Truth and wonder
in Richard Head's geographical fictions[*]

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ABSTRACT

In line with the method prescribed by members of the Royal Society for natural history and travel writing, Richard Head explored the limits of verisimilitude associated with geographical discourse in his three fictions *The Floating Island* (1673), *The Western Wonder* (1674) and *O-Brazile* (1675). In them he argues in favor of the existence of the mysterious Brazile island and uses the factual discourse of the travel diarist to present a semi-mythical place whose very notion stretches the limits of believability. In line with recent critical interpretations of late seventeenth-century fiction as deceptive, and setting the reading of Head's narrations in connection with other types of travel writing, I argue that Head's fictions are a means of testing the readers' gullibility at a time when the status of prose, both fictional and non-fictional, is subject to debate.

KEYWORDS: Richard Head; Brazile island; truth and wonder; deception in fiction.
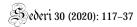
Verdad y maravilla en las ficciones geográficas de Richard Head

RESUMEN: En consonancia con el método prescrito por los miembros de la Royal Society para la historia natural y la escritura de viajes, Richard Head explora los límites de la verosimilitud asociada al discurso geográfico en sus tres obras de ficción The Floating Island (1673), The Western Wonder (1674) y O-Brazile (1675). En ellas se muestra a favor de la existencia de la misteriosa isla de Brazile y utiliza el discurso fáctico del viajero para presentar un lugar semi-mítico cuya noción va más allá de los límites de lo verosímil. Acorde con interpretaciones críticas recientes sobre la ficción de finales del

Verdade e Maravilha nas Ficções Geográficas de Richard Head[**]

RESUMO: Seguindo o método prescrito por membros da Royal Society para a história natural e a escrita de viagens, Richard Head explorou os limites de verossimilhança associada ao discurso geográfico em três ficções suas: The Floating Island (1673), The Western Wonder (1674) e O-Brazile (1675). Nelas, Head argumenta a favor da existência da misteriosa ilha de Brazile e usa o discurso factual do diarista de viagem para apresentar um lugar semi-mítico cuja própria ideia força os limites da credibilidade. Em consonância com interpretações críticas recentes da ficção do final do século XVII como enga-

siglo XVII como engañosa, y situando la lectura de las narraciones de Head en relación con otros tipos de narrativa de viajes de la época, sostengo que las ficciones de Head son un modo de poner a prueba la credulidad de los lectores en un momento en que el estatus de la prosa, tanto ficcional como no ficcional, está sujeta a debate.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Richard Head; Isla de Brazile; verdad y maravilla; ficción y engaño.

nosa, e relacionando a leitura das narrações de Head com outros tipos de escrita de viagem, argumento que as ficções de Head são um meio de testar a credulidade dos leitores num momento em que o estatuto da prosa, tanto ficcional como não ficcional, está sujeito a debate.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Richard Head; Ilha de Brazile; verdade e maravilha; engano em ficção.

In the mid-1670s, the Irish hack writer Richard Head published three related geographical fictions on the existence and discovery of an enchanted island—Brazeel, Brazile, or Brasil, in the different versions—situated on the western coast of Ireland.[1] Under the guise of different fictional personalities, *The Floating Island* (1673), *The Western Wonder* (1674), and *O-Brazeel, the Inchanted Island* (1675) have been all attributed to him. They share their description of a wonderful island, recorded on ancient and more recent maps, which had mysteriously disappeared in the author's time. By exploring the contours of truth and wonder, I argue that he is consciously playing with the limits of believability in fiction, training his readers in distinguishing true from false accounts, by discerning between reliable and unreliable methods of narrative truth-telling. In so doing, Head is inspired by true travel diaries and takes elements from other previous travel fictions, also anticipating later imaginary journeys. My argument is that in the three texts under inspection, Head blurs the boundaries between credibility and deception, instructing his audience in the art of reading skeptically. In the pages that follow, I will briefly refer to the general notions of truth and wonder at work in seventeenth-century philosophical and scientific contexts, to focus more extensively on the ways in which the emerging critical discourse on prose fiction incorporates them, particularly in relation to forms of travel writing. Finally, I will concentrate on the representation and combination of true and wonderful elements in Head's Brazile

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[1] I reproduce in the article the particular spelling employed in each text, and choose "Brazile" to refer to the island in more general terms. As Robert Fuson claims, there are more than twenty forms of spelling the name, five of which are of Gaelic origin (1995, 44).

narratives which speak of the hybrid and still unstable nature of late seventeenth-century methods of literary and scientific inquiry.

I. Truth, wonder and deception in late seventeenth-century fiction

The interrelated notions of truth and wonder were invariably associated in the Renaissance with the discourses of religion, history and natural philosophy. In A Social History of Truth (1994), Steven Shapin was concerned with "truth-generating practices" (1994, xxi) at work in the seventeenth century, which he identified with a gentlemanly society, most specifically with institutions of knowledge like the Royal Society, and with the work of some of its members like Robert Boyle. The assumption went that knowledge as truth was in the hands of trustful individuals alone, whereas lying and deception were clear symptoms of moral and social disorder (1994, 9–10). The importance of distinguishing truth from lies was also a priority at a time in which a number of political-cum-religious plots seemed to menace the stability of the state.[2]

On the other hand, wonder has been considered the origin of philosophical inquiry and discourse (Sell 2006, 5). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was basically related to any encounter with what caused surprise or astonishment, and was identified with miraculous events that could be found in nature, as Marsilio Ficino contended (Blum & Blum 2011, 1–2); with the unpredictability of man's behavior, in Pico della Mirandola's view in Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486); or even with the capacity to distinguish true from false religions, using the related principles of belief and authority, in line with Tomasso Campanella's Atheism Conquered (1606–1607). In the age of empiricism, wonder was, nonetheless, reassessed as problematic but also as what fostered the very processes of knowledge-making (Das 2016, 21). Wonder was also appropriated by travel writers, who marveled at the new places and objects they encountered and wanted to elicit similar responses in their readers. In

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[2] More than fifteen pamphlets and allegorical works on the figure of the informer were published between 1660 and the mid-1680s. Most of them presented the figure of the informer as a controversial character and an unreliable source, especially because they were paid in return for their services. On this figure, see John Dunton's allegorical text The Informer's Doom (1683).

this context, wonder was at the service of the literary market, as it often raised the interest and curiosity of an audience which was developing a taste for the foreign.

Critics of early prose fiction (Davis 1983; McKeon 1987; Hunter 1990) have often engaged with the distinction between truth and wonder in relation to the epistemological systems of romance and novel, following in many respects Ian Watt's developmental theory (Salzman 1999,295). Lennard Davis has proposed a Foucauldian reading of the novel as discourse concerned with "ruptures and transformations" that help us interpret the social and contextual relations that explain the evolution of the genre (1983, 9). He claims that romances should enforce verisimilitude, meant not as a technique of formal realism, but only as a means "to defictionalize the work to an acceptable threshold of credibility" (Davis 1983, 31). He argues further that the fact and fiction diatribe is at the heart of the news/novels discourse, and that the apparent contradictions that define it constitute the very foundation of the genre. Final interpretations are left in the readers' hands, who were most probably unable to say whether what they read was true or not (Davis 1983, 70).

One of the emblematic examples of the characteristic claims to truth in early fiction is Behn's Preface to Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave (1688), where the author makes a claim in favor of the true nature of her story, set in two far-away lands, alien to the experience of most English readers. Behn's strategy of suggesting that she has been eye-witness of most narrated events, or that she had received the story from the protagonist himself, is a ploy to excuse the romantic and improbable details in her tale, pressing her audience to accept its believability (Behn 1994, 6). Alongside seemingly probable events, Behn includes elements of wonder, directly related to the world of romance. Cases in point would be Behn's marvelling at the natural wonders and curiosities that could be found in the colony (1994, 47), or the Indians' astonishment at the customs and the aspect of westerners like Behn and her brother, which they referred to as "Tepeeme" or "numberless wonders" (1994, 53).

Michael McKeon has argued that romance was often associated with a broad notion of "history" in the course of the seventeenth century, whereas the novel was generally related to the world of "news," an umbrella term that alluded to very different kinds of material. Behind the variety of labels applied to fiction at the time, the

ongoing debate was (and still is) how to tell the truth in narrative (McKeon 1987, 27). Progressively, romances as "histories" began to be differentiated from "true histories," the name often used to refer to shorter specimens of fiction whose plots drew closer to the readers' worlds and everyday experience. However, as seventeenth-century texts demonstrate, a pattern of double reversal in relation to both epistemology and ideology can be applied to romances and novels. A complex epistemological transformation needed to take place before "the novel" was accepted as a distinct category representing prose fiction in the eighteenth century (1987, 27). This transformation was gradual and can be traced in the prefaces and dedicatory epistles to the fictional texts themselves, in which their authors address the truth versus falsehood issue mostly in association with the worlds of romance and the novel.[3]

In both genres, though, the aim of prose fiction writers was to gain the reader's credibility (Tieje 1913, 213). Percy Adams has also referred to the credibility of gullible or candid seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers, who were keen to consume fictional narratives which were either truth-like or passed for truth (1983, 88). In a similar vein, Kate Loveman argues that late seventeenth-century authors solicited "candid" readers, with whom to create a relationship of mutual respect and honesty, as their prefaces and dedicatory epistles demonstrate (2008, 19). The reader's task, however, was to discern truth from fiction, reading the texts skeptically: "Readers not only suspected that the true meaning of a work had been disguised but also that the writer had a devious, possibly malicious, design upon his audience" (Loveman 2008, 20). Thus, writer and reader negotiated the limits of believability, the role of the writer being to convince the reader of the basic truths of his story and the reader's part to suspect the evidence of truth. Readers dedicated themselves

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[3] In the epistle to the reader in The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians (1705), Delarivier Manley distinguishes between romances—or "long-winded Performances" whose "Likeness" is "so little managed"—and "little Pieces" which are "much more agreeable to the Brisk and Impetuous Humour of the English" (1705, iv). In the preface to Incognita, or Love and Duty Reconcil´d (1692), William Congreve argues that romances are full of "miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances" and that they "elevate and surprise the Reader into a giddy Delight," whereas novels are "Intrigues in Practice […], such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the Pleasure nearer us," concluding that "Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight" (1692, A4). In spite of appearances, there are not many differences between the two forms, as the contradictory titles given to novels demonstrate.

on many occasions to "read against the grain," encouraged by the intellectual forays of science and natural philosophy, by religious skepticism (especially of Catholics) and by the alleged testimonies of truth at the court of law. The topic was popular in works like Meric Casaubon's Of Credulity and Incredulity in things Natural, Civil, and Divine (1668), where the author warned readers against the danger of falling into "unadvised belief, or unbelief," frequently seen as sources of superstition and atheism. In Casaubon's account, the wonder of fiction became associated with the faith of religion, that could not be granted through sensorial apprehension—"not discernible with bodily eyes" (1668, Sig B, 2)—but through rational discernment and "Divine revelation." To read texts skeptically became an extended practice which even reached the new social sphere of the coffee-house and which distinguished good from bad citizens, as Dunton argued in The Informer's Doom (1683), leaving to his readers' "candid View" (Sig A2) the ability to discern between friends and enemies of the state.

Not only in the titles of the lives, letters, and journals, but most importantly in the appearance, techniques and reliability of the stories, writers wanted to achieve the credit that historians had been granted in earlier times (Adams 1983, 89). Different kinds of material—and Restoration printed material was indeed varied—elicited different responses and allegiances to truth. Gerd Bayer explores this issue, concluding that "questions of representation" were vivid and true to seventeenth-century readers, and that apparently they shared expectations about the degree of truth different types of texts displayed (2016, 190). In spite of the Royal Society's promotion of travel accounts which relied on direct experience and individual observation, Adams has noted that the form of travel writing was associated with the shadow of lie and deceit. More often than in other fictional types, they were required to authenticate facts for a growing audience of avid readers who wanted to know what exotic and mysterious places had in store (1983, 94).

II. Seventeenth-century travel narratives: Factual fictions

The seventeenth century was rife with stories of imaginary journeys and utopian narratives. Encouraged by the voyages of discovery and geographic exploration, and by the travel writings and diaries that illustrated them and supported their credibility, authors wrote tales

of adventure, sometimes based on true accounts and journeys and others on purely fictional ones. The purpose of the former works was basically informative and didactic, as they were meant to reinforce the English character in contrast to the rest of the world. According to Leslie B. Cormack, "with the incremental accumulation of information about Europe, patterns of national behavior and trading relations could emerge. Descriptions of the four corners of the world confirmed English sentiments of superiority and otherness" (1991, 650). These "real" narratives, which spurred the thirst for exploration, as well as for nationalistic feeling and for the knowledge of the Other, promoted colonial exploitation and found a growing number of fictional counterparts, in which authors followed very closely the same methods of description and inductive knowledge as found in true travel accounts. Other exemplars of fictional travel writing are at the heart of Richard Head's texts, like Sir John Mandeville's *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville Knight*, first published in the late fifteenth century but newly edited in 1657, Francis Bacon's *New Atalantis*, re-edited in 1658, or Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines*, published in 1668, and its sequel *The Hairy-Giants* in 1671. Head's fictions, however, are closer to the branch of chorography than to general geography, due to their interest in the local. His native Ireland is behind his Brazile narratives, and London, his city of adoption, is the real location in his allegorical piece *The Floating Island*. Head's chorographical fictions were "aimed at the armchair traveler and island-bound country gentleman rather than at the practical navigator or merchant" (Cormack 1991, 654), in contrast to real travel diaries.

In Salzman's view, the late seventeenth-century imaginary journey contained a greater narrative interest than the merely utopian, displaying in many cases an important political and allegorical content. However, the *voyage imaginaire* inevitably included some utopian reminiscences, and the influences of real travel writing and imaginary journeys were mutual. While the two narrative forms coexisted, truth and lies combined in tales which attracted the readers' interest in new lands, their fauna and flora, and their people and organization. These exotic new territories kindled the imagination of an audience that found in these exotic voyages a form of escapism.[4]

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[4] Purely fictional travel narratives coincide with other true travel accounts and geographies, propelled by the new explorations and settlements in other parts of the

The discovery of new lands fueled the interest of the Royal Society, which promoted methods of scientific inquiry based on reports on correspondence as well as on travelers' experiments and anecdotes (Carey 1997, 271). Members of the Society like Boyle even instructed them on how to make their observations of foreign lands (1997, 272). At the same time, these journeys and the travel writings that recorded them, titillated the imagination of writers who told stories about how other lands were sometimes inhabited by strange and monstrous beings.[5] To illustrate this "narrative" interest in geographical explorations, I will briefly mention Margaret Cavendish's The Blazing World. Though not a member of the Society, Cavendish showed her scientific and literary interests in its work, by appending her philosophical observations to her utopian tale. She claimed that The Blazing World was entirely the product of her imagination, and that it comprised three different forms: the first part romancical, the second part philosophical and the third part fantastical (Cavendish 1992, 124). These three elements can be also found in different degrees in Richard Head's Brazile narratives.

Travel accounts kindled the curiosity of scientists and general readers because they proved that "the course of knowledge was radically open to suggestion" (Carey 1997, 276). In fact, natural philosophers accepted the smooth transition from travel to travel literature, as Daniel Carey suggests, "because not every item observed in travel could be delivered for inspection" (1997, 279). Travel narratives of all kinds, therefore, shared a number of common generic features, like the presence of a first-person voice, or of second-hand accounts, describing experiences recorded or memorized in the course of travel, the references to real time coordinates and to a historical context, as well as a wealth of detail. Seventeenth-century travel narratives came gradually to accommodate truth by following the empirical method of knowledge. The writers navigated between the plausible, the imaginary and sometimes the historical, ascertaining truth by developing a still imprecise narrative method. Precisely,

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globe, like John Ogilby's Africa (1670) or Gabriel de Foigny's A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis (1693).

[5] Philosophical tracts and imaginary journeys, like those by Giordano Bruno or Francis Bacon, became a matter of controversy from political and religious perspectives (Matytsin 2013, 361–64). All had their own views about the changing situation of human beings in the universe, as well as about the interrelation of fancy and scientific works with the revealed truths of religion (Cressy 2006, 962).

McKeon selects Richard Head's Brazile fictions as models for the demystification of historicizing travel narratives from the perspective of extreme skepticism (1987, 111ff.). Head is skeptical of the association of truth with travel narratives and creates travel tales that are representative of the hybrid status granted to travel writing as well as illustrative of the changing nature of prose fiction at the time. Similarly, following the practice of the Royal Society of accepting the existence of monsters and oddities of nature in the travel accounts, Head makes of his texts "oddities" in their combination of truths and lies.

III. Truth and wonder in Richard Head's fiction

The son of an Irish protestant preacher, Richard Head left his native country for France and then England, where part of his mother's family lived (Katanka 1975, 6; The English Rogue, 1665, Sig B4v–B5). He would return to Ireland, where he wrote his Jonsonian comedy Hic et Ubique, or the Humours of Dublin, printed in England in 1663 and including a dedicatory epistle to the Duke of Monmouth.[6] His comedy relied on autobiographical data (Katanka 1975, 35) and presented characters who went bankrupt. Their allusive names—Hope-well, Contriver, Trustall and Bank-rupt—remind us of the universe of his own creation in The Floating Island. In 1664, the first edition of The English Rogue saw the light, published by Henry Marsh, and other editions with new parts followed in the coming years. This work in particular has often been read autobiographically, and Meriton Latroon's ominous life has been interpreted as part of the author's own experience. Head was also the author of some miscellaneous writing, including a historical poem on the Anglo-Dutch wars of 1665–1667 at the height of the conflict, The Red-Sea (1666), a book of prophecies, The Life and Death of Mother Shipton (1667), and the three chosen travel narratives.

Only a few spare facts about Head's eventful life are known, as he sometimes appeared and other times disappeared accosted by debts, in a similar fashion to the mysterious Brazile island. Head moved from England to Ireland, to find his death at sea, drowning off the Isle

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[6] In Act I, Scene 3 in this play, Contriver, a citizen of London, wished to be sent on an expedition to find Obrazeele to avoid his present fears (1663, 8). The island is thus situated by Head in the realm of the improbable and utopia.

of Wight in 1686. Together with some spare autobiographical references, these works portray Head's preference for realistic detail mixed with the fictive and the mysterious. This odd combination of truth and wonder is present most significantly in The Life and Death of Mother Shipton. After commending the historical qualities of his improbable piece, the author adds in a Postcript to this work: "Courteous Reader, let me desire thee Candidly to pass over some seemingly Impossibilities in the first sheet, (allowing the Author Licentia Poetica in her description and some Actions performed in her Minority); and only to weigh the more serious parts of her Prophecies." Head is committed in these early works to the representation of truth in fiction, that he takes to the limits of believability.

Between 1673 and 1675, Richard Head wrote three short travel narratives, though none of them was expressly signed by him, probably a strategy to induce his audience to believe that what they were reading was true.[7] Their attribution is unanimous nowadays, endorsed by ESTC, and suggested by the many interrelated references that connect them to other works in Head's production. The Floating Island, published by one Franck Careless, "one of the Discoverers," is about Captain Robert Owe-much, a member of the Bankrupt Society, and his voyage and sighting of Scoti Moria, or "Summer Island," in the course of an allegorical journey through several London scenes which reproduce some well-known sanctuaries for debtors. Aboard a fleet of three ships, The Paynaught, the Excuse, and the Least-in-Sight, the expedition finds Scoti Moria, situated in the Thame-Isis gulf and hidden from view in winter time (1673, Sig C2, 13).[8] In The Western Wonder, the first-person voice of the traveler is anonymous, whereas O-Brazile, or the Inchanted Island is a long letter signed by one William Hamilton in Londonderry for his cousin in London, dated March 14, 1674. In line with the former texts, Hamilton's letter describes O-Brazile as a place associated with legend and hearsay, but now subject to a "wonderful Dis-Inchantment."[9] The recurrence of the same place

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[7] Donald Johnson considers O-Brazile, or the Inchanted Island not one of Head's works, but a real letter (1999, 117–19) and offers an extensive description of the text.

[8] Mythical accounts of the island of Hy-Brazil agree on the fact that it only appeared once every seven years, a symbolic number in several cultures (Johnson 1999, 124).

[9] Only a couple of years after the publication of O-Brazile, William Winstanley, Head's first biographer, also mentions the island in his book Poor Robin's Vision (1677), where

in the three narratives and the accumulation of similar details in different textual accounts—an allegorical voyage, a travel narrative, and a letter—seem to reinforce the believability of the stories.

Head's accounts of the Brazile island are based on seemingly real evidence. The first documentary proof of a voyage to discover it comes from 1480, when a Bristol expedition set out in search of this mysterious place (Fuson 1995, 43). This enigmatic spot had been reproduced in Portolan charts much earlier, around the 1330s, and it continued to appear in maps till the nineteenth century (1995, 46). In popular Irish accounts, this mysterious island is variously called "the submarine country," "isle of life," and "land of talents" (Griffin and Mac Suibhne 2006, 122). It was commonly situated off the Irish western coast, or "upon the North of Ireland" (O-Brazile 1675, Sig A2, 3). It was also mentioned by Irish legend as "Brendan's Island," in reference to the place that the saint visited on his missions.

In the seventeenth century, Brazile had a hold on the imagination of the members of learned circles. Its existence was acknowledged in Robert Hooke's diary, a reputed member of the Royal Society. In spite of this, however, the name "Brazile" has often been related to lying; as Barbara Freitag notes, "its deceptive nature serves to comment on shifty matters—be they in a political, religious, or social context—generally through use of sarcasm, ranging from mild mockery to elaborate hoaxes" (2013, 131). Head's versions of the discovery of Brazile fit this interpretation, since he comments on the hypocritical nature of his society (The Floating Island), and experiments with different narrative forms in which the boundaries between credibility and deception are far from clear (The Western Wonder and O-Brazile). I contend that the island became for Head a means to re-connect with his Irish origins, at the same time that his choice of genre gave him a chance to approach his object of study from an external and knowledgeable perspective.

The imaginary voyage had its own method of proving its veracity, consisting, for example, in the citation of travel accounts and testimonies deemed to be authentic (Tieje 1913, 218). Head uses this strategy in O-Brazile, but particularly in The Western Wonder, where he

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O Brazeel is described as a Fool's Paradise (in Freitag 2013, 133). Johnson points out that Hy-Brazil stood for the Garden of Hesperides of classical mythology (1999, 114).

reinforces the believability of the incredible elements of his story by detaching his work from previous fictions of travel:

> New Discoveries of late, are as much admired as Miracles of old, and as difficulty believed, notwithstanding the variety of apparent proofs which demonstrate their undoubted Verity; and without question this Incredulity proceeds from no other cause, than the abuse of Belief, occasioned by such monstrous Fictions as the Isle of Pines, A New World in the Moon, with the like Lunatick Stories, by which the credulous World hath been misguided into a Faith wholly preposterously erroneous and ridiculous. (1674, Sig A2)

Exemplars of imaginary travel narratives like the ones mentioned above are described by Head as pure pieces of fiction that cannot be taken seriously, despite the fact that he imitates very closely Neville's The Isle of Pines (Freitag 2013, 139–40). Yet, at the same time, by invoking Neville's work and referring subliminally to the stories about voyages to the moon, he inserted his text within the tradition that he claimed to reject. Though apparently dismissing narratives of voyage and discovery for being products of the imagination, his own stories alternate between rational evidence and fanciful exercise.

In the Epistle to the Reader and through the literary persona of Robert Owe-Much, in The Floating Island Head confesses that this narration is his own corrective response to "errours and fopperies" and in particular to "the debauchery of a Fop-Jaunty Suburbian." In his view, the country in general, and the city of London in particular, are subjected to "insufferable abuses" (1673, Sig A2). Owe-much refers to the creation of this allegorical and satirical piece as a means of escape at a time when he was hiding from his creditors. His text is, therefore, a peculiar imaginary journey "from Lambeth to the Bridge on one side, and back again the other, recounting all remarkables between the two Shores" (1673, Sig A2), narrated by James Standish, stationer, at a special meeting of the Society of Owe-much, and for the benefit of its associates, whose names also have a clear allegorical meaning.[10] The expedition sets out with the purpose of avoiding inhospitable places and of founding their own colonies where they could disperse without risking their freedom (1673, Sig B2). It culminates in a mordant critique of London manners. In the course of their voyage, they discover a continent, Terra del Templo—the Temple—and find

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[10] To give a few examples, Giles Sweeting is a confectioner, William Whiting the color-man, and Humphry Holland, the linen-draper (1673, Sig B).

places like the Savoy, part of the Liberty of the Duchy of Lancaster, or Fulwoods Rents in High Holborn, other sanctuaries for those in debt, meticulously described by Standish. Soon, the floating island is within sight, and the narrator provides its spatial coordinates with a great deal of precision: "The Christian-shore [lies] to the Norward, and the Turkish-shore to the Southward, bounded to the Eastward with Pont-Troynovant, but to the Westward thereof, you may sail up the Streights till you go as far as Maiden-head, and farther, crossing the Equinoctial-line" (1673, Sig C2, 13).

As the mythical Brazile, this newly-discovered land is inhabited by colossal and fabulous creatures, whose function is to extend the knowledge about this exotic place as much as to entertain readers, at the same time that their very existence creates wonder and suspicion about their credibility. In line with Judy Hayden's claim about the contribution of seventeenth-century travel narratives to the dissemination of knowledge and the establishment of fact, I argue that Head perfects a method of chorographical analysis in The Floating Island, by providing a detailed account of people, fauna, flora and manners in an allegorical fashion, in the light of the instructions given to travelers and mariners by members of the Royal Society, who sent them inquiries to improve their methods of observation of foreign lands (Hayden 2012, 8, 10).[11] In his own words, he recounts "the Character of the Inhabitants" as well as "their Humours, Natures, and Dispositions" (1673, Sig C). Though not a conventional travel narrative, The Floating Island uses the motif of the journey, and above all, the customary descriptions found in travel writing, as an excuse to draw a satirical map of different areas and emblematic London sights. In this way, the allegorical reference to a number of real locations compensates for the unreliability of Standish's narration. In relation to these marvelous travel accounts, Daniel Carey affirms that the acceptance of the wonderful and the monstrous promoted a "fluid exchange between travel, narrative, and natural history" which more often than not "masked rather than exposed problems of belief, testimony, and evidence, perpetuating an economy of error in which knowledge was both advanced and retarded" (1997, 269). In this

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[11] In "The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England," Steven Shapin explains how in the seventeenth century literature runs parallel to a systematic experimentation carried out by the natural sciences, and that the convergence of both is what enables the institutionalization of empirical knowledge. Testimony becomes a crucial element in the acquisition of geographical knowledge (1988, 375).

sense, by imitating the principles of chorography using a purely literary discourse, The Floating Island presents very familiar places and social types in disguise, against which its author directs his mordant critique. Thus, Head's use of the procedures and the methods of geographical observation is not aimed at the expansion of knowledge but at expressing stylistic and literary concerns. In this work, rather than scientific interest, Scoti Moria has a chorographical-cum-literary interest, as it appears as an allegorical sanctuary and a refuge for social outsiders like Head or Owe-much's crew, for that matter. The narrative concludes with a fair account of "the manners and dispositions," the "Religion, Laws, and Customs" of the Ramallians (1673, Sig E2), as well as about the practices of their enemies, the London authorities. Anticipating a sardonic Swiftian style, Head concludes this piece by offering a sarcastic portrait of different contemporary types, as shown by his illustration of a cosmographer: "He that boasts of his Travels, and impudently professeth to have been in places he never saw but in a Map" (1673, Sig E2), in a way privileging testimony and first-hand experience over theoretical knowledge.

It is precisely the importance and the credibility of oral testimony that Head emphasizes in the next two fictions, The Western Wonder and O-Brazile. In the former, he presents the Brazeel island as a "New Discovery" which he substantiates by applying the scientific method. He points out its material presence in documents—"your own observations out of Strabo, and other ancient Geographers, in whose Maps you may find the Island, its name, and situation" (1674, Sig A2, 2)—, while referring to the unreliability of certain written testimonies. Side by side with cartographic references, Head also relies on oral testimonies and describes the island as "Inchanted." In the end, it is not a question of material evidence but of belief. Fishermen's testimonies, however, are deemed unreliable by Head himself, since he feared "those Relations will be look'd on as the Chimera's of a junior Quixot, or foolish Fictions, undeserving the Registry of a serious and judicious memory, since they seem to give Tom Coriat the Lye, and run away with the Whetstone from our famous Knightly Mandevil" (1674, Sig A2, 2). Therefore, no matter how wonderful first-hand accounts may seem, Head implies that travel writing is equally unreliable and deceptive. The anonymous narrator of The Western Wonder, though perplexed by the incredible accounts of travelers and seamen, relies on their reports because they coincide in the essential description of

the island and its inhabitants; this, despite the fact they were not initially veritable sources of information and knowledge, since they are seen by the narrator's acquaintances as "a company of ignorant Fellows, who had neither reason, nor sense enough to distinguish a blue Cloud from Land" (1674, Sig A2, 5). Spurred by these mariners' testimony, the narrator is paradoxically finally confirmed of the isle's existence after a dream, as a result of which he takes a ship "on October the 9th, 1672" (1674, Sig B, 8) and sails in search of Brazile.

If The Western Wonder tries to foster verisimilitude through first-hand testimony and by constant appeals to truth, in O-Brazile Head continues dressing up a fictional motif as if it were non-fictional, and thus, true, by choosing the format of the letter, which was written and posted, it is claimed, a few months before the text's publication, and by suggesting the veracity of the story on seemingly incontestable grounds: firstly, the island has been included on ancient and modern maps, and secondly, the addressee's cousin, "a wise Man, and a great Schollar," has even paid a patent on the island (1675, Sig A2, 4). Hamilton also provides the exact measurements of the place, these being "above 60 miles in length, and above 30 in breadth" (Sig A2, 8). At the same time, the narrator detaches his narrative from imaginary accounts of enchanted islands—"I know there are, in the World, many Stories and Romances, concerning Inchanted Islands, Castles and Towers, &c." (1675, Sig A2, 3)—, and he brings his story closer to home by referring to an island on the Irish coast. The narrator also stresses the validity of the story providing historical data, like the fact that a Member of Parliament in Dublin informed the House of Commons about O-Brazeel in 1663. Hamilton claims, though, that the time of enchantment was over, since the island's existence had been proven. Furthermore, the testimony of other reliable witnesses, like Captain John Nisbet and his crew, is meant to add to the truth of his account.

In the three texts under inspection, Head employs similar techniques and reproduces analogous descriptions in respect to wonder. In The Floating Island, the crew of debtors describe the strange beings they find upon coming ashore: a mysterious "thing in glorious habit but with a face as black as hell" which they take for a "She-Devil," wearing a mask, and also mighty harts, "whose horns are of the comliest branch and spreading that can be; whose dimension and extension is unfathomable" (1673, Sig C2, 11, 12). They also see another monstrous being, identified as Giant Colbron: "we were so

near that we could look into his very entrals [sic], his belly being wide open, and could perceive a very strange motion within, whilst his arms were continually agitated circularly" (1673, Sig C2, 13). This gigantic being reminds the narrator straightforwardly of the quixotic adventure of the giants and the wind-mills:[12]

> Fear did so wing our flight, and the wind so largely contributed to its assistance, that in a little time we found our selves not in a condition to be harm'd or prejudiced by that Gigantick Scare-crow: had we had as much valour as there was in Don-Quixot, one assault would have prov'd him a meer airy flash, and could do nothing but cry, saw, saw. (1673, Sig C2, 13)

In spite of what senses declare, Head's narrator is convinced that this is only a vision, a "meer airy flash," which would vanish at the wink of an eye, adopting in this way a quixotic personality but also Sancho Panza's clear understanding. In their exploration of the floating summer-island, they also encounter other mythical beings, Christian and Barbarian Amazons, living on each shore; and mating with "their Bully-Huffs and Hectors" once a year (1673, Sig C2, 14).[13] Furthermore, the crew's descent to the bowels of the earth is similar to Aeneas' descent into hell (1673, Sig C2, 14), whereas in their circumnavigation of the island they spot men-mermaids (1673, Sig D2, 20).

The Western Wonder and O-Brazile coincide in the representation of wonderful elements. The former reproduces the report of several anonymous mariners, one of whom claimed to have watched the mysterious island from his ship and spotted some monstrous men who looked like "walking Oaks," whose hands waving at him were like "Wind-mill Sails," a new reference to Cervantes's text (1674, Sig A, 3). The Tempest also resonates in this work, as Shakespeare's unnamed island and Head's Brazile are both magical and enchanted, difficult to spot and only discovered after a shipwreck. In The Western Wonder, we are given the testimony of another sailor who claimed to

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[12] Head's travelers refer to the quixotic elements in this adventure, looking at giants who move their arms as if they were windmills. Don Quixote confounded the windmills with the arms of the giant Briareo (Don Quixote 1998, I, viii, 88), while in The Floating Island, Head situates his mythology closer to home in choosing Colbron, a legendary giant defeated by Guy of Warwick.

[13] Especially in The Floating Island, Head introduces some of the terms and characters he mentions in The Canting Academy, or, the Devils cabinet opened, like the Bull-Huffs and Hectors (1673).

have seen the place, and who is compared to "the Usurper Trinkelo," in his wish to be appointed Viceroy of Brazile. A thick mist, nonetheless, conveniently blocks their view and they lose sight of the isle. Head's narrator refers to scientific debate, though, in particular to the veracity of the theory about the multiplicity or plurality of worlds, in order to justify the existence of wonderful beings. In his above-mentioned dream, a gigantic eagle transports him to an island, where he was met by "millions of Devils, and horrid Spectrums […] and other very strange apparitions" (1674, Sig B, 6). He was brought later to a land of milk and honey, and met people who went about stark naked and worshipped the Devil, the Prince of the Air (1674, Sig B, 7). On waking up, he was convinced that he was going to be the discoverer of O Brazeel, the point at which the account of the voyage begins. Stormy weather and a shipwreck prevented him from discovering the desired place and from there on the narration focuses on the particulars of visiting Montecapernia, which has been connected with Irish social types and manners (Freitag 2013, 140).[14]

A similar wonderful event is narrated in O-Brazile, or the Inchanted Island. After reaching land, Captain Nisbet and his crew saw a very ancient man who, accompanied by some ten others, and in the Scottish tongue, invited them to go ashore. He explained how his ancestors had been living under the influence of a Necromancer, who ruled tyrannically and kept the island invisible, as under a spell. The natives had been inadvertently rescued by Nisbet and his mariners upon them kindling a fire on the island. With due regard to their help, they were given immense amounts of gold and silver of an ancient stamp, which they could show on their return as material proof of their miraculous adventure.

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[14] The language spoken, similar to Gaelic, the staple food of the natives—"a thin Oat-cake […], a little Sheeps-milk Cheese, or Goats-milk, boyl'd Leeks, and some Roots" (1674, Sig E, 31)—, their inclination for music, and their Christian—most probably Catholic—religion (1674, Sig E2, 35), make the comparison with Ireland feasible. Head's view of Ireland is of a mythical land, a natural place, now in decadence, governed by monstrous rulers, whose influence is lasting on the natives but, at the same time, easily dissipated by virtue of the innocuous actions of strangers. A colonial interpretation of their expedition is also called to mind when considering not only the civilizing and restorative impact of the adventurers—or discoverers—, but also the willing submission and utter generosity of the islanders. They are well-meaning, though vicious and primitive, as backward—Head seems to imply—as their faith.

IV. Conclusion

In his geographical narratives, Head uses wonder to explore the limits of his readers' credulity, by asking them to believe at the start, only to make them read it as a fiction. Like other writers before him, most notably Cavendish in The Blazing World, Head situates elements of wonder almost on the same level as elements of verisimilitude, and in so doing he relies on a credible context in which some fantastical elements are interspersed. Works like The Western Wonder and O-Brazeel dwell in the slippery terrain between history and romance, as, to a certain extent, does the allegorical text The Floating Island. This combination of truth and wonder also helps the author to plead for the endless possibilities of fiction-making, since within its "safe" boundaries, even improbable events are possible. Head's purpose, however, is not to deceive but to instruct his readers and to celebrate the all-inclusive nature of fiction. However, he seems to suggest that the existence of Scoti Moria or Brazile island is either as "improvable" or as believable as the wonderful events narrated in ancient and contemporary travel accounts and, by extension, as the marvelous occurrences his narrators and characters reproduce.

Loveman has described two of Richard Head's travel fictions, The Western Wonder and, above all, O-Brazile, as shams, a form that imitates truth, a "fraud that takes between genres," to use Carey's words (in Loveman, 2008, 78). At a time when truth was gradually being appropriated by the institutions of knowledge, and was in the hands of a social and intellectual elite, Head invites a skeptical reading of these texts which rival true travel accounts, and privileges individual testimony, regardless of social extraction. His geographical fictions escape clear-cut categorizations and prove that representations of truth in travel narratives can be easily manipulated. More than accessories to knowledge, as members of academic and scientific circles prescribed, fictions of travel become in Head's literary universe vehicles of social critique and entertainment.

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