implications are, however, not fully developed, since Brunt lacks the empirical, explanatory attitude that is central in Gulliver's outlook. As a result, the fantastic representation is less convincing – and less marvellous, since the boundaries between the empirical and the non-empirical are not explicitly emphasized and explored.

The same could be said for Murtagh McDermot's *A Trip to the Moon* (1728), which takes on *Gulliver's Travels*'s critique of modern science, and, instrumentally to satire, recuperates – and at the same time oversimplifies − Swift's excremental vision. After climbing the mountain of Tenerife – in homage to *The Man in the Moone* – the protagonist vomits, causing a complicated physical process which results in him being caught by the winds and brought to the moon, home to a scientifically advanced society. As in *A Tale of a Tub*, everything is reduced to mechanical operations: not only the various absurd inventions of local projectors, but also cognitive, psychological, and social processes.[43] Empirically-based thinking is constantly mocked by providing implausible explanations based on low materialism. The critique of science is further developed in a voyage underwater. Aboard a submarine, the protagonist and a group of scientists set out for a journey that prefigures Captain

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[43] Murtagh McDermot, *A Trip to the Moon* (London, 1728), 17. Further references will appear in the text.

Nemo's exploration, but, comically enough, the submarine crashes on a rock because its pilot was "taken up in considering whether he might not demonstrate a mathematic problem by the motion of the Fishes tails" (61) – a stance bearing a strong resemblance to that of the scientists of Lagado. Even subsequent episodes are modelled on *Gulliver's Travels*: the protagonist reaches a hyper-rational, dystopian society, where even language activity is mathematized – scholars try to understand "the arithmetical progression of a tale" (81) − and where − an idea derived from *A Modest Proposal* − children's blood is used to make medicines (80). Both *A Voyage to Cacklogallinia* and *A Trip to the Moon* evince *Gulliver's Travels* great influence. Swift's work partly reset the generic parameters of imaginary voyages, which stopped venturing into ambivalent utopian realms in order to undertake a recognizable satire of English society, focusing in particular on contemporary science. Both works, however, lack *Gulliver's Travels*'s highly developed apparatus of verisimilitude, and, as a consequence, the marvellous that contemporary audiences enthusiastically found in Swift's masterpiece.

The anonymous *Voyages of Captain John Holmesby* (1757) is a slightly more original imitation of *Gulliver's Travels*, in which nonetheless fantastic representation is completely subordinated to satire − and ultimately defused. After the death of his father, Holmesby is kidnapped by sailors hired by his brother, who wants to appropriate his inheritance. Thus, Holmesby is stranded on a South-American shore, and, exploring a hostile environment, comes across a "venerable" old man,[44] a hermit who rejects his gratitude and invites him to work on his plantation. The old man comes from a country called Nimpatan, whose inhabitants, he says, are radically corrupt. Published in 1757, this imaginary voyage seems to have taken inspiration

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[44] *The Voyages of Captain John Holmesby* (London, 1757), 23-24. Further references will appear in the text.

from ideas foregrounded by Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1754). The old man explains that "thirst of knowledge makes men miserable" (36), and that "folly has caused Man to divert from the simple pleasant Path of Nature" (37). Originally, the Nimpatanese were a patriarchal society and lived in touch with nature. Then, after an invasion, they betrayed their principles: such corruption went along with the introduction of refined customs (41). Proud of England's progress, Holmesby does not believe the old man: he thinks that "Society and improved Life" ought to be preferred to the state of nature (43). But the old man responds that reason is nourished by temperance (43, 44). His discourse, that highlights the evils and systematic hypocrisy of social life, constitutes the narrative's satirical norm. Then, the old man dies, Holmesby inherits his gold and a "golden prism," and is found by the Nimpatanese.

This prism could turn this satirical dystopian tale into a full-fledged fantastic representation, but its potential is not fully exploited: ontological accretion does not go along with ontological hesitation, and Holmesby does not really question the nature of what he encounters. Among the Nimpatanese, he realizes that the prism, that they venerate as a deity – which highlights their cult of material possessions − controls people's will, and that the marks on it diminish in proportion to the avidity of the people he faces. Thus, the prism becomes instrumental to satire, without mobilizing ontological implications. Holmesby's travels turn into an unoriginal critique of English corruption, which reproduces Swift's conservative viewpoint.

A Voyage to the World in the Centre of Earth, published anonymously in 1755, is a later derivation of *Gulliver's Travels*, which recuperates the anti-Whig preoccupation with money accumulation and expenditure as engines of social mobility. After losing his wealth and being denied the help of a man he formerly

helped – and who is now affluent and stingy – the protagonist is compelled to go to sea. What follows is a fall into utopia: exploring the mouth of Vesuvius, he descends into a subterranean world, finding a globe that shines like the sun, and a variety of precious metals. The improbability of these events is ironically justified by mentioning Gulliver as a reliable historian,[45] thereby ironically acknowledging the text's model. As in other utopias, the pure rationality of this world's overtly fictional inhabitants suggests the impossibility of a rational behaviour among men. Using the subterranean world as a touchstone, this imaginary voyage conveys an explicit indictment of unrestrained capitalism that resonates in other texts of the period, and – recuperating the Platonic as well as Roman Catholic ideas that informed Thomas More's *Utopia*[46] − condemns unequal distribution of money in Europe. (But utopias are always ambivalent: the subterranean world turns out to be governed by a ruthless exclusionary logic: criminals are cruelly punished and differences are not tolerated.)

The most relevant fantastic representations in the text are, nonetheless, informed by the condemnation of human avidity. Roaming the subterranean world, the protagonist encounters one Mr. Thomson, a younger son who devoted himself to help people imprisoned for debt. Mr. Thomson describes the cycle of his metempsychoses, envisioning an ethically oriented universe that, being inspired by the Pythagorean cosmology – overtly pre-modern and therefore superseded − appears utterly unrealistic, a dream of metaphysical justice that pessimistically adumbrates a disorderly reality. Originally an inhabitant of planet Jupiter, Thomson killed his father and was compelled to reincarnate various times to atone for his sins. In fact, the universe also contains "hellish" planets where the souls of sinners are sent (120-140). Mr. Thomson is later reincarnated as a serpent and becomes an inhabitant of Saturn,

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[45] *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of Earth* (London, 1755), 3. Further references will appear in the text.

[46] See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), chap. 3.

which is populated by giants. Then he is reincarnated as the son of a miller, is hired as a footman by a lewd lady, resists her, is executed and winds up on Mars, world of heroes.

In *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth*, nature is re-enchanted by means of an ontological relativity derived from *Gulliver's Travels*: the subterranean world presents forms of life that develop on different scales. Nature is, again, highly variable, resisting the regularization promoted by the new science. Such variability culminates in Mr. Thompson's cosmological digression, which merges superseded − "ancient" – cosmological models and elements of the traditional Christian world-view. Fantastic representation seems here tinged with nostalgia, evoking and amalgamating conceptions that are both incompatible and unreliable: the representation of a pseudo-Christian universe suggests that traditional Christian cosmology is now only one of the many superseded constructs available to authors of imaginary voyages.

In spite of its amazing discoveries, the protagonist of *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of Earth* is, like the protagonist of a Medieval travelogue, easily accustomed to the unreal: he impassibly transcends the boundaries of our world, precipitating into an immensely complex cosmology. In fact, these imitations of *Gulliver's Travels* have not survived the centuries for both their lack of originality and their inability to valorize, and overcome, the tension between the empirical and the non-empirical. As we have seen, *Gulliver's Travels* highlights the novelty of the monsters Gulliver encounters, and at the same time reintroduces them into a world that is analogous to ours and should therefore be known and explained rationally and empirically; as a result, the existence of those monsters appear as reliable data. This amounts to the simultaneous assertion and suspension of the highly normative outlook

associated to empiricism. The empirical world-view is perpetuated, but at the same time is refigured, so that it can incorporate what in fact negates. Such a mediation probably provided readers with a pleasure that partly determined the success of *Gulliver's Travels*. As the Freudian theorist Francesco Orlando has argued, in particular circumstances literature, reproducing the workings of semiotic manifestations such as dreams or jokes, functions as a Freudian "compromise formation": it pleasantly reconciles competing affective or intellectual impulses.[47] In the fantastic, the empirical world-view, which entails a cognitive imperative, is reconciled with the beliefs it tends to reject. Increasingly regarded as unreliable, irrational, and absurd, these beliefs have come to embody non-logical impulses: in *Gulliver's Travels* and in the entire tradition of the fantastic they stop running counter to the outlook that has determined – or is determining – their supersession.

While Swift's work appealed to eighteenth-century readers who were internalizing a new superego restriction, training themselves to conform to the principle of reality imposed by empiricism, its less "realistic" imitations failed to do so. This may explain why they were less successful, and may also explain why they are only partly reducible to subsequent works of the fantastic, whose structural principle is the mediation between the empirical and the non-empirical. In fact, the fantastic enacts the "compromise" theorized by Orlando – who has used his Freudian theory to understand the functions of the supernatural in many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works.[48] At the same time, however, the imitations of *Gulliver's*

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[47] See Francesco Orlando, *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature: with an Analysis of Racine's 'Phédre'* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 140. Orlando's theory owes much to Ignacio Matte Blanco's reading of Freud, which refigures the conscious/subconscious dichotomy as a contrast between a logical and a non-logical language that coexist and sometimes merge. See Ignacio Matte Blanco, *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets: An Essay in Bi-Logic* (London: Duckworth, 1975).
[48] See Francesco Orlando, "Forms of the Supernatural in Narrative," in *The Novel¸* ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), vol. 2, 207-243.

Travels contributed to define the imaginary voyage as a recognizably literary genre, retroactively strengthening *Gulliver's Travels*'s aesthetic identity.

ix. *The Extraordinary Case of Automathes:* **Nature, Revelation, and Intelligent Design**

Strongly influenced by the model of Menippean satire, imaginary voyages – except *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.*, which is, however, uninfluenced by high literary models – tend not to embrace a religious world-view. There are, however, exceptions, such as *The Capacity and Extent of Human Understanding. Exemplified in the Extraordinary Case of Automathes* (1745), which recuperates the providential logic of seventeenth-century books of wonder, at one point also staging a theophany. John Kirby, the author of *Automathes*, was Gibbon's tutor and an Anglican priest, and he wrote books about grammar and mathematics. The topics of knowledge and education are in fact elaborately developed in *Automathes*, intended to demonstrate how the evolution of human morality and knowledge has been directly determined by God. *Automathes* is, as we shall see, different from most imaginary voyages: it is close to religious narratives, such as *Robinson Crusoe* or seventeenth-century captivity narratives. While, however, these works are intended to stage the providential rather than a radically non-empirical supernatural, Automathes's adventure entails a form of ontological hesitation, that culminates with the sudden, spectacular, eruption of the miraculous. While in providential narratives the natural and the supernatural are laminated together, in narratives such as *Automathes* their boundaries are visible – but can astonishingly be transcended.

Automathes's narrator is an "indigent curate."[49] During a sojourn in Cumberland, his native county, he stops to contemplate the shore and finds a hundred-year-old message in a bottle written by "an English priest of the order of St. Benedict," who founded a Christian utopia in the Pacific. The utopia, called Soteria, is characterized by "a steady adherence to apostolical Doctrine and Discipline in its original purity, and a strict conformity of Practice and Profession" (5). Its inhabitants, of Chinese descent, speak Greek, because they were evangelized by St. John's disciples. But Soteria is not a confessional state: it is characterized by a clear-cut separation of church and state, although governed by a conservative − but at the same time egalitarian − religious ethos. Soteria's church is an idealized version of the Anglican church, which implies a critique both of Roman Catholicism and its hierarchies and of the economic interest of Anglican priests. But the main topic of *Automathes* is not so much the organization of clerical life as human education, and the questions, both physical and metaphysical, it implies. The narrator praises the people of Soteria for the way in which they educate their youth, which enables a harmonious social coexistence (17-18). As in many other utopias, Soterians train children to self-denial and self-control (19). In a long digression, the narrator explains that what differentiates men from brutes is education, and that the body of knowledge and customs constituting education was constructed by "means" that were not "merely human" (22). Culture, he suggests, is a product of revelation.

The long analepsis that constitutes the body of the narrative is intended to demonstrate this notion. A bishop explains to the narrator that a man called Automathes is the living proof that the main principles of education came to man through revelation. For the bishop, the metaphysical roots of Christian education

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[49] John Kirby, *The Capacity and Extent of Human Understanding. Exemplified in the Extraordinary Case of Automathes* (London, 1745), 1. Further references will appear in the text.

make it the perfect model for all other societies (40), and the fact that education is a consequence of revelation can be poignantly seen in the people of the colonies: living in a state of nature, unaided by God, they did not develop knowledge or social organization. In other words, the bishop of Soteria (as well as Kirby) sees the formation of morality as an evolutionary process partly natural and human, but fundamentally based on divine intervention. The fact that such a process has a supernatural component can be seen in the exceptional history of Authomates, the only one who received "the immediate effect of God himself" (42).

At this point, the Christian utopia turns out to be just a frame, designed to valorize and complement the story of Automathes, whose father, Eugenius, is unjustly banished, and shipwrecks with his family on an island, in a situation reminiscent of *Robinson Crusoe*. After recuperating objects and tools, Authomates's parents set up a household and develop a pious detachment from the need for luxury and consumption. But Automathes's mother dies, and Eugenius tries to leave the island, only managing to separate himself from his son – he ends up on a nearby island. What happens later is omitted in order to elicit expectations on Automathes's destiny. They meet again in Soteria after many years: despite his long solitude on the island, Automathes has become a learned, wise man, inferring the existence of the Creator as well as that of all human knowledge. He attributes his education to divine providence: he had "secret hints and intimations" in dreams (80) that enabled him to pursue the right path. His emphasis on providence goes along with a positive assessment of human agency: unlike animals, men are endowed with the ability to transmit information – but, left to themselves, they would wind up reverting to the animal state.

The story of Automathes's' solitary evolution bespeaks the role of divine providence. In the most original and beautiful pages of eighteenth-century imaginary voyages – which recall, and poeticize, Robinson's adventure − Kirby describes Automathes's defamiliarized perception of the nature of the island as well as his progressive construction and recapitulation of human knowledge: an astonishing process that presents itself as perfectly natural but at the same time, in the light of the Bishop's words, seems directed by the invisible hand of God, engendering an ontological hesitation similar to that dramatized in *Robinson Crusoe*. In a chain of inferences, the observation of every object leads Automathes to understand the structure of the universe, his place in it, and the features of the human society from which he is temporarily alienated. He first discovers himself, staring at his own shadow (110), wonders about his nature and origins (111), and from the diversity of the natural world infers the existence of different species (113). Analogously, from the objects left by his father he infers the existence of people similar to him (114). Then he realizes how "the beginning of reason is but the beginning of sorrow" (116), since he starts to be tormented by desire and by a keen sense of imperfection. But the contemplation of nature also provides evidence of the existence of God (117). Kirby is an advocate of intelligent design, highlighting the analogies between the society of beavers and human society (147): instead of relativizing man's position, such analogy sets off the orderly, pervasive, structure of nature. With the apprehension of order, however, goes that of death and chaos (120), and when his dog dies, Automathes fist conceives of loss (154).

The contemplation of the outer world is conducive to Automathes's self-contemplation. He understands the structure of the mind (149), the distinction between the body and the mind (150), and the latter's creative power. The

recuperation of the objects his father saved from the shipwreck marks a new chain of deductions, concerning humankind; he also finds books, and understands their meanings through illustrations (172). Mastering human technology entails experiencing its disruptive power: lighting a fire, Automathes unintentionally causes the destruction of a forest (190). Evil cannot be eliminated from nature, especially from human nature, prone to error (192-198). Automathes realizes that God made man imperfect in order to keep him in a state of dependence, thus allowing him to complete himself through transcendence. To encourage religious feelings, God enabled revelations (202).

This starts to throw light on the sequence of deductions that marked Automathes's growth, whose exemplary value had been foreshadowed by the narrator's remarks. Automathes's deductions, seemingly made possible by his intelligence, now turn out to have been directed by his mother's spirit. After finding an organ, he hears a heavenly melody and sees a rainbow which is "situated quite contrary to nature" (216). This is a prelude to a fuller suspension of natural laws: Automathes sees the apparition of his mother, whom he can recognize because he saw her portrait. His reflections on the apparition are analogous to Glanvill's: despite the fact that he is facing something that defies his expectations, he decides to rely on his senses (220). In the light of this experience, which retroactively shows that his self-education was supernaturally directed, he criticizes those who do not believe in miracles. And he decidedly argues for intelligent design, every detail of the natural world now affording evidence of the creator's wisdom: "The curious structure of these minute Animals to me was a notorious Instance of the infinite wisdom of the great Creator" (224). The argument for design is followed by a new manifestation of

the supernatural: Automathes foresees in a dream that someone is coming to rescue him, and digresses on the revelatory power of dreams (229).

At this point, the ideas at stake are evident, and Kirby decides to state them plainly, fully overcoming ontological hesitation and anticipating further developments of Automathes's narrative: he asserts the importance of revelation in the development of education. Immediately afterwards, however, he makes a move that, as we have seen, characterizes various reassessments of the role of the supernatural in the modern world, in particular Defoe's: he defines revelation as something that mostly took place in the past (234). Describing the transition from a supernatural past to a natural present, he highlights the links between revelation and what we now call "culture;" the transmission of the knowledge originally provided by God is entrusted to human hands, constituting "the strongest tie between men" (255). Obedience to God goes along with belief in revelation and with an active dissemination of the divine truth.

With a broad-ranging synthesis, *Automathes* conflates divine revelation – evoked by analogy, since Automathes's self-education epitomizes the supernaturally-driven development of human learning − and apparitions, implying that both are mediated by empirical perception. Despite the rise of deism, belief in revelation was not uncommon in the eighteenth century, but *Automathes* does not take the supernatural for granted. Automathes's self-education seems, at first, purely rational and inferential; the supernatural agency that underlies it shines only intermittently, leaving readers free to wonder on the nature of things. Besides, framing revelation as a foundational event, *Automathes* apparently replicates the pattern, already detected in Defoe, whereby the supernatural is displaced in the past, implying that nature's workings are more and more regular and that the human agency is in charge of

history.[50] In other words, Kirby sketches a boundary between the natural and the supernatural, a boundary which can be crossed once the ghost has appeared. And, by conflating apparitions and divine revelation, he enacts a two-sided re-enchantment: ghosts demonstrate the existence of God, and at the same time demonstrate that history has been, and still is, governed by divine forces. Needless to say, *Automathes*'s re-enchantment, apparently dramatizing a commonly shared belief, in fact evinces a crisis: the representation of revelation has become available to the manipulations of a philosophical romance.

x. *Peter Wilkins* and the Transformation of the Supernatural

Around the 1750s, new imaginary voyages that focused on colonial expansion were produced. The year 1739 saw the War of Jenkins's Year, while in the 1740s and 1750s the East India Company consolidated its power; though hindered by Spain, England steadily increased foreign – and slave – trade, and gained new colonies.[51] Responding to these events, new imaginary voyages articulated crucial problems raised by the colonial adventure.

The most influential eighteenth-century imaginary voyage after *Gulliver's Travels* is *The Adventures of Peter Wilkins* by Robert Paltock, published in 1751 and modeled on both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. *Peter Wilkins* is the story of a shipwrecked sailor who finds himself in a subterranean world inhabited by a race of flying men; the protagonist evangelizes them, teaches them the use of technology, and helps them establish an autonomous colonial power, thereby gaining political prominence. As we shall see, by deploying ontological hesitation Paltock legitimates

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[50] At the same time, however, it reproduces the typical logic of imaginary voyages, using a geographic elsewhere as a setting for Automathes's encounter with his mother's ghost.

[51] See *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol. II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. G. Marshall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

various expansionist practices – he does not directly stage colonization, but sanctions

the values and policies that enable it. Thus, in *Peter Wilkins*, the mediation between

the natural and the supernatural is no longer the main aim of the fantastic. Fully

developed, the device of ontological hesitation can now be used for new ideological

purposes, and the presence of the supernatural – more overt than in *Robinson Crusoe*,

which privileges a providential ontology – serves not so much to re-enchant the world

as to validate Peter's ascent to colonial power. Ideally, this new deployment of the

supernatural sanctions the coalescence of the fantastic's distinctive devices, paving

the way for further developments. No longer instrumental to the solution of

epistemological problems, imaginary voyages emerge as a malleable form that can be

inscribed with new ideological meanings and adapted to new purposes.

Peter's adventures resemble Gulliver's. After various misadventures, he

shipwrecks because of a loadstone that capsizes his ship, finds himself in a cave near

the south pole, and accesses a subterranean world, where he survives like Robinson,

settling in a cave. He even refers to the surroundings as "his kingdom" and never

loses his sense of time.[52] Then he comes across a shipwrecked woman, who resembles

his wife. She is covered with a strange fabric that tightly adheres to her body, and

which will eventually turn out to be her foldable wings: she belongs to a race of flying

men that live on another side of the subterranean world. Peter immediately tries to

evangelize her, to undermine what he perceives as her idolatrous belief, and "marries"

her. Then she returns to her country and a group of members of her society come to

pick up Peter (256). This is his first meeting with the highly ritualized, but

technologically backward, society of the Glums. Peter becomes conscious of his

superior knowledge while reflecting on his potential for social advancement in the

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[52] Robert Paltock, *The Adventures of Peter Wilkins*, (London, 1751), vol. 1, 90-110. Further reference will appear in the text.

Glums' society: "I might make a better figure than they, by my superior knowledge of things, and have the world my own" (II, 21). Peter's "superiority" emerges when, like Gulliver, he explains to them how to use gunpowder (II, 39) and the alphabet (II, 54). Later, he explicitly acts as a reformer. He does not approve of the Glums' constrictive sense of hierarchy, so he teaches them meritocracy and liberates a slave to reward his zeal (52). His father in law, the King, tells Peter that he has "enlightened" him. (54). Peter is an Enlightenment hero and a Whig hero: he is a blend of Robinson and Gulliver.

However, Peter thrives also because he seems to have providence on his side. After he is invited to court he is told of an ancient prediction. In the past, a priest who wanted to abolish idolatry predicted that there would be political turmoil, and that a man without wings would come to liberate the country. This determines a moment of ontological hesitation: at first Peter is rather skeptical, and ponders over the nature of the prophecy: "there has been an old prophecy . . . as firmly believed to be true as if it was so. . . But why should it not be true?" (II, 38) but he later says he will accept his new role if the king promises to abolish slavery. With a Machiavellian attitude, he decides to act as the liberator for the sake of religion: "if any Means but Fraud or Force can gain so large a Territory to the Truth," he will embrace both (II, 39). However, his questions over the nature of the prophecy remain unanswered – in fact, he also hypothesizes that it might have been inspired by the Christian God.

Subsequently, Peter defeats the rebels and abolishes slavery. Then he helps a part of the population that had been enslaved by conquerors from the sea. After setting them free, he makes laws with their consent and founds a colony, which he conceives as a laboratory for social progress. He organizes a race between the colonizers and the colonized, intending it as a socializing practice. Shortly afterwards, it turns out that

even the colonized had a prophecy: Peter fulfills it by organizing a marriage between their king and the princess of a nearby kingdom. Peter spends the remainder of his years as a promoter of technology and reform, working, as he says, "for the good of this people" (II, 139). One of his friends manages to produce pen and paper, and he brings the technology of writing into the country. Later he introduces trade and sets up a paper manufacture. When his wife dies, however, he leaves his sons and decides to return to England.

Peter Wilikins's deployment of the supernatural is particularly sophisticated. As in *Robinson Crusoe*, at first we do not know if Peter's world is ruled by supernatural forces, and what begins as an apparent sequence of chaotic events later turns out to be governed by a teleology. True, Peter's Machiavellian outlook seems to imply that he is simply turning the Glums' beliefs to his advantage; Paltock does not go so far as to obliterate the ambivalence of Peter's behavior, suggesting that the spread of technology, meritocracy, and order – which entails the supremacy of the nations that can in fact enforce them − should be promoted even without a divine sanction. However, he avoids endorsing a completely secular view, which would prevent him from fully legitimating Peter's attitude: *Peter Wilkins* is different from *Robinson Crusoe* insofar as Peter actually has a clear-cut demonstration of his divine election: two prophecies predicted, and paved the way for, his arrival and exploits − detecting the divine agency is not a matter of interpretation. Once Peter has accomplished his enterprises the providential logic is confirmed, and the hesitation that attended its manifestation is simultaneously superseded. In other words, at the end of Peter's adventures we retrospectively learn that the supernatural directly manifested itself, that Peter's role was not only providentially arranged, but also revealed in advance.

Displaced in the past, the supernatural is not directly described, but evoked, and it is confirmed by Peter's heroism.

As other imaginary voyages and apparition narratives, *Peter Wilkins* bridges the gap between the natural and the supernatural. But it does so to perform a new task (less overtly pursued by its main model, *Robinson Crusoe*): to assert the superiority of the British and present their ascent to power as determined by the divine will. Ontological hesitation, originally elaborated to mediate between the natural and the supernatural, is used for a new, distinctly ideological, purpose: it suggests that Peter's ascent has been ascertained by God. This transformation evinces the imaginary voyage's coalescence into an autonomous form, separated from the epistemological context that shaped its main devices. Nonetheless, the original function of imaginary voyages, to restore a pre-modern conception of nature, is, if only residually, maintained: half-men and half-birds, the Glums clearly recall the monsters that populated early travel writing, and Peter's world is anything but disenchanted. In fact, the consolidation of empirical culture obscured, but not eliminated, the needs determined by the collision of contrasting world-views.

xi. *John Daniel*, *William Bingfield*, and the Transformation of the Monstrous

In early imaginary voyages, monsters had an ontological significance: they were intended to reconcile the empirical with what was increasingly felt as non-empirical. With the development of the genre – which incorporated conventions of Menippean satire − they also assumed, as we have seen, a satirical inflection, which tended to defuse their mediatory function. After 1750, monsters took new shapes, their significance no longer depending on their original function, which survived on the

residual level. Narratives' focus tended to shift on questions and anxieties connected to the colonial enterprise.

The Life and Astonishing Adventures of John Daniel (1751) follows *Robinson Crusoe*'s model, with interesting variations. The main character is "virtuously inclined" and mechanically turned.[53] His stepmother tries to seduce and threatens to kill him, so he is compelled to escape and goes to sea. He shipwrecks on an unknown land, a survival adventure reminiscent of *Robinson Crusoe* begins and Daniel demonstrates remarkable skills by organizing the other sailors in a "labour force" for survival (56-57). Later, he remains alone with his friend Thomas, who, in a romance inversion, turns out to be a woman (74-75). Very quickly, they fall in love and, without any religious or moral scruples, get married, and Daniel makes a ring with cat guts. After rescuing objects from their ship (104) – by this point a *topos* of the genre – they start a household. Daniel's wife is afraid that their sons and daughters may go native (92); nonetheless, they procreate, and, later, to ensure that their community perpetuates itself, they marry their sons and daughters to one another, an incestuous practice (which they do not seem to regard as such) that exacerbates the dynamics of inter-familial reproduction dramatized in Henry Nevile's *The Isle of Pines*. The community grows rapidly, Daniel calls the island "Providence Island," and establishes a set of rules, paralleling himself and his wife with Abraham and Sarah (175).

Afterwards, one of Daniel's sons, Jacob, develops technological skills and builds a flying machine. They set out for a journey that leads them to the moon (cursorily characterized as a land where daylight lasts abnormally long [207]), then to a remote island inhabited by a sea-monster; a skinny, amphibious anthropoid with palmed hands, which speaks English and acts as a rational creature. The monster is directly

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[53] *The Life and Astonishing Adventures of John Daniel* (London, 1751), 4. Further references will appear in the text.

represented in an illustration inspired by seventeenth-century literature on monsters, with a surplus of realism that attests to the emergence of an empirically-oriented aesthetics (fig. iv):
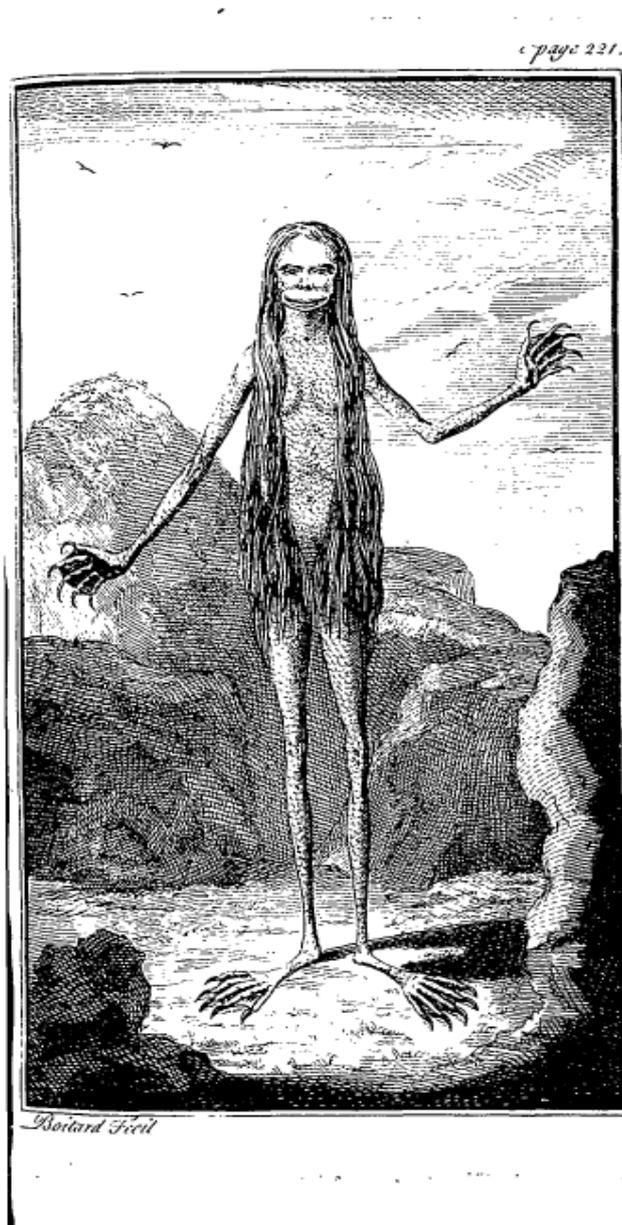
The monsters tells his story, which parallels that of Jacob's community, and seems to foreground the danger at the core of the incestuous society he has founded −

he and his wife are the son and daughter of a shipwrecked couple (240). Then a new, unsettling theme emerges. The monster recounts that he and his wife have that peculiar shape because one day their mother saw a "sea-monster" which impressed her during her gestation; so that after their father's death nature started "creeping more and more" upon them (241). The monster, which Daniel and his son regard as fundamentally human because of its rationality, is conscious of its abnormality − he is in fact afraid that his 30 sons may see Daniel and realize their own monstrous, hybrid nature.

Crossing the boundaries between man and nature, already crucial in *Robinson Crusoe*, is here seen as a degenerative process. An even more complex sense of such boundaries, one that fully addresses the sexual preoccupations already suggested by this text, emerges when Daniel fortuitously recuperates a diary and learns the truth about the monster's origins. The wanton mother of the monster had sexual intercourse with an actual "sea monster," giving birth to those abnormal creatures. This "sea monster," an undefined entity that is able to copulate with human beings, epitomizes the mixed, intermediate quality that was often projected onto "savages," seen by early anthropologists as the link between man and beast.[54] The addition of new ontological levels typical of imaginary voyages is, in *John Daniels*, inflected in a direction that was marginally suggested by *Gulliver's Travels*. Nature's extreme variability here entails that entities may disturbingly fluctuate between the human and the non-human, and that such uncertain ontological state could extend to Europeans. In other words, *John Daniel* brings to the fore a staple of expansionist ideology: the presence, even on the level of sexual practice, of boundaries between the colonial self – often seen as

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[54] On early anthropology and the nature of "savages" see Christopher Fox, "How to Prepare a Noble Savage: The Spectacle of Human Science," in *Inventing Human Science. Eighteenth-Century Domains*¸ ed. C. Fox, R. Porter, R. Wokler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). See also A. J. Barker, *The African Link, British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), chap. 3.

human − and the Other – often seen as non-human. While nineteenth-century scientists explicitly attributed to different races a different speciation,[55] at the beginning of the eighteenth century travel writers such as Woodes Rogers criticized the Spaniards for their lechery, for having generated a "mongrel" population, thereby laying the condition for social disorder, caused by the lack of distinctions between the dominators and the dominated.[56] Sexual practice, and the preservation of the European identity, felt as both cultural and biological, will become cruxes of the colonial ethos: "What is striking when we look to identify the contours and composition of any particular colonial community is the extent to which control over sexuality and reproduction were at the core of defining colonial privilege and its boundaries."[57]

The Travels and Adventures of William Bingfield, Esq. was anonymously published in 1753, almost at the same time as *Peter Wilkins,* with which it shares an explicit commitment to empirical culture and expansionist ideology. In fact, *William Bingfield*'s main models are *Robinson Crusoe* and the literature on monsters. Recuperating the latter's pictorial element, *William Bingfield* advertises the presence of a dog-bird, represented in the frontispiece, in which the exotic and the monstrous are seamlessly merged (fig. v):

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[55] See William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White response to Blacks, 1530-1580* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), chap. 8.
[56] See Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (London, 1715), xx.
[57] Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), 154.
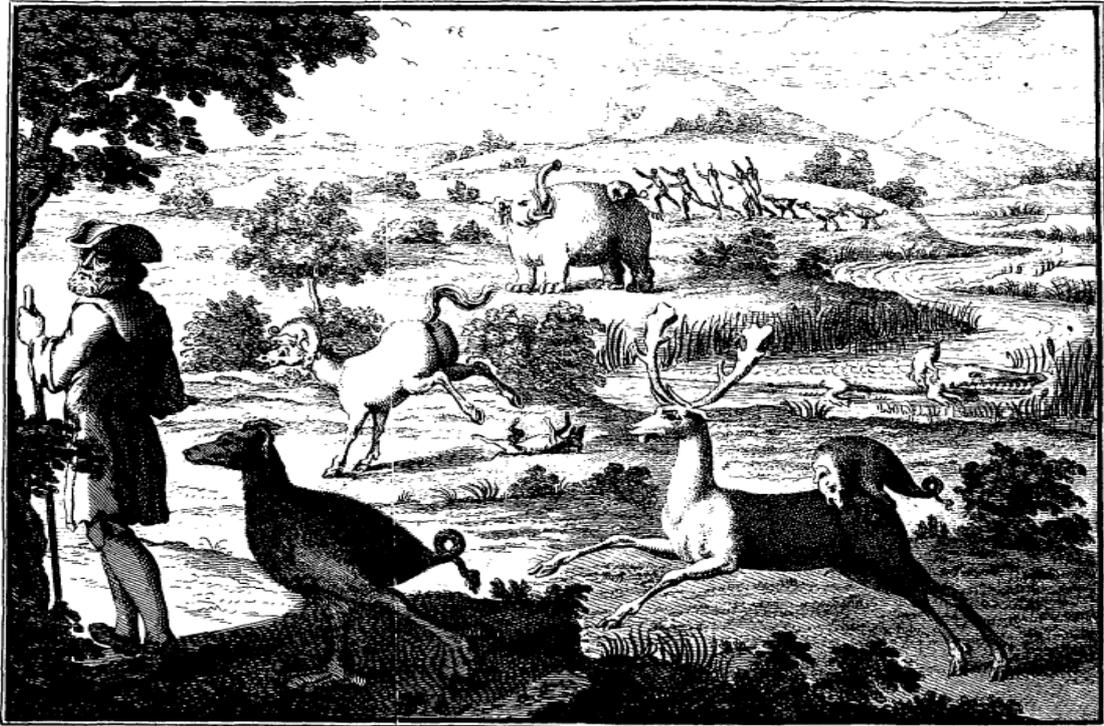
However, *William Bingfield* innovatively detaches itself from its models. One no longer finds the sense of impending catastrophe that characterizes *Robinson Crusoe*. Bingfield decides to become a soldier like his father, and his decision is not framed as a transgression or an imprudence; it is just a source of displeasure for his poor mother, whom we still find alive at the end of his travels. Bingfield is a knight-errant who winds up exploring new worlds and finding a place within them by means of his martial and intellectual skills. His ethos strongly resembles that of the average romance hero: "brave Men . . . are ever endued with humane Natures; and as they are stirred to emulation in Battle, so they are in every virtuous and praiseworthy Action; for the same spirit that excites in them the one, never fails to excite the other also; their favourite principle being – never to be outdone".[58] At the same time, however, the particular setting of Bingfield's adventures, and his typically European approach

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[58] *The Travels and Adventures of William Bingfield* (London, 1753), 111. Further references will appear in the text.

to nature and technology, evinces new ideological functions: Bingfield symbolizes the white man's ability to enter – and ultimately control – other societies and environments.

After a sequence of sea adventures, Bingfield arrives in the African inland and fights against the "dog-birds," taming them and turning them into his personal mass-destruction weapons. Later, he will use them to become a prominent member of a local society. Like Peter Wilkins, Bingfield will bring order in pre-colonial chaos, but he will find a European wife. Bingfield's successful career is enabled by prowess, inherited from romance heroes, but also by his intelligence, particularly visible in his defeat and management of the dog-birds. The appearance of these monsters in the initial stage of Bingfield's exploration of the African inland apparently resuscitates the enchantment that characterized older texts such as *The Adventures of Mr. T. S.,* but it soon turns out to be instrumental to something else. In *William Bingfield,* wonder is subordinated to the establishment of a pseudo-scientific outlook. At first, the appearance of the dog-birds, very similar to Medieval hybrids, implicitly raises questions over their nature, establishing a tension between the empirical and the non-empirical. This tension is not explicitly dramatized by the text, but is triggered by the seemingly abnormal nature of the dog-birds. Soon, however, Bingfield regards them from a biological point of view – he frames them as a species: "here we met with such innumerable flights of Birds as are not to be conceived; but chiefly of a Species we had never before seen . . . It had a short thick Neck, and bony Head, in make like a grey Hound's . . . and a long Tail, very hairy, much like a Pig's . . . from their affinity to both Species, we called them Dog-birds" (14). Framing monsters in biological terms makes them easier to treat and manipulate – "they were an oviparous animal, though I had before suspected them to be viviparous" (24) − and, ultimately, to

domesticate and turn into weapons by means of an "experiment" (24, 79). After killing and eating the dog-birds, Bingfield also manages to tame them − "if we could but breed up these Creatures tame, they might be of a great Use to us" (23).

In *William Bingfield* the fantastic is used to suggest that the seeming Otherness of the natural world can easily and advantageously be reduced to the epistemic norms elaborated by the Europeans. In fact, in *William Bingfield* the fantastic is short-lived; immediately after the appearance of the dog-birds we enter a world where each object's identity is clear-cut and where no more unexpected ontological layers emerge. The need to dramatize Bingfield's political skills and manipulative ability takes over the need to dramatize his relation to non-empirical objects. In *The Travels and Adventures of William Bingfield* the fantastic contributes to a reflection on the relation between Europeans and the colonial Other, to the presentation of the empirical outlook as a factor that establishes white men's power and merit even beyond the boundaries of their world.

No longer exclusively informed by the epistemological debates that determined their origins, imaginary voyages are now free to transform in response to new socio-cultural contexts. Originally representing the collision between incompatible world-views, in *William Bingfield* the tension between the empirical and the non-empirical is instrumental to its own supersession, to the establishment of a perspective on Otherness that implies the intellectual primacy of the Europeans − what at first looks unknown can easily be assimilated to the known and turned to the protagonist's advantage. What matters is, therefore, not so much the mediation between incompatible cosmologies – which survives as one of the text's secondary purposes − as the incorporation of new objects into the empirical outlook, presented as a main instrument for domination. Disembedding from the epistemological context that

shaped them, the distinctive instruments of the fantastic are now autonomous formal

tools, that can be put to a variety of new uses.

Conclusion:
Empiricism and the Fantastic

As we have seen, the origins the fantastic are a result of the rise of empiricism: a further reflection on the relation between empirical culture and the fantastic can therefore help throw light on the latter's coalescence and epistemological implications. To conclude, I shall suggest that the formation of the fantastic and its ascent to the level of critical consciousness imply that a separation between the empirical and the non-empirical took shape both on the ontological level — ghosts and monsters gradually became unacceptable objects of scientific discussion — and on the level of discursive formations — fiction no longer needed to borrow from travel writing, and apparition narratives, although surviving as an autonomous genre, were aestheticized in the Gothic. The increasingly autonomous sphere of the aesthetic, whose definition was catalyzed by the rise of empiricism, included not only the emergent novel, but also the genres I have placed in the genealogy of the fantastic.[1] In fact, both the fantastic and the novel engaged with – and provisionally solved – key epistemological questions: the novel's seemingly materialistic world-view internalized the spiritual by staging providential chains of events, and the fantastic mediated between the natural and the super- or the non-natural.

My discussion of ontological hesitation and ontological accretion, which I shall briefly summarize, has attempted to highlight the empirical matrix of the fantastic. As we have seen, the genres associated with the fantastic are based on the representation of a skeptical attitude that depends on first-hand experience and on the deployment of seemingly factual codes. Apparition narratives' depiction of the supernatural is based

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[1] For an account of the rise of the aesthetic in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England see Michael McKeon, "Politics of Discourse and the Rise of the Aesthetic in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Politics of Discourse. The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 35-51.

on two factors: first, on their ability to build, and accurately render, realistic settings; second, on their internalization of an empirical, pseudo-scientific stance that tends to regard skeptically what challenges the natural order − and that at the same time, self-contradictorily, entails a full acknowledgment of the non-natural even in the absence of a viable explanation. The inability to rationalize the supernatural, which goes along with what Todorov calls "ontological hesitation," is ultimately overcome by a typically empirical reliance on direct perception: foregrounding a tension intrinsic to empirical epistemology, apparition narratives establish a conflict between rational skepticism and individual perception, ultimately privileging the latter.

Analogously, imaginary voyages – occasionally interested in the problematic relation between religion and empirical epistemology – often deploy ontological hesitation to undermine rigid conceptions of nature, suggesting that ontologies have porous boundaries – and perpetuating notions, developed in the early stages of empirical culture, of an incredibly productive nature that challenges European experience. Simultaneously, imaginary voyages develop a complex ontological structure. A familiar ontological level that is rendered in distinctly empirical terms is the basis upon which new, recognizably non-factual, ontologies are built. These include entities that the more and more authoritative empirical episteme tends to displace or reject: in this case too, the coexistence of different ontologies contributes to minimize the distance between competing, increasingly incompatible world-views. (For example, in *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver's rigorously empirical outlook is confronted with beings − such as giants or talking animals − that are drawn from the obsolescent universe of pre-empirical travel writing).

However, empiricism's influence on the fantastic entails not only the latter's constitution by empirical protocols and attitudes, but also its self-definition as a non-

factual mode. Gradually, the genres of the fantastic become recognizable as fictive constructs, separating out from strictly empirical epistemology. While most early eighteenth-century apparition narratives reproduce empirical protocols – including reflections on eye-witness and second-hand information, and deploying quantitative language − Gothic fiction utilizes a literary rather than scientific language, which is similar to that utilized by the newborn novelistic tradition. In fact, the formal and functional analogies between the novel and the fantastic attest to their common belonging to the sphere of the aesthetic.

Simultaneously, imaginary voyages have grown more and more independent of empirical travelogues, imitating recognizably literary models such as Cyrano's *Voyages* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Hardening into a convention, the traveler's empirical stance loses its vital connections with scientific codes: *Gulliver's Travels* includes the last problematization of truth-protocols attempted by eighteenth-century imaginary voyages. Thus, while provisionally bridging the gap between the empirical and the non-empirical, the fantastic self-reflexively points to its own inevitable distance from reality, actually broadening that gap. The full emergence of the fantastic bespeaks not only the flexibility and instability of empirical rhetoric, but also the consolidation of a system of genres that is empirically-oriented, and unambiguously distinguishes between the real and the unreal.

The specification of the literary discourses associated with the fantastic evinces the establishment of a system of verisimilitude that, though "realistic," can no longer be confused with the rhetoric of empirical discourse. In fact, although an inclusive category that accounted for its workings was not produced in eighteenth century, a critical awareness of the formal novelty of the fantastic – of its "mixed," only partly empirical, nature − existed. Not yet regarded as two versions of the same thing, the

literature of the supernatural and the tradition of imaginary voyages were nevertheless conceptualized in similar terms. As we have seen, Lord Monboddo praised Swift's ability to confer monstrous creatures with an air of "probability," and Horace Walpole self-consciously merged the new romance with the old, constructing his narrative according to the "rules of probability." In both critical accounts, an innovative combination of the empirical and the non-empirical is highlighted. Johnson commends the seeming truthfulness of Swift's style, focusing on the disparity between form and content that is constitutive of the fantastic and implicitly emphasizing the narrator's empirical identity. Similarly, Walpole underlines that his characters are built and described in a way that is faithful to nature, implying that an empirically-oriented rendition of social and psychological processes coexists with, and lends an air of truthfulness to, the representation of non-empirical events − mediating the perspective of "probable" characters, the style of the "new romance" makes the supernatural no less probable.

The aestheticization of the fantastic – strengthened by its dialectical relation with the novel – could easily be taken as the end of its origins, but, as we have seen, that end can more easily be found in the moment in which the fantastic, no longer directly influenced by the epistemological context that has determined its formation, assumes new tasks. The rhetorical devices of apparition narratives, incorporated into the Gothic towards 1760, disconnect themselves from the epistemological discourse that contributed to shaping them. Early Gothic novels are generally not intended to provide reliable scientific information on the otherworld and thereby persuade skeptics – a function they will recuperate later, with the short-lived attempt to moralize the genre − and, given their fiction of antiquity, they do not overtly engage with the practices and problems associated with the new epistemology; they are,

rather, easily identifiable as part of the recognizably aesthetic discourses that have recently emerged. By the same token, imaginary voyages are inscribed with new ideological meanings that center on colonial expansion, shifting their focus. In imaginary voyages such as *Peter Wilkins* and *William Bingfield*, ontological hesitation and the tension between the empirical and the non-empirical that are characteristic of the fantastic are no longer aims in themselves, but are subordinated to an ideological purpose. In *Peter Wilkins* ontological hesitation serves to suggest that the protagonist's ascent to power may be divinely sanctioned, and the tension between the empirical and the non-empirical that characterizes *William Bingfield* is superseded in order to assert the primacy and power of the European outlook, able to assimilate and manipulate the unknown.

This would seem to imply that no immediate continuity besides a formal one exists between the texts I have analyzed and their descendants, all the more because eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers did not formalize such a continuity, and did not coin an inclusive category that took into account the multifarious embodiments – and the diachronic development − of the fantastic. But a cultural continuity actually exists: it resides in these texts' consistently empirical identity. Even though the fantastic detaches itself from epistemological discourse, on a less visible level it still entertains a dialogue with it: it solves the conflicts engendered and sustained by the continuing hegemony of empiricism. This task, accomplished by the novel too, attests to the fantastic's belonging to the new sphere of the aesthetic. But while the novel's functions seem to have gradually shifted, the fantastic's original vocation has survived a long sequence of transformations. A mediatory pattern is laminated on the texts, persisting like an archetypal structure, and responding to the permanent crisis triggered by the problematic rise of a materialistic world-view.

In other words, the fantastic has changed without completely losing its original, still necessary, function: re-enchanting the world. In fact, the subsequent centuries saw both a massive proliferation of ghost stories and new, scientifically-oriented – but highly controversial − attempts to demonstrate the existence of spirits. Fueled by an increasingly aggressive scientific culture, the conflict, and the mediation, of the empirical and the non-empirical took new shapes. The Victorian age was, for instance, characterized by a strong interest in the world of spirits, epitomized by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fascination with the occult, which resonated in his literary production.

Though assuming new ideological tasks, the fantastic perpetuated its mediatory work; at the same time, however, its representation was based on the same scientific views whose disenchanting power it was trying to compensate for. Let us take two works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: "The Captain of the Pole Star" (1890) and *The Lost World* (1912). The former is the narrative of an arctic voyage shaped as a sea-log, and fictitiously written by a student of medicine, John McAlister Ray. With the circumstantial, quantitative language of empirical travelogues, McAlister records what could be both the Captain's testimony of an apparition or his solitary descent into madness: as in eighteenth-century apparition narratives, the narrator's skepticism enables our wonder and lends an air of truthfulness to the Captain's problematic perceptions.

In *The Lost World*, Conan Doyle builds a micro-cosmos based on Darwinian assumptions: paradoxically enough, modern science accounts for the (past) existence of monsters, firmly placing them in the evolutionary genealogy. Nevertheless, one needs Doyle's creativity to bring those "naturalized" monsters to the present. Though overtly deploying Darwinian categories, *The Lost World* simultaneously constitutes an imaginative reaction to Darwinism, suggesting that the force of nature does not act so

destructively, ineluctably, and regularly as reliable scientific conclusions and empirical common sense would have us believe. Though professing their affiliation with modern science, Doyle's works refigure the contrast between the empirical and the non-empirical that was – and still is − the distinctive feature of the fantastic, and attest to the latter's paradoxical ability to reproduce, and at the same time elude, the empirical world-view. In the nineteenth century, this ability is fully epitomized by science fiction – which takes shape in Jules Verne and Herbert George Wells's works − whose extraordinary situations are seemingly based on a scientific logic.

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