Lunar travel and lunacy: reading conflict in Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687)

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Early modern travel writing had its infancy in the accounts written by travellers and published by stationers keen to cash in on public interest in tales about the world. Medieval travel texts such as *The Book of Sir John Mandeville* (c. 1356) laid claims to being accounts of physical travel that remained fantastical, unverifiable and located within a Christian framework that viewed the globe as fundamentally sacred.[1] Later texts, such as Thomas Coryate's *Crudities* (1611), explored locales that were familiar to the rich, but perhaps equally intriguing to those less able to travel abroad, whereas the emerging genre of *ars apodemica* instructed consumers on the art of travel. Although by no means forming a single, clearly defined genre, literature on and about travel proliferated in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, as with the examples of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), these texts influenced the development of the novel and often blurred the boundaries between the real and the fictional, veracity and verisimilitude.[2] Early modern astronomy also sat at the threshold of what could be imagined and what was real. As I go on to argue below, the planets, once construed as a site of harmonious movement, became a space of travel and conflict: Behn utilizes these tensions to question perceived truisms concerning gender, spectacle, and bodily cognition.

This essay explores the treatment of travel writing as a way of falsifying knowledge of the cosmos to counter poor reading practices and reconcile familial conflict in Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon*. This play utilized the visual culture of *comedia dell'arte* and was first staged to great success and published in 1687.[3] It has received limited critical attention:

recent scholarship has sought to locate Behn's text within a nexus of royalist propaganda and cultural memory, or else has attempted to mine the text for further evidence of Behn's complicated Toryism and politics in the play's very specific use of spectacle, gaze and natural philosophy.[4] Conversely, Judy A. Hayden has argued that Behn employs *commedia dell'arte* to ridicule the notion of plurality of worlds.[5] Claire Preston has considered how the sites of scientific endeavour are offstage and, instead, the audience is presented with the folly of faux-scientific spectacle.[6] In all of these readings, visual culture is brought to the fore. Scholars have tended to consider reading and performance as separate events, but, as criticism increasingly makes apparent, reading aloud blurs the distinctions between performance and print.[7] Not all acts of reading happened in private closets and reading aloud presented its own forms of public performance and spectacle. This essay will therefore build on Katherine Mannheimer's suggestion that *The Emperor of the Moon* establishes a symbiotic relationship between private reading practices and publicly staged spectacle, to argue that reading and misreading travel writing is fundamental to the spectacle of performance in the play. The opposing epistemological approaches of private, individualized modes of reading and public, communal acts of performance align partly through reading being an embodied act.[8]

Travel itself was often used as a metaphor for the experience of reading: whether through space or through text, movement was perceived as having a cognitive, emotional and physical transformation upon the subject. Indeed, the pervasiveness of travel as a metaphor for critical thought has led Georges Van Den Abbeele to comment upon the "banality" and paradoxical nature of the trope even as he acknowledges its centrality to intellectual endeavour.[9] Voyages necessitate movement, but thinking tends to be perceived as a static activity. Yet thinking requires a metaphorical journey through ideas to stimulate conclusions. Central to travel narratives is the credulity of the reader and the

extent to which he or she is willing to suspend disbelief and accept the veracity of the account of travel. Narratives of travel bore many similarities to the cognate genre of utopian fiction, casting doubt on the kinds of empirical knowledge that can be garnered from tales of the wider world.[10] Literature of travel made claims to truth that were often untenable and the narratives deconstruct themselves through making bold and spurious claims. However, these fabrications are not necessarily indicative of a deceitful writer attempting to dupe a gullible reader. Instead, they may offer broader philosophical truths about far-off lands from which the reader may draw and make comparisons with their lived experiences.

In considering reading as performative, we can gain some insights into the material conditions of enacting space and the relationships between reading, spectacle, the cosmos and travel. Consequently, after this brief overview of the relationship between travel and reading, this essay will go on to consider early modern conceptions of travel, natural philosophy and wonder to show how the play uses spectacle and space (both fabricated and performed) as a way to castigate reading practices that lead to misinterpretation. First, I will turn to early modern notions of the universe before moving on to the travel narrative to show how the cosmos and this slippery genre each feed into the comedy of the play. What emerges is that both reading and scientific observation were considered as ways of acquiring knowledge, but this knowledge could be dangerous and unverifiable.[11]

From geocentrism to heliocentrism

The basic plot of the *The Emperor of the Moon* centres on the need to dupe the moon-obsessed but apparently otherwise learned Dr Baliardo into believing that two gallants,

Cinthio and Charmante, are the Emperor of the Moon and his brother, the Duke of Thunderland, respectively. Such an enterprise is deemed necessary, not only for the gallants to achieve their designs to wed Baliardo's daughter Elaria and his niece Bellemante, but also to cure Baliardo of his malady. Baliardo, it would seem, has been rendered lunatic from reading too many fantastical tales about lunar travel and this has caused him to believe that terrestrial beings are inferior to their neighbouring moon-dwellers. Baliardo's malady reflects not only debates over what to read and how to read it, but also exposes radical changes in how the cosmos was conceived. In 1609 Galileo Galilei invented the first telescope strong enough to view in detail celestial objects; viewing the motions of the planets and four of Jupiter's moons led to a growing rejection of geocentric Ptolemaic cosmography and a reconfiguring of the universe.[12]

The technology supporting reading and the technology to see the stars were closely intertwined: optical lenses had their genesis in spectacles developed to aid sight and to enable the reader or writer to see the page. Although reading glasses had been invented c. 1300, it was another three hundred years before magnifying lenses had advanced sufficiently to enable Galileo and his contemporaries to make their discoveries. Experiments with optical lenses in Italy towards the end of the sixteenth century led to the beginnings of the telescope, but it was not until late 1608 that the first spyglasses were revealed in The Netherlands. This invention instantly provoked much interest across Europe, but the magnification was limited. By late 1609 Galileo had developed a telescope that had a magnification of x20. It was this telescope that Galileo used in his astronomical observations that are documented in his *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610, commonly translated as *The Sidereal Messenger*).[13] At least two other astronomers had turned the telescope to the night sky before Galileo, but he had the strongest instrument and consequently observed the heavens more clearly. Galileo discovered that, contrary to

conventional wisdom, the moon was not a perfect, smooth, celestial orb, but had craters. More importantly in terms of advancing heliocentrism, Galileo also discovered four of the moons of Jupiter.

The discovery that Jupiter had satellites was of major scientific importance: Galileo provided empirical evidence that there was more than one fixed point in the cosmos and orbs wandered around orbs. Planetary motion thus presents travel and conflict as being at the centre of scientific inquiry in the seventeenth century. As we will see, it is the attempt to reconcile heliocentrism with geocentrism and misunderstanding the epistemologies of travel writing that drives Baliardo's malady and underpins the plot of *The Emperor of the Moon*.

Galileo's discoveries revolutionized ways of knowing the wider world, the cosmos and humanity's status in creation. It also led to renewed fascination in the relationship between humanity and the universe. Yet Galileo was also part of a wider movement that reevaluated the heavenly spheres. Texts as diverse as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published 1621, then going through numerous revised and expanding editions throughout the seventeenth century) and Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (c. 1611, published posthumously in 1634) turned to imaginative, dream-like, visions to comprehend the space of the moon, the cosmos's relationship to the body, and to make the case for heliocentric Copernican theory.[14] The Copernican revolution also gave rise to early science fiction as writers and readers tried to make sense of the new cosmological order.[15] Yet not all were ready to embrace the heliocentric universe. As Edward, Viscount Conway, crudely observed in a letter to his daughter-in-law, the earth lacked the agility to travel around the sun:

> for the Earth a heavy dull grosse body to move and the heaven and Starres who are light to stand still is as if a Prince should upon a festival day appoint all the old and fat men an woemen to dance and all the yonge men and woemen of sixteen and twenty to sit still.[16]

In the geocentric universe, base, mutable matter and death occupied the sublunary sphere. Ironically and paradoxically perhaps, given that some of its symbolism aligned it to both mutability and chastity, the moon becomes gatekeeper to the celestial or heavenly spheres, where the immutable planets move in their orbits. By reclassifying the earth to be a planet, this sense of the two-tiered universe, with base, gross matter at its centre, disappears. However, Conway's comments demonstrate the ongoing insistence that the earth is a "heavy dull gross body" in comparison to the lithe celestial planets. Rather than placing the earth in a privileged place at the centre of the universe, as in Aristotelian and Ptolemaic cosmology, this positioning becomes representative of the earth's coarse bulkiness.

"Gross body" not only invokes celestial bodies, but also imbalance within the body and within the globe. In medicine, "gross humours" signifies a thickening of the humours, leading to disease. In discussing gout, Philemon Holland underscores the connection between gross humour, heaviness and disease:

> *Gout* is a griefe of the feet, occasioned by some distemperature, or irregular humor … A griefe (as concerning this purpose) is occasioned after foure sorts: Either by way of oppressing a part, when as a grosse humor weighing downe a part ponderously, causeth it to greeve in bearing the burden thereof: such kinde

> of griefe proceedeth of a phlegmatick, and melancholick humor, because they are heavy and weighty.[17]

Grossness in the macrocosm and in the microcosm, then, points to plethoric, lethargic and weighty bodies, but the analogy of a Prince instructing lithe young men and women to sit still as the older couples dance implies a grotesque, Saturnalian and carnivalesque element to Copernican theory. A prince may have the authority to temporarily invert social structures on feast days, but such inversion only emphasizes the natural order of things.[18] For Conway, the apparent absurdity of Copernican theory exposes its own impossibility and becomes a means by which geocentric models are reaffirmed.

Conway's analogy not only asserts an assumed natural order with regards to class and age, but also assumes particular roles for men and for women and how they ought to move when young and when old. This gendering of movement can also be seen in how Ptolemaic cosmology was refashioned by Christianity. Since the early Christian church, Ptolemaic cosmology had been absorbed into Christian narratives of creation, lending a more theologically fraught subtext to Conway's dismissal of Copernican theory. Within a Christian framework, as a consequence of Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden, humanity has been relegated to dwelling in the basest part of the cosmos: Eve was subjugated to Adam and both were subjugated to the harshness of the land. Unlike the bountiful Garden of Eden, earth was a space of toil and tribulation. Medieval writers conceived earth as the dull, fixed, base centre of the universe: Albertus Magnus went as far as to assert, "among the simple bodies, the earth is like an excrement".[19] Far from privileging the earth and humanity, the geocentric universe effectively marks humanity as the dung beetles dwelling in a heap of cosmic faeces.

Conway's comments focus upon the grossness of matter and he uses the simile of withered, gross fat earthly bodies to emphasize this sense that the decayed matter of the earth cannot be a celestial body. Yet his views were already deemed outmoded by those who elevated the earth beyond the negative connotations of it being the fixed, dull centre of the universe.[20] What this emphasizes is how older notions regarding cosmic movement continued to be known, held and understood.

Thirty years after Conway made these wry observations, Behn presents in Baliardo a fictional man of learning who believes, paradoxically, that terrestrial creatures are too base for his earth-dwelling charges. In focusing upon elevated lunar creatures, Baliardo appears to be harkening back to a geocentric view of the universe, but the very mentioning of a lunar society hints at heliocentrism. In 1638, John Wilkins speculated over the possibility of a lunar world:

> Very many others, both English and French, all who affirmed our Earth to bee one of the Planets, and the Sunne to be the Centre of all, about which the heavenly bodies did move, and how horid soever this may seeme at the first, yet is it likely enough to be true, nor is there any maxime or observation in Opticks (saith *Pena*) that can disprove it.
>
> Now if our earth were one of the Planets (as it is according to them) then why may not another of the Planets be an earth?
>
> Thus have I shewed you the truth of this proposition: Before I proceede farther, 'tis requisite that I informe the Reader, what method I shall follow in the proving of this chiefe assertion, that there is a World in the Moone.[21]

For Wilkins, the very reordering of the universe makes possible the plurality of worlds and the existence of aliens; since the earth is re-categorized as a planet, other planets can be inhabited like earth and there can be a society ("a World") dwelling on the moon. Wilkins points to the novelty and to the horror of acknowledging that the sun – not the earth – is the fixed point of the universe, demonstrating the extent to which conflicting accounts of how the planets wandered in space was a site of discord. This anxiety connects closely to perceptions of how God ordered the cosmos and what this ordering implied about humanity, salvation and an individual's relationship with God. In acknowledging that the earth was a planet, not only was earth reconsidered, but also other planets. William Gilbert, who was amongst the handful of people to accept Copernican theory in the sixteenth century, concluded the moon must have continents, oceans and a terrain that is similar to earth.[22] Such conjecture could be contentious within a Christian framework.

Wilkins was a cleric and founding member of the Royal Society, and reconciling astrological discoveries with God concerned some Christians. In particular, theories regarding the plurality of worlds were controversial and texts such as Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* ("Conversations on the plurality of worlds" 1686) was blacklisted by the Roman Catholic Church and continued to be listed on its index of heretical works until the nineteenth century.[23] However, at this point in his discussions, Wilkins is less concerned with reconciling readers with the "horrid" notion that the earth is a planet and, instead, focuses upon optics. Observation, especially through the telescope, provides the viewer with empirical truths about the nature of matter and how it travels through space.

The telescope enables the viewer to see what is being perceived more clearly, but hidden within this recognition of the telescope as an instrument for scientific enquiry is an acceptance of the instrument's strategic importance. When Galileo presented his telescope with a magnification of x8 to the Doge of Venice and the Venetian Senate, he emphasized its military relevance:

> This is a thing of inestimable benefit for all transactions and undertakings, maritime or terrestrial, allowing us at sea to discover at a much greater distance than usual the hulls and sails of the enemy[24]

The telescope had strategic importance from its inception, particularly in times of conflict and as an aid to assist safe passage across treacherous seas. As such, the telescope could be construed as a potent weapon in the quest for knowledge acquisition, whether this knowledge was military or astronomic. Through observation and magnification, forms of knowledge previously hidden to the human eye could be revealed.

Observation and optics, as Wilkins maintains, thus have the potential to expand knowledge. However, seventeenth century telescopes were difficult to handle and the fields of vision were very small: it was not easy to keep celestial objects in sight.[25] Although later examination of the moon through more powerful telescopes showed Galileo's plotting of lunar craters to be surprisingly accurate, the small sight lines could expose the drawings to doubt and to suspicion.[26] The seventeenth century may have witnessed the decisive rejection of geocentrism, but the possibility of doubting what the eye sees meant that Edward, Viscount Conway, could scoff at the absurdity of heliocentrism: common sense told us that the earth was static and did not move.

Nevertheless, Galileo's invention revolutionized how the cosmos was conceived and his discussions became popularized in print. Readers could engage with astronomy through consuming texts that imagined new extra-terrestrial lands, and it is this fascination with the planets that Behn draws from in fashioning the spectacle of her play.

Reading and performing the early modern moon

Behn took a keen interest in the developments in scientific method and was one of the earliest translators into English of Fontenelle.[27] Despite – or perhaps because of – its controversy, Fontenelle's text eventually became a European best-seller. As Line Cottegnies has argued, Behn does not produce a faithful word for word or sense for sense translation of Fontenelle, but instead distances herself from the most controversial elements of the text through how she frames it in her preface and from her loose translation of certain parts.[28] Fontenelle's narrative is structured around a series of nocturnal conversations between a philosopher and his host, a marquise, as they wander around her garden observing the night sky, and, as Cottegnies has argued, Behn makes women more prominent in the narrative and less passive agents in the philosophical discourse.[29] This echoes and challenges Elaria and Bellemante's active participation in the fabrication of a lunar society in *The Emperor of the Moon*: whereas Behn's translation presents women as engaged in philosophical discussions regarding the order of the cosmos, *The Emperor of the Moon* presents women as energetically challenging cosmic philosophy through using visual culture to cast doubt on scientific method.

Although Fontenelle wrote in the vernacular for a wide readership, Behn's interjections, as Cottegnies observes, "show Behn's awareness of herself as a critic and … a scrupulous mediator between a philosophical/scientific text and a public of non-specialists".[30] In the

preface to her translation, Behn playfully contests, distorts and renders ludicrous Fontenelle's most contentious arguments – especially with regards to the existence of other inhabited planets, asserting that Fontenelle "failed in his design" due to his endeavours to make astronomy accessible:

> I must tell you freely, he hath failed in his Design; for endeavouring to render this part of Natural Philosophy familiar, he hath turned it into Ridicule; he hath pushed his wild Notion of the *Plurality of Worlds* to that heighth of Extravagancy, that he most certainly will confound those Readers, who have not Iudgment and Wit to distinguish between what is truly solid (or, at least, probable) and what is trifling and airy: and there is no less Skill and Vnderstanding required in this, than in comprehending the whole Subject he treats of.[31]

These critiques of Fontenelle might seem at odds with Behn's interventions in the text that are aimed at making it accessible, but it casts light on reading and the reading strategies needed to engage with scientific learning. Behn presents herself as the mediator of a controversial text, enabling the reader to engage "appropriately" with the more provocative elements of Fontenelle's argument. When Behn's comments regarding Fontenelle are considered in relation to her play and reading, however, we see that Behn consistently returns to questions of reading and how the reader consumes and digests works that are concerned with deciphering the secrets of the universe.

In the play, Baliardo is presented as a learned natural philosopher who is obsessed with the moon. He conflates heliocentric cosmography with some aspects of geocentrism: for Baliardo, the moon continues to be the threshold to the celestial sphere, even though the earth is a planet. Convinced that the moon is inhabited, Baliardo privileges lunar dwellers

and asserts that the lunar society is superior to terrestrial civilizations. The moon thus becomes a dominant force, not by governing human physiology as some early modern medics believed, but instead by dominating Baliardo psychologically.[32] Baliardo's interest places impediments upon his household and prevents him from engaging with his physical surroundings: it is only through calling a halt to Baliardo's fixation with the moon that order will be restored. In the opening scene, we are told Baliardo's malady was triggered by reading lunar travel narratives:

SCARAMOUCH: lunatic we may call him … for he is always travelling to the moon.

ELARIA: And so religiously he believes there is a world there, that he discourses gravely of the people, their government, institutions, laws, manners, religion and constitution, as if he had been bred a Machiavel there.

SCARAMOUCH: How came he thus infected first?

ELARIA: With reading foolish books, Lucian's *Dialogue of Icaromenipus*, who flew up to the moon and thence to heaven; and heroic business called *The Man in the Moon*, if you'll believe a Spaniard, who was carried thither upon an engine drawn by wild geese; with another philosophical piece, *A Discourse of the World in the Moon*; with a thousand other ridiculous volumes too hard to name.

SCARAMOUCH: Aye, this reading of books is a pernicious thing. I was like to have run mad once, reading Sir John Mandeville.[33]

Imaginary travel, the servant Scaramouch asserts, is at the root of Baliardo's malady, but the punning use of "lunatic" highlights how, since antiquity, madness and the moon were perceived as closely intertwined. Humoural theory asserted that the balance of the

humours was governed by the phases of the moon – women, with their weaker bodies and reasoning were more susceptible to sudden changes in emotion and, inevitably, were more likely to be influenced by the moon.[34] In imagining himself to have an affinity with lunar dwellers, Baliardo renders himself lunatic and effeminate. In setting up this premise, the text becomes a means to refute the misogyny inherent within forms of medical theory that continued to hold sway in the seventeenth century. The moon-infected Baliardo is cured of his lunacy by his daughter and his niece and this act enables the wards to marry the men of their choosing. Far from being governed by the mutable moon (as previous ways of considering the relationship between the moon and the body attested), female agency is the catalyst for conflict resolution.

Whereas Behn celebrated female agency, others viewed it as a disruptive force, especially if excited through reading: romances, especially, were believed to affect the senses and encourage hysteria. These views continued into the eighteenth century, where the novel was feared to be detrimental reading matter for women in particular.[35] Baliardo's imagination has deceived him, but this deception has been brought on by the material practices of reading. Aristotelian theories regarding the faculties of the mind presented cognition as being reached through sensory information being conveyed to the brain by the animal spirits. The imagination converted this data into images that were stored and (after being stored) continued to be perceived when the external object was no longer in sight. These images were then transmitted to reason and to memory: the internal senses thus made sense of data gathered by the external senses.[36] This not only shows how interior and exterior knowledge was conceived as closely intertwined, but it also highlights the belief in the porous, leaky quality of the human body and mind. Right reason could enter the body through sensory experience, but so too could false knowledge: Charles Gobinet instructed the young Christian reader to avoid "unchast

Books … as the Plague of the Soul", demonstrating ongoing anxieties regarding what to read and how to read.[37] Women, perceived as being especially leaky vessels, were believed to be particularly susceptible to absorbing data that would be cognitively and physiologically detrimental. What women read and how they engaged with fiction was therefore a cause for concern to moralists. By presenting Baliardo as falling prey to delusion, Behn not only draws from fears regarding what ought to be read and how to read, she also inverts gendered concerns regarding reading. Elaria dismisses the "foolish books" that led to her father's faculties being perplexed: far from being deceived by reading pernicious books, the female characters in Behn's play understand the importance of careful and judicious reading.

Behn realigns false reading practices to be a malady of men who pursue scientific enquiry with little understanding of scientific method. Elaria's criticism of her father centres on how Baliardo has placed trust in there being a perfect lunar society. Baliardo has moved beyond the parameters of what can be known empirically through plotting information received through the telescope and, instead, he subscribes to metaphysical speculation that can be neither be proved nor disproved. Baliardo has strayed from scientific method and instead considers what kind of society might inhabit the moon. In so doing, he entered the realms of governance. Machiavelli, whose complex theories of statecraft were contentious and caricatured throughout the early modern period, then becomes the influential force as Baliardo fabricates his lunar society.[38] Baliardo ceases to have right reasoning and instead suffers from a Machiavellian infection.

Through reading, Baliardo is thus deceived into believing the hypothesis that there are other inhabited worlds is authoritative. In so doing, doubt is cast on Baliardo's erudition: instead of being a learned doctor, Baliardo has shown himself to be a reader who lacks

the judgment and critical acumen to distinguish between the "truly solid" and the trifling and airy. Behn's criticism of Fontenelle materializes upon the stage as the relationship between reading, matter, imagination, travel, the performance of travel and staged spectacle is explored and deemed a site of conflict.

Reading, travel, and the performance of deception

Elaria dismisses Baliardo's reading of "ridiculous volumes" relating to the moon, but the servant Scaramouch's observation that he almost went insane as a consequence of reading the medieval travel romance by John Mandeville is telling. By referencing Mandeville's travels, Scaramouch is not only establishing a connection between lunar exploration and terrestrial travel, he is also identifying the pre-history to ideas of exploration and how the epistemological precepts that underpin travel were gradually changing. Terrestrial travel and lunar travel are both causes for anxiety. At the time of the play's first performance, John Harrison was still fifty years from discovering a means of accurately calculating Longitude and the world still presented the wayward traveller with undiscovered countries.[39] Travel narrative in the late 1600s therefore could (and did) encompass the fantastical as well as the factual. The discussion between Elaria and Scaramouch highlights tensions between the impulses towards modernity and the birth of more scientific ways of knowing the wider world and previous discourses of travel and wonder. Elaria's dismissal of the lunar narratives as "foolish" and Scaramouch's assumption that they are "pernicious books" that lead the reader into the vice of lunacy highlights each character's inability to comprehend the rhetorical mechanisms of early modern travel writing.

Natural philosophy and experimental philosophy may have sought to establish truths through observation, but Jonathan Sell has drawn attention to the fact that the travel narrative demands to know what sort of truths are under discussion. Rather than offering specific empirical truths about the wider world – or even the moon, in the case of authors on lunar travel – travel writing is less concerned with scientific reasoning, but instead offers metaphors and parallels that may be unpicked by the reader. Since language itself can cloud and obfuscate meaning, any relaying of the exotic and foreign is flawed: verbal signs could transform a rhinoceros, as Marco Polo found when he attempted to describe the beast to untravelled Europeans by naming it a unicorn.[40]

The rhetoric of early modern travel, therefore, is fraught with difficulty if it were to be taken literally. Instead, early modern travel could offer a way of knowing that is largely based upon perceived universal truisms. One of the "pernicious books" identified by Elaria neatly encapsulates the metaphorical nature of travel writing and the fictionality of utopian tales. *The Man in the Moone*, by Francis Godwin, was printed posthumously in 1638. It is supposedly the autobiographical account of Domingo Gonsales, a Spaniard whose adventures take him to the moon on a contraption he invented and harnessed to a flock of birds (Fig. 12.1). Gonsales' discoveries offer parallels to earthly societies. On the moon, he finds a refined lunar society. This society has a natural accord with Christianity as demonstrated by the moon inhabitants bowing at the name of Jesus – even if they appear to have no concept of Christianity as an organized faith.

<Fig. 12.1 near here>

Such a representation of moon-dwellers would seem to suggest that there is an inherent harmony within creation and this harmony is something to which Baliardo aspires. In

denying his daughter and his niece access to terrestrial lovers, Baliardo sets his sights (if not the sights of his wards) upon higher beings. Advancements in science would seem to locate these discussions within a nexus of scientific learning predicated upon discoveries chartered through knowledge gained by looking through the telescope. However, telescopic insights lack viability in the context of lunar travel narratives. Many of these lunar explorations are less about the moon as a real space and more about the imagined societies that could inhabit it. Perhaps most notably as far as the play is concerned, Godwin's text blends travel writing with the picaresque and utopian fiction.

Utopian literature signalled its own fictionality in its very construction: the lack of clear coordinates enabled writers to use the ill-defined space of the far-off land to imagine other ways of ordering society. Central to utopian literature is travel and, as Chloë Houston notes, Godwin's appropriation of forms associated with travel encourages comparison of lunar and terrestrial life even if Godwin makes no suggestions with regards to how the latter may be reformed.[41] Travel writing and utopian literature raise questions regarding authenticity and the reader's credulity: Houston argues that the mid-seventeenth century marks the point where the idealism of utopianism is replaced by comic ridicule. Despite this, the form maintained vitality across many genres and the seventeenth century witnessed a proliferation in texts that appropriate utopian forms.[42] Utopian literature thus informed ideas of travel and constructions of ideal societies, even if readers during a period of continued revolution, political uncertainty and religious reform failed to invest in the idealist precepts that underpinned the genre.

The moon, imagination, and natural philosophy

Utopian fiction implies that the moon could offer a space to reflect upon earthly matters and humanity's status in the wider cosmos. Central to these discussions were not only ways of understanding the heliocentric universe, but also endeavours to comprehend changing attitudes to religion – perhaps especially soteriology and whether or not aliens could receive salvation. As David Cressy writes:

> Like the Utopian tradition to which it was related, the literature of lunar voyaging was part parodic but mostly sober, combining earnestness and jest. Imagining a world on the moon was perhaps a response to a shuffled world, a world turned upside down, in which systems of hierarchy, authority, religion, and gender, as well as planetary revolutions, were called into question.[43]

Lunar travel narratives thus become a means to question and destabilize early modern truisms: Baliardo's foolishness stems from his taking a positivist approach to these narratives and making an inductive leap of faith in the absence of empirical evidence. Rather than seeing lunar civilization as a cognitive exercise and acknowledging an indebtedness to utopian writings and fantastical discourses regarding an ideal society, Baliardo believes the lunar community to be real. The stage directions of Behn's play, such as the one that opens 1.2, emphasize this absurdity:

> *Enter* Doctor*, with all manner of Mathematical Instruments, hanging at his Girdle;* Scaramouch *bearing a Telescope twenty (or more) Foot long.*

The telescope is presented as a preposterously phallic object for comic and visual effect as Baliardo seeks to view the moon dwellers, "the most beautiful of all the sons and daughters of the Universe" (1.2.55). However, twenty-foot and longer telescopes were

not unusual in the seventeenth century due to the smallness of the field of vision and how the lenses needed to be positioned. The 202 feet tall Monument, completed in 1677 to commemorate the 1666 Great Fire of London, was designed to be a giant and powerful telescope: although this experiment was abandoned due to vibrations from passing traffic affecting the sensitivity of the instrument, it underscores the eagerness with which the new technology was replicated and enhanced.[44] Behn's comic telescope thus has a basis in astronomical fact, but it also highlights the need to imagine and construct various elaborate theatrical and verbal spectacles in order to continue the ruse. Much of the deception exercised in the play is predicated upon the way in which Baliardo's imagination can be abused.

As noted previously, imagination was central to Aristotelian ideas regarding sensory experience and cognition. However, imagination can also refer to what is fanciful, likely, expected or anticipated.[45] The lovers and their accomplices develop Baliardo's fancy by deceiving his imagination. They expand upon Baliardo's belief that the moon is inhabited and encourage him to believe that the two principle moon dwellers are in love with his daughter and with his ward.

Credulity and imagination thus go hand in glove, but the text establishes tensions between Baliardo's scientific method and the Naples that he inhabits. His scientific instruments are dismissed as "devils" before the decision is taken to act out a farce to cure him of his lunar obsession. Here, the telescope is not presented as a means by which empirical truths can be established, but instead it is viewed as an instrument of visual deception. Folly is to be cured by folly, but the play's metadramatic concern with performance and spectacle does not stop at the impositions placed upon Baliardo. Scientific learning and the instruments associated with it are rejected, but lest we fall into

the trap of believing the narrative will unravel into a war between piety and science, other modes of performativity are introduced. In 1.1, Bellemante is witnessed clutching a prayer book and has the appearance of a woman who has returned from Church; the sensory gratification gained from reading her prayer book (and in attending public forms of worship) thus provides nourishment for her soul.[46] Yet, it becomes apparent that her attendance at chapel was less to feast her eyes upon God and more to gain carnal gratification through assuming the role of voyeur. Her sole purpose in attending church worship is to ogle men and especially her lover Charmante.

Appearances and the realities of the situations presented distort the various narrative strategies employed, showing staged spectacle to be as pernicious a thing as the play purports reading to be. Behn appropriates the rhetoric of celestial orbs and their relationship to God as a way of satirically implying that the church is a place to see and to be seen. Later, Baliardo assumes the role of a chaste voyeur when, as part of the deception meted out on him, a disguised Scaramouch implores the doctor to clear his mind of all vices as only a virtuous man can see the spirits who inhabit the heavens. While Baliardo is praying, Scaramouch affixes a lens onto the telescope that depicts a beautiful celestial nymph sleeping. Private repose is thus scrutinized by the male gaze and there is a tension between the insistence of Baliardo's inherent virtue permitting him to view the sleeping nymph and the sense of perversion generated through the act of illicitly watching a private scene.

The boundaries between public and private – so hotly debated by later critics – become ever more porous as the play establishes more and more elaborate modes of disguise, surveillance and misunderstandings that require resolution. The various binaries that the play seeks to establish become destabilized through the various strategies used to create

the elaborate spectacles that were in vogue with theatre audiences at the time of the play's first performance. Private meditations and public devotions, private repose and public action, masculine and feminine forms, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial activities, interiority and exteriority, static reading and active spectacle, travel and remaining stationary, are all called to question as these conflicts remain unresolved. This might partly be due to the creative impulses that underpin the development of staged spectacle colliding with the parallel concerns of travel writing. The velocity of the narrative collapses these binaries as imagination feeds both the staged spectacles that the play appears to celebrate and the travel writing precepts that it seems to attack.

Wonder

How the imagination can be abused brings us to the notion of wonder – in terms of the emotion that is caused by perceiving something novel, inexplicable and astonishing; the curiosity, perception and bewilderment that the sensation elicits; and the cognitive methods this emotion may generate. The play uses wonder to establish various deceptions for comic effect and to ridicule the easily duped. In the subplot, Cinthio's servant, Harelequin, disguises himself as a farmer in an attempt to win the hand of the wards' companion, Mopsophil, while his rival for her affections, Scaramouch, assumes the appearance of an Apothecary. Mopsophil is not deceived, but Harlequin adopts further disguises: in order to escape paying a tax upon entering the city, he transforms his appearance from a gentleman farmer driving a calash to a baker steering a cart. The various stage directions emphasize the relationship between wonder and spectacle:

> [The Officer] goes to the entrance to call the clerk; [in] the meantime Harlequin whips a frock over himself, and puts down the hind part of the chariot, and then 'tis a cart. Enter Clerk (3.1)

This visual trick is present in Behn's source text, *Arlequim, empereur dans la lune*, performed by an Italian troupe in Paris in 1684, yet this trick has little bearing on the plots.[47] The entire scene is a comedic device where a city official is duped into believing that he must be drunk to have mistaken a baker delivering goods to the city for a gentleman farmer. Consequently, its purpose seems purely to provide visual pleasure to an audience privy to the joke. However, the scene also draws attention to the way in which seeing, perceiving and cognitive blindness operate within the play. Through Harlequin's duplicity, the official cannot rely upon his sensory perceptions to establish the empirical truth of the matter. Instead, he is left in a state of bewildered wonder.

While the spectacle may point to wonder being a source of deception, wonder is also inherent in early modern travel writing. Upon returning to Europe, the traveller could regale their audiences with astonishing stories of remote and far-off lands and the peoples who inhabit them. Audiences to these narratives both require the capacity to imagine the details described and the ability to marvel at them. An unknown physical object thus becomes a source of wonder, thereby anchoring abstract sensations in an unknown material world. Drawing from the humanist tradition and in accord with practices of knowledge acquisition in the early modern period, Baliardo's scientific learning blends astrology, astronomy, alchemy, medicine, cosmography and Rosicrucian spiritualism as a way to establish empirical truths about the moon and the wider world. Yet wonder, as asserted by Socrates and later by Francis Bacon, is at the root of all knowledge. Philosophy and science begin with bewilderment. In *The Advancement of*

Learning (1605), Bacon refers to wonder as being both "broken knowledge" and "the seed of knowledge". Establishing a difference between the dangerous and "proud knowledge of good and evil" that brought humanity to its postlapsarian state and virtuous knowledge that permitted humanity to name the animals, Bacon asserts the need for wonder as the starting point for all cognitive processes that bring about reasoning and empirical truths.[48]

Wonder, therefore, is at the heart of early modern scientific method and learning, but how does this connect to a play that seems determined to lampoon the folly of placing too much faith in perception and appears dismissive of lunar exploration? In the final scene of the play, spectacle, deception, wonder and gender conjoin before Baliardo is cured when he learns the spectacle is fabricated. Baliardo is led to believe that he, Elaria, Bellemante and Mopsophil might have been transported to the moon:

BELLEMANTE: Are you sure on't, sir? Are we not, think you, in that world above I often heard you speak of? In the moon, sir?

DOCTOR [Baliardo]: (*aside*) How shall I resolve her? For ought I know, we are.

ELARIA: Sure, sir, 'tis some enchantment.

DOCTOR: Let not thy female ignorance profane the highest mysteries of natural philosophy. To fools it seems enchantment, but I've a sense can reach it: sit, and expect the event. Hark! [Aside], I am amazed, but must conceal my wonder, that joy of fools, and appear wise in gravity.

(3.3.6-13)

Rather than perceiving wonder to be the beginning of knowledge, Baliardo dismisses the sensation as the "joy of fools". Baliardo aligns wonder with curiosity and in so doing rejects all scientific learning. Unable to see the distinctions between good and bad curiosity, legitimate and illegitimate learning, Baliardo is exposed as a fool precisely because he is unable to publicly succumb to the sensation of wonder, or to admit the limits of his knowledge. The scene culminates in further spectacles as the lovers marry, before it is abruptly asserted that Baliardo is cured of his lunacy. Upon learning that he has been the subject of an elaborate hoax, Baliardo decides to destroy his library:

DOCTOR: Burn all my books, and let my study blaze;
Burn all to ashes, and be sure the wind
Scatter the vile contagious monstrous lies.
- Most noble youths, you've honoured me with your alliance, and you, and all your friends, assistances in this glorious miracle, I invite tonight to revel with me. – Come, all, and see my happy recantation of all follies fables have inspired till now … I see there's nothing in philosophy. – of all that writ, he was the wisest bard, who spoke this mighty truth:

He that knew all that ever learning writ,
Knew only this: that he knew nothing yet.

(3.3.222-8 & 30-33)

Baliardo thus abjures philosophy, but this decision only emphasizes that he misses the point. The rhetoric employed is loaded with contradictions. The vile contagious books are to be scattered to the wind, but this spreads the "contagion" rather than containing it. To endorse the view that "there is nothing in philosophy," Baliardo cites a maxim first

propounded by Socrates to test the limits of knowledge and not to dismiss all learning.[49] Rather than demonstrating reading to be a bad exercise that clouds judgement, we are presented with a doctor who lacks the erudition to understand the knowledge he has acquired. The false reading and interpretative practices that lead Baliardo to conclude that a philosopher is against philosophical learning also encourages him to misunderstand the tenets of early modern travel writing. His reading of the texts is predicated upon the false assumption that the texts address empirical truths. Instead, the barriers between real and imagined space and the beings that inhabit these spaces become fractured sites of conflict. The binary divisions between the earth and the moon that Baliardo assumes to be in place are not supported by the play, yet the oracular distinctions between reading and viewing spectacle are also open to speculation. Despite its allusions to travel narrative, its geneses in *comedia dell'arte* and its appropriation of the fashion for staged spectacles as a means of conflict resolution, ultimately, Behn's play seems more concerned with the epistemologies that underpin reading.

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[1] For a discussion of how Columbus set sail to find the Far East and the Garden of Eden, and Cartier's Pentecostal approach to the New World, see Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud's essay in this current volume.

[2] For a succinct overview of the complexities of travel writing as a genre, see Carl Thompson's *Travel Writing* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 9-33. On the relationship between travel writing and the novel, see Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

[3] Derek Hughes, "Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29-45 (35).

[4] Daniel Gustafson, "Cultural Memory and the Royalist Political Aesthetic in Aphra Behn's Later Works," *Restoration* 36 (2012): 1-22; Al Coppola, "Retraining the Virtuoso's Gaze: Behn's *Emperor of the Moon*, The Royal Society, and the Spectacles of Science and Politics," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41 (2008): 481-506.

[5] Judy A. Hayden, "Harlequin Science: Aphra Behn's *Emperor of the Moon* and the Plurality of Worlds," *English* 64 (2015): 167-82.

[6] Claire Preston, *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107-8.

[7] See Elspeth Jajdelska, *Speech, Print and Decorum in Britain, 1600-1750: Studies in Social Rank and Communication* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Jennifer Richards, *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: A New History of Reading* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press); in recent years, there has been a proliferation of interest in the relationship between literate and oral cultures, influenced by earlier studies such as Bruce Smith's *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Adam Fox's *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a discussion of the performance of print, see my "Viewing the paper stage: civil war, print, theatre and the public sphere," in *Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Performance, Geography, Privacy* ed. Angela Vanhaelen and Joseph Ward (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 54-75.

[8] Katherine Manheimer, "Celestial Bodies: Readerly Rapture as Theatrical Spectacle in Aphra Behn's *Emperor of the Moon*," *Restoration* 31 (2011): 39-60.

[9] See Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel As Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xiii-xiv.

[10] For a discussion of the conflictual nature of utopian fiction, see Daniel Carey's essay in this volume.

[11] Elizabeth Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: the Art of Making Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 102.

[12] David Wootton, *The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 214-34.

[13] Galileo Galilei, *Sidereus Nuncius or The Sidereal Messenger,* trans. Albert Van Helden, 2 ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[14] David Cressy, "Early Modern Space Travel and the English Man in the Moon," *The American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 961–82.

[15] The earliest work of science fiction in the English language is often credited as being Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (pub. 1638). See William Poole, "The Origins of Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638)," *Philogical Quarterly* 84 (2005): 189-210.

[16] Edward, Viscount Conway, letter to his daughter-in-law Anne Conway, July 22, 1651, *Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642-1684*, ed. Marjorie Hope Nicolson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 34.

[17] Philemon Holland, *Gutta podrica: a treatise of the gout The severall sorts thereof. VVhat diet is good for such as are troubled therewith. And some approved medicines and remedies for the same* (London, 1633), A4v-B1r.

[18] For more on the Carnivalesque, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[19] Albertus Magnus, *De Caelo et mundo*, cited in Dennis Danielson, *"Paradise Lost" and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 158. For a detailed discussion of the kind of space Earth is conceived as being, see Danielson, ch. 7.

[20] Danielson, 159.

[21] John Wilkins, *The discovery of a world in the moone, or, A discourse tending to prove, that 'tis probable there may be another habitable world in that planet* (London, 1638), G7r-G7v. For a sustained discussion of this text and how its connections to Galileo and Christianity, see

Howard Marchitello, "Telescopic Voyages: Galileo and the Invention of Lunar Cartography" in *Travel Narratives, the New Science, and Literary Discourse, 1569–1750* ed. Judy A. Hayden (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 161-78.

[22] Wootton, 157-58.

[23] Line Cottegnies, "The Translator as Critic: Aphra Behn's Translation of Fontenelle's *Discovery of New Worlds*," *Restoration* 27 (2003): 23-38 (25).

[24]Cited in Van Helden's introduction to *Sidereal Messenger*, 8.

[25] Van Helden, 14.

[26] Spiller, 101. Anna Marie E. Roos notes that in 1609, Thomas Harriot made telescopic observations of the moon and, after viewing Galileo's wash drawings of the moon, drafted more precise lunar sketches (Roos, *Luminaries in the Natural World: The Sun and the Moon in England, 1400-1720* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 94).

[27] Behn's translation was printed under the title *A Discovery of New Worlds* in 1688. Two further translations in English appeared in 1687 and 1689 (Cottegnies, 23).

[28] *Ibid.*, 30.

[29] *Ibid.*, 26.

[30] *Ibid.*, 33.

[31] Bernard de Fontenelle, *A discovery of new worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn* (London, 1688), A8r.

[32] See Anna Marie Roos on how, after the Restoration, mechanistic explanations over the physiological effects of the moon on the body replaced occult rationalizations.

[33] Aphra Behn, "The Emperor of the Moon," in *The Rover and Other Plays,* ed. by Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). 1.1.87-102.

[34] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971), 351-52; Dolly MacKinnon, "'Poor Senseless Bess, Clothed in her Rags and Folly': Early Modern Women, Madness, and Song in Seventeenth-Century England," *Parergon* 18 (2001): 119-

51 (139). For a discussion of women as "weaker vessels" who are forbidden to travel except through reading, see Gábor Gelléri's chapter in this current volume.

[35] On attitudes to women readers, see, for example, Jacqueline Pearson, "Women Reading, Reading Women," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 80-99; Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Barbara M. Benedict, "'I Never Read Novels': The Gender of Readers and Reading," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel* ed. J.A. Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 355-71.

[36] Thibaut Maus de Rolley, "The Devil. Delusions and Early Modern Cognition," in *Cognitive Confusions: Dreams, Delusions and Illusions in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Ita Mac Carthy, Kirsti Sellevold and Olivia Smith (Cambridge: Legenda, 2016), 71-88 (73-74).

[37] Charles Gobinet, *The instruction of youth in Christian piety taken out of the sacred Scriptures, and Holy Fathers; divided into five parts. … The last edition in French, now render'd into English*. (London, 1687), Q7v.

[38] Erica Benner has offered an overview of Machiavelli's early reception history before going on to make a detailed, revisionist account, of his most controversial text. See *Machiavelli's "Prince": A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[39] Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996).

[40] Jonathan P.A. Sell*, Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560–1613* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 2-3.

[41] Chloë Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia: Dialogue, Travel and the Ideal Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 144.

[42] Houston, 162-63.

[43] Cressy, 981-82.

[44] J.A. Bennett, *The Mathematical Science of Christopher Wren* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 42.

[45] "imagination, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2017. http://www.oed.com/.

[46] On private devotion, see, for examples, Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie, eds., *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). On women reading and piety, see Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). On congregational engagement with sermon culture, see Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[47] Christa Knellwolf King, *Faustus and the Promise of the New Science, c. 1580-1730: From the Chaptbooks to Harlequin Faustus* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 173.

[48] Sell develops this point, 4.

[49] Apology 23b3-4. For a study of Socrates and knowledge, see Hugh H. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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