Revealing the Unknown in *La Terre australe connue* (1676) by Gabriel de Foigny

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Gabriel de Foigny (1630-1692), a writer whose tumultuous life led him from the role of a preacher in a Catholic order in France, to a conversion to Calvinism in Geneva, and finally back to a convent in Savoy (Trousson 138-139), left behind a text that likely emerged from a difficult struggle with epistemological uncertainty. In 1676, he published his novel *La Terre australe connue* in Geneva after taking a series of precautions, perhaps seeking to render its fantastical imagery inoffensive for readers who might see his exploratory musings as dangerous lies and threats to perceived theological truths. His printer placed a false imprint on the cover page, giving an address in Vannes, a city in Brittany, and presenting "G. de F." as the editor of a found manuscript written by one "M^{r} Sadeur" (Foigny 1). While these precautions turned out to be ineffective, and Foigny was imprisoned with his printer (Ferguson 259), accused of having portrayed dangerous, impious falsehoods (Trousson 139), copies of the 1676 first edition of his work survived and continue to elicit new interpretations.

Foigny's narrative recounts the adventures of Nicolas[1] Sadeur, a self-described hermaphrodite (25) born at sea in 1603 to French parents who would die shortly afterward (18) and educated in Portugal (27-28) before events lead him to unknown lands. Whatever the physical nature of his hermaphroditism may be, he refers to himself with masculine pronouns, as I will do here, and the 1676 version of the text presents his masculinity as an obvious choice made by his early caretakers (Ferguson 263, Foigny 27). In any case, his trust in Providence sustains him through several near-death experiences before he finds himself on a mysterious continent almost entirely unknown to Europeans. He describes the Southern Land as an astonishingly large, flat continent that occupies a majority of the southern hemisphere. A nation of preternaturally strong human beings inhabits this territory. Each of them

[1] The protagonist's given name of Nicolas would be changed to Jacques, actually ascribed to the hero's father in the 1676 edition, in a heavily modified version published in 1692. See Pierre Ronzeaud's note (Foigny 18). Sadeur remarks that since he was born at sea, his parents named him Nicolas after a saint invoked on maritime voyages (19).

goes naked, displaying red skin, six fingers on each hand, both beards and breasts and tiny genitalia of both sexes, while some individuals also possess a second set of arms protruding from their hips (Foigny 83-84). After Sadeur lives among these people for 35 years (220), passions drive him to transgress their laws (201-202), committing crimes for which they condemn him to suicide (215-216). He hatches a plan to evade the sentence, however, and through a serious of further, unlikely adventures, he undertakes a catastrophic return journey toward Europe. In 1661, at the very instant that he is about to set foot once again on that continent, he slips into the water at the port of Livorno and falls ill (10), then delivers a manuscript detailing his experiences to an editor before succumbing to exposure (11).

In recent decades, criticism on Foigny's work has sought to account in various ways for ambiguities arising from the contradictions inherent in his utopian visions. Pierre Ronzeaud's notable 1982 monograph, *L'Utopie hermaphrodite*, showcased a degree of cohesion and logic structuring the text, and argued against reading its paradoxes as clear marks of a sardonic, destructive, or anti-religious composition. At length, Ronzeaud settled on interpreting the novel in part as a display of the inconsistencies of Christian dogma, and a fable indirectly advocating deist principles (233). Subsequent studies by Lise Leibacher-Ouvrard reexamined the inconsistencies in the fictional world and emphasized the fundamental ambivalence at work in them, produced from an irreconcilable collision between theological paradoxes and a desire to attain ideal discernment (*Libertinage et utopies* 195). In her view, Foigny's text exhibits an epistemological rupture, which itself is at odds with its ambiguous hints that Christian doctrine might provide a certain resolution (195). Other critics engaged with these studies and cast light on other incoherencies in Foigny's text, such as aporiae resulting from the depiction of a theoretically ideal language within the constraints of a verisimilar fiction (Benrekassa 160-161), wider paradoxes related to languages in utopian narrative (Sermain 103, 109), and even textual clues seen as asserting "the inevitability of rational inconsistency itself" within any existing or imaginable human society (Fausett XLV-XLVI). Ronzeaud in turn responded to these readings and others, in an introduction to his 2008 critical edition of *La Terre australe connue*, with a qualified concession. As he concurs that the contradictions embedded in the idealized, rationalistic, and deistic Australian society indeed undermine its value as a prescriptive model, he invites further exegesis in light of this conclusion (LXXXI-LXXXIII). More recently

published criticism on Foigny has shed additional light on the work's inconsistencies while leaving ample latitude for further interpretation. For example, Isabelle Moreau focuses on the representations of Australian animals in the text, reading them as vehicles for heterodox and impious arguments inherited from early modern libertine writers, and contending that they constitute an attack on Christian doctrines that posited distinctions between humans and animals (58). Gary Ferguson's nuanced article draws out the influences of ancient and early modern skepticism in the text to argue that it does not definitively take either a prescriptive or a condemning ideological position with regard to its utopian visions, but rather reveals a series of incompatibilities between and within two distinct metaphysical discourses (274).

For my part, I would like to privilege the conclusions of Leibacher-Ouvrard (in 1987), Ronzeaud (in 2008), and Ferguson (in 2013) as starting points for focusing an analysis on one significant strand in Foigny's richly woven narrative. I aim to show here that the contradictions arising from the author's depictions of knowledge acquisition, and of impeded or stalled attempts at transmitting discoveries, can be seen as products of an unfolding, imaginative, experimental mode of writing. It is conceivable, in my view, that the novel's characteristic, cyclical structure of elaborating promising visions before dismantling them reflects a creative process that shaped Foigny's work. If this is the case, then the text developed in an exploratory, unfurling fashion while adhering to logical constraints adopted at the outset, in a process announcing the science fiction genre (Eco VIII). Interpreting the text as a product of such creative activity can account for its ambivalent, wavering endorsements of deism alongside faith in Providence and its neo-Stoicism juxtaposed with cynical intimations about the imperfectability of humankind. This perspective also opens the way for an interpretation of the novel not as an endorsement of any particular philosophical or theological position, but rather as an invitation for readers to imitate for themselves Foigny's experimental confrontation with the unknown, however futile such an undertaking may appear.

Throughout his text, Foigny uses a set of strategies to direct readers away from interpretations of Sadeur's depiction of utopian social, political, and moral frameworks as prescriptions to be taken seriously, and to invite various ironic readings. As Alice Stroup has argued, Foigny's early readership was highly attuned to tricks often used by

writers of utopian novels, and acutely aware of how they toyed with the reader's interest in and skepticism about far-off places (165-66). The text welcomes such attitudes from its primary audience, amusingly cautioning against the exaggerations and lies common in travel tales, with humor recalling Lucian of Samosata's (c. 125-after 180 CE) *A True History*, a mock-voyage story available in French translation in the latter half of the seventeenth century (Foigny 43). In addition, the zany interplanetary travel narratives of Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655), which echo Lucian's works like *Icaromenippus, or High Above the Clouds*, probably provided recent French-language models for Foigny in this regard. In light of such aspects of *La Terre australe connue*, and considering early audiences' expectations for the genre, few readers were likely to have taken its fictions for unqualified ideological proposals. This is especially likely since Foigny used the widespread strategy that Stroup usefully calls a "disclaimer," which writers of utopian texts used to disarm readers by making their story seem like nothing more than an elaborate joke (168). In Foigny's case, Stroup suggests, the disclaimer takes the form of Sadeur's expulsion from the Southern Land, which allows a reading of the text that is "the mirror image of its explicit messages" (169). I would argue further that in a sense, Foigny's fiction contains not only this single, most significant disclaimer but indeed a series of them.

Furthermore, the elements that take shape as disclaimers when the text is considered as a whole can also appear as results emerging from a series of component hypothetical reflections. I am contending that when Foigny's epistemological uncertainty became acute, writing fiction seems to have provided him with a tool for confronting and working through it. His literary composition can be seen in part as a practice of framing scenarios as thought experiments whose implications played out in his manuscript. As one might expect from such an approach to storytelling, however, the final product of this exploratory narration evinces ambivalence, irony, and autoreferentiality that have made it difficult to interpret.

Explorations of themes related to knowledge and its reliability and transmissibility structure much of Foigny's text, a factor which helps to justify reading it as responding to epistemological problems in this way. In fact, if readers approach it as such, then at least one disclaimer-cum-experimental result emerges for each mode and medium of knowledge transmission that the author appears to have considered. Both Ferguson

and Barbara Knauff have described aspects of the text in terms of imaginative experimentation (Ferguson 276; Knauff 280), and Alberto Capatti notes how the utopian society depicted does not appear utterly alien, but rather seems to displace and alter the meaning of social problems familiar to its implied readers (114), providing an opportunity to trace out far-reaching implications of such issues. Within a similar conceptual framework, Paola Vecchi portrays the text as an "exploration romanesque" of an alternative world that at length reveals new sources of concern as it plays out the implications of its initial assumptions (52).

On my reading of Foigny's depiction of knowledge attainment, and its attempted transmission to new learners, thought experiments yield eight significant and sobering main results. These hypothetical outcomes cast doubt on the viability of as many potential modes of acquiring and implementing new knowledge. As a most concrete example, the text envisions a language that superficially seems to eradicate socio-political problems arising from the manipulation of rhetoric and the inherent imprecision involved in speech and writing. Upon reflection, however, the novel appears to endorse a cynical outlook on such an enterprise, foregrounding a disclaimer as it exposes other limitations of a linguistic nature that come to appear ineluctable. Next, the narrative represents a human population enjoying unlimited access to plant and animal resources that can be seen as knowledge rendered into material forms. In principle, this bounty of externalized, concrete erudition invites curious seekers to seize it both figuratively and literally, yet rigid taboos of uncertain origin prevent it from actually being acquired in many cases. This state of affairs suggests that solidified knowledge offered freely, even if realizable, would not guarantee a definitive transcendence of human ignorance. Foigny in turn stages a fusion between linguistic expression and possession of materialized knowledge, as he depicts the Australians' system of education. In this context, an unspoken injunction to ritualize processes of learning paradoxically stops the diffusion of knowledge completely.

Later in the text, as the narrative mode transitions from the exposition of the utopia's features to recounting the hero's dangerous return to Europe, the focus of imaginary experimentation also shifts. Attention moves from investigating the obstacles to sharing knowledge amongst the utopian people to showcasing allegorically how all-too-European barriers to knowing afflict the hero as an individual. Conflict with mighty and ferocious wild animals, symbolizing the competition for

martial prowess, robs from him knowledge as physical power, then human incarnations of uncontrollable passion strip him of the knowledge of how to satisfy his own desires, leaving him crushed with melancholia. Thereafter, awareness of how to persuade others of the truth also symbolically escapes him, as European rescuers consume the last physical proof of what he has learned. Finally, upon the return journey's tragic end, Foigny draws several reflections together to follow his thought experiments to an uncomfortable conclusion about the nature of knowledge.

While inviting readers to suspend judgment, various clues lead them to imagine that perceived divine revelations, far from imparting ultimate truths, might definitively prevent human beings from acquiring knowledge for which they ceaselessly yearn. Still more disconcertingly, they might imagine, if the distribution of revelations coincides with curses imposing ignorance, then this would be a cruel parody of the extension of Divine Grace. In that case, not only did the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden separate them from the Tree of Knowledge, but subsequent revelations later implanted new permutations of ignorance far beyond the boundaries of the original Earthly Paradise.

In any case, the text asks, what impediments to acquiring and transmitting knowledge currently exist or might emerge in the future? How could postlapsarian mortals possibly triumph over such obstacles? An answer to the latter question might come from seeing the novel as a lesson by example. In a sense, it invites readers to imagine and experiment in imitation of its creator, daring to probe the boundaries between the unknown, the unknowable, and that which should remain outside of knowledge.

Curiosity

A comment on the human curiosity driving such inquiry opens the novel. The text begins with a note from a fictitious editor that not only serves as a compass for orienting the early modern reader in an imaginary journey through the lands that will be presented but also invites allegorical interpretations touching on themes of learning and knowledge. In fact, it posits the desire for knowledge as the most essential, innate aspect of human nature, and in its articulation of this claim, associates the exploration of the cosmos with the pursuit of divine secrets:

> L'Homme ne porte aucun caractere plus naturel, que le desir de penetrer dans ce qu'on estime difficil, & de comprendre ce qui paroit à plusieurs inaccessible. Il est né avec cette passion, & il en donne autant de preuves, qu'il entreprend de nouveaux desseins. Il veut même monter dans les Cieux : & non content de raisonner & discourir des qualitez des étoiles, il s'éforce d'approfondir dans les secrets de la Divinité. Cette considération oblige plusieurs personnes de s'étonner, quand ils font réflexion, qu'on ne cesse depuis quatre ou cinq ans de proposer une Terre australe inconnuë : sans qu'aucun jusqu'ici fait paroïtre son courage & ses soins, pour la rendre connuë. (3)

This note lays groundwork for the author Foigny both to set up his vividly imagined Australians in a dialectical opposition to his fictitious Europeans and to render these distinctions in terms not only of animality and humanity (Moreau 55-56, 58) and purity and abomination but also of the possession of extraordinary knowledge. The inhabitants of the Southern Land see outsiders as innately flawed, as evinced by their division into two sexes and their consumption of meat. The Australians are vegetarians who eat only life-giving fruits with remarkable properties, since they consider that eating animals will make them more like these lesser, corrupted creatures (178). They take advantage of the remarkable climate of their continent, where the productivity of the earth maintains itself in equilibrium with human needs. They have perfected techniques for using the juice from a prodigious fruit to make any material, be it twigs or leaves, as hard and strong as steel, which allows them to create nearly impenetrable armor for their chests (196) and huge, unbreakable, razor-sharp and feather-light halberds to wield against their enemies (156). Their military application of this substance, coupled with their spring-loaded rifles and cannons, near-perfect organization, and strategy and tactics in combat assure victory against incursions by firearm-wielding Europeans, as is clear from Sadeur's account of a failed expedition by French and Portuguese sailors who are slaughtered to the last man after they exhaust their stores of ammunition (207).

Clearly, the Australian society is extremely difficult to reach, and Sadeur presents himself as one of the only human beings in the world capable of surviving the extraordinary obstacles, differences, and

distances that separate Europeans and Australians, and thereby accessing the incredible knowledge the latter hold. Many other Europeans have arrived in the Southern Land only to be slain mercilessly, yet the hero's unusual body lends him an air of familiarity that spares him from such instant condemnation. Thanks to all of this, he successfully integrates into their world and for 35 years lives as one of them, learning their ways from a cultural informant named Suains.

Language

Foigny's fictitious Australian language of the hermaphrodites stands out as a particularly salient feature of his imagining of knowledge transmission. Thanks to Suains, Sadeur becomes proficient at this system of speech and writing that the author represents in some detail. The literary depiction of the language takes inspiration from early modern speculations about how people might prevent error and deceit by somehow eliminating all that is arbitrary from the application of signs to referents. Nadia Minerva notes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reflections about reforming language in general and returning it to an imagined original state, often conceived in Judeo-Christian terms as Adamic speech or as using a neo-Platonic vocabulary by reference to the dialogue *Cratylus*, were widespread (27-28). If words could be invented or discovered that emanated directly, logically, and naturally from that which they designated, this might enable interlocutors not only to avoid error stemming from linguistic imprecision: Such words could also prevent rhetoricians, sophists, and impostors from manipulating language to others' detriment.

As Umberto Eco remarks, Foigny wrote after the publication of three notable and elaborate seventeenth-century studies on the possibility of such an "a priori philosophic language": *A common writing: whereby two, although not understanding one the others Language, yet by the helpe thereof, may communicate their minds one to another* (1647) by Francis Lodwick (1619-1694); *Ars Signorum*, *vulgo character universalis et lingua philosophica* (1661) by George Dalgarno (c. 1616-1687); and *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668) by John Wilkins (80-81). Foigny's sketch of an Adamic or Cratylic language can be read as a parody of projects like these (Eco 80). Alongside such philosophical volumes, Foigny had almost certainly read fiction that had already staged related linguistic and philosophical questions in its own way. Among the author's most

probable seventeenth-century literary models, for instance, Cyrano de Bergerac's narrative journeys to the moon and the sun had explored issues of idealized, error-free speech within a similar generic framework to the one adopted for *La Terre australe connue*. To cite only the clearest example, in *Les États et empires du soleil*, Cyrano broaches the question most directly. As his hero lands upon a tiny planet orbiting the sun, a diminutive man living on this "macule" (216) speaks to the protagonist in a language that he has never heard before, yet that he understands effortlessly since each word exposes to perfection the essence of its referent (218).

In Foigny's own fantastic voyage narrative, as the implications and conditions of possibility of such a language play out in the fiction, two major obstacles take shape, suggesting that the entire enterprise is a mirage. As the Australians deploy their language in both the most abstract and the most concrete ways, it showcases its unviability as a tool for transmitting knowledge without distortion and limitation. As Eco suggests, Foigny's representation of the language both reveals and magnifies the shortcomings of philosophical projects like those of Lodwick, Dalgarno, and Wilkins (81). His fictitious linguistic system fails not only to communicate theological, ultimate truth but also to address base functions of the human body. As Foigny represents these breakdowns in signification, he suggests that no matter how ideal a language may appear, arbitrary, random and irrational taboos will invariably prevent it from encompassing and conveying all areas of human knowledge.

The narrator portrays a linguistic system in which all words are monosyllabic, and in every syllable, one of the five core Latin vowels, which he lists out of alphabetical order as *a*, *e*, *o*, *i*, and *u*, designates one of the five essential elements posited by an agreed-upon Australian cosmology: fire, air, salt, water, and earth (Foigny 162). As for consonants, they function as "distinctions individuelles" or accidental characteristics to be associated with a given essence, thereby designating a category of referents (163). Sadeur presents a series of words to show how the system can work. For example, the word "aeb," equating to 'fire-air-bright,' means "star," whereas "aab," or 'fire-fire-bright,' means "sun" (163).

Most studies examining Foigny's imaginary Australian speech and writing, including those by Minerva, Eco, Jean-Paul Sermain, Carla

Pellandra, and Georges Benrekassa, foreground Sadeur's memorable remarks that equate the acquisition of new words with philosophical and alchemical knowledge-building. Indeed, the narrator asserts that naming any referent on the Australian continent explains its essential nature, and each speaker who learns these labels and alchemical analyses thereby receives an education in philosophy in which error is impossible:

> L'avantage de cette façon de parler est qu'on devient philosophe, en apprenant les premiers élements, & qu'on ne peut nommer aucune chose en ce pays, qu'on n'explique sa nature en méme tems[.] (163)

This learning is even accessible to children learning how to write the language:

> Quans on enseigne un enfant on lui explique la signification de tous les elements ; & quand il les joint ensemble, il apprend à même tems l'essence & la nature de toutes les choses qu'il profère. (165)

Pellandra observes that this system features a narrow gap between signifiers and signifieds (59), in that each word reflects a thing as a coincidence of elements and attributes, while categorizing it after a vaguely Aristotelian fashion (60). At the same time, Foigny's depiction of Australian speech suggests that the entire nation of hermaphrodites has attained an astounding degree of alchemical mastery, albeit fundamentally different from what readers might expect with regard to the role of salt as a fifth element. As Eco suggests, salt seems out of place alongside the "four classic elements" notably associated with Aristotle (364-322 BCE), since it might be expected to appear instead in a grouping proposed by Paracelsus (1493/1494-1541), with mercury and sulphur (90). Allison B. Kavey recalls that for the Swiss philosopher and physician:

> Mercury and sulphur are two of the three principles that comprise the chemical model of the natural world, and when combined with salt, the third principle, they represent the spirit, the soul, and the body in the microcosm. (128)

Foigny's combination of Aristotelian and Paracelsian references, alongside the continual repetition of the term "hermaphrodite," itself extremely dense with hermetic associations, reinforces an impression that the Australians' mastery over nature has surpassed European pretensions to accomplish the Great Work, and that they have developed their own superior and distinct approach to alchemy.

In addition to this proto-scientific value of a language that unerringly conveys truths about nature, Australian speech appears all the more estimable when considered alongside European traditions in rhetoric. In fact, as Sermain has suggested, Sadeur's description of the language can also be read as a theoretical inversion of an early modern notion of rhetorical acumen that likely elicited marvel and fear in some of Foigny's early readers. Among rhetoricians, argues Sermain, the three key techniques of designating, defining, and using multiple denominators allow for individuals to represent their personal viewpoint while at the same time catalyzing inequalities with regard to the possession of knowledge and access to it. Designating things causes confusion since individuals associate different senses with different words. Defining terms enables speakers and writers to alter the perceived value of things and people by omitting certain characterizations while selecting others, and using diverse denominators permits a person to impose an individual point of view on something. Combining these three rhetorical moves opens the way for people more knowledgeable and rhetorically adept to manipulate those with less access to learning.

In light of these considerations, among others, he contends, as Minerva affirms (27), many people of the classical age considered rhetoric to be at the root of all that distorted and confounded communication through language and thereby contributed to politico-social conflict (Sermain 93). Among Foigny's Australians, by contrast, the processes of designation, definition, and diverse labeling have all been stripped of their capacity to foment inequality based in rhetorical skill, politico-social power, or knowledge. With regard to designating things, a one-to-one unalterable correspondence links words to things while ensuring that the same sensory impressions are suggested each time a word is used. Each thing can therefore only be referred to with the same word and associated senses conferred by its spelling. Since the letters that compose the word for a thing characterize it and place it within at least two or three categories, definitions are stable, since withholding an attribute would leave a word incomplete and adding one

would transform the word entirely. Definition is thus incapable of altering the perceived value of things in Foigny's Australia. Finally, each thing can only be referenced through a single denominator, and by virtue of this constraint, speaking the hermaphrodites' language is akin to uttering an unending description of appearances, combined with the recitation of formulas of essential nature that remain fixed.

As a result of so many constraints, not only is rhetoric reduced to ritual description (Pellandra 70), based on a unique point of view presented as universal and rational, but sophistry cannot occur. Since no other perspective is expressible, as Sermain concludes, it is as though reason speaks for itself, and speaking alone suffices to convince an interlocutor of one's claims (93), which align inevitably with that person's own perspective. It follows logically that no inhabitant of the Southern Land can think in any way requiring them to imagine things that have not been previously observed and named. No cultural change can occur from within if no one has seen it occur in the past, because words to describe it are lacking. No argument or disagreement can take place (Sermain 94).

For all of its veneer of logic, rationality, social harmony, and even miraculousness (Foigny 130), however, Foigny's fictitious language system reveals limitations and blatant contradictions detectible to readers, presenting a major disclaimer. Within the narrative itself, Pellandra highlights small contradictions in the linguistic system as presented that betray larger incoherencies. For example, she reasons, since "p" means both "doux" and "tu" and "pa" means "tu aimes" and connotes the sweetness of a lover, then it seems impossible to say "tu détestes" without falling into a contradiction about the kind sweetness with which 'you' hate (69). In a wider perspective, Eco suggests that in the Australian language system, the necessity of designating innumerable common objects through a very limited number of descriptors (or "primitives") forces speakers to use dubious metaphors almost constantly (86). To make themselves understood, the hermaphrodites:

> must employ periphrases that, in Foigny's satirical version [of a language], are highly questionable metaphors: apple becomes sweet and desirable water, and the act of loving is expressed as *af* (dry fire), or burning derived from the fire of passion. If *dry fire* means love, then why should *wet fire* not be able to mean

> metaphorically some other thing? The problem that arises, analyzing this caricature of language, is a serious problem: if a few primitives must denominate many things, it is indispensable to recur to periphrasis, and this is precisely what happens with the "serious" projects of Wilkins and Dalgarno. (Eco 86-87)

On an extradiegetic level, Benrekassa teases out inconsistencies arising from the interactions between the linguistic system and its narrative framing as perceived by readers (161). One such problem emerges when characters attempt to speak about referents that defy labeling in the Australian tongue due to their incompatibility with the pseudo-Aristotelian categorization scheme embedded in the words themselves. Benrekassa argues that Sadeur's attempt to render an equivalent to the word "père" in the Australian language leads readers into an aporia that loudly calls attention to the impossibility of a linguistic system like the one portrayed. From the readers' point of view, Sadeur the character must be able to share major aspects of his biographical experience and philosophical outlook with Suains in order to follow a typical utopian plot structure, from the hero's arrival in the land of alterity to his expulsion and return to the realm of the familiar. This requires him to identify his family origins and background, which involves rendering the word for "father" intelligible in a language where not only a relevant signifier but also a referent are absent (Benrekassa 159), at least if one infers that the hermaphrodites could not recognize Fondin fathers as such. The narrator states that he must coin a new Australian word while attempting to explain the concept, and Suains is then so uncertain about its meaning that he repeats the neologism back three times before paraphrasing what he has understood (Foigny 96). The incongruity between key facets of Sadeur's linguistic exposition and the poetic constraints of the narrative format here makes logical absurdity manifest (Benrekassa 159).

A related, pervasive problem associated with the language stems from the hermaphrodites' taboo against speaking about religion. With regard to this limitation on Foigny's imagined linguistic system, Benrekassa highlights the paradox by which all Australians are absolutely forbidden from speaking about the object of their religious devotion. They are not allowed to discuss it "soit par dispute, soit par forme d'éclaircissement" (Foigny 113) and yet they initiate children into knowledge and practices surrounding the sacred (Benrekassa 160),

which they designate as "Haab," meaning "l'Incomprehensible." They teach that each youngster "ne sauroit discourir de ses perfections sans l'offenser" (Foigny 113). Thus, parents speak of offending the Incomprehensible, while at the same time attributing qualities ("perfections") to it, thereby doubly committing the "crime inoüy" of discussing the topic, without this transgression being perceived as such (113). This yields a contradiction that becomes still starker in light of Sadeur's subsequent statement, in which he claims that Australian mothers impart knowledge of the Incomprehensible to their children, yet he does not explain how they do this without words. The ambiguous verb that he uses here, "inspirer," provides little clarity on the matter: "Il n'est que les meres qui leur donnant les premieres connoissances, leur inspirent celle du Haab" (113).

Following upon this inconsistency related to discussing religious matters, Sadeur's theological debate with Suains makes the same linguistic problem a major focus of readers' attention. This dialogue evidently constitutes a violation of law by both parties, and as such the mentor takes an apparent precaution to hide the illicit behavior from view, leading him into an alley, by his hand, before speaking (114). In addition, from an extradiegetic viewpoint, there is more at play in this dialogue than mere criminal speech, as the remarks about angels and immortal souls attest. At this point, a reader might expect that there should no more be a word in the Australian language for "âme" than for "père," since referents for neither can be observed in the Southern Land (at least in the absence of Fondins) and the translation issue raised by the latter appears in a preceding chapter. Indeed, Sadeur takes great pains to convey this feature of Christian cosmology while working within a categorizing scheme that lacks clear means of designating anything immaterial and generally imperceptible. When Sadeur seeks to evade this linguistic constraint while justifying his habit of praying, he tries to explain that he speaks to the Incomprehensible so as to "changer de monde" upon death (129), an expression which prompts still further objections from Suains. In response, the narrator attempts a periphrasis to translate the word "âme" as he previously did for "père," saying that "nôtre principale partie, que nous appelons nôtre ame," which was "ce qui nous fai[t] raisonnables" separates itself from the body upon death and goes to a place selected by God (130).

In this context, unexpectedly and implausibly, Suains produces an Australian word indicating that at least one unobservable object of

thought has earned a label within his people's worldview: "Tu crois donc," dit-il, "que nous devenons des Habis, c'est-à-dire, des Anges en nôtre mort" (130). According to the code laid out in the previous chapter, "Habis" is composed of letters designating the elements of fire (*a*) and water (*i*), and the characteristics "bas" (*h*), "clair" (*b*), and whether one interprets the *s* as part of the French plural or integral to the Australian word, "blanc" (Foigny 164). Suains' comment equates the word "Anges" with the fusion of terms "bas-feu-clair-eau-blanc," which appears at odds with the connotations of the French word. While brightness and whiteness seem angelic enough, these spirits would be better suited by the descriptor *z* ("haut") than by "bas," and the convergence of the opposing elements fire and water might be imagined either to produce steam or eliminate each other entirely. The word could be taken as something mistranslated by Sadeur, which would cast additional doubt on the whole of his claims regarding the Australian language.

Here, the façade of coherency shielding Foigny's language fractures when it comes into contact with taboo topics of a highly abstract nature. Indeed, the author's representation of an ideal language as a reliable mode of knowledge transmission leads to an aporia at each such occasion. The coherence of the linguistic system breaks down whenever it is faced with an object of thought sufficiently abstract or taboo to defy the attribution of words, and at the same time, this confrontation appears within the constraints and according to the necessities of a narrated dialogue (Benrekassa 160).

On the opposing end of the spectrum of abstraction, the Australians also bracket off one of the most concrete and base topics as taboo, revealing a second locus of linguistic stoppage. Due to a cultural injunction against speaking of reproduction, whether sexual or asexual, among the hermaphrodites, the subject eludes discussion and remains a facet of life on the continent that Sadeur cannot discover, even after three decades spent there (Foigny 137). He mentions that when the natives converse on mundane and concrete matters, they use a system of gestures, and this could lead readers to infer that if they reproduce sexually, then any communication related to the topic is conducted in this way, since they only use words for abstract discourse (Foigny 161). However their gestures may serve them in that sphere, nonetheless, their verbal and written language fails on an intradiegetic level to express a believable truth of the matter, and at the same time, showcases another incoherency to readers. Against all plausibility, Suains' attempt at

explanation veers away from expressing any essential nature of the issue, as the language purports to do. Instead of ensuring that the risks and rewards of rhetorical figures and veiled implications remain absent from discourse (Benrekassa 157), Suains' arguments fade into a repeated, unconvincing, and vacuous analogy:

> il entra dans un long discours & m'étalla plusieurs preuves, pour m'obliger à croire que les enfans venoient dans leurs entrailles comme les fruits viennent sur les arbres. Mais comme il vîd que toutes ses raisons ne faisoient aucune impression sur mon esprit, & que je ne pouvois m'empêcher de soûrire, il me quitta sans achever […]. (135-136)

Here, a language presented as verbalizing the alchemical composition and phenomena underlying every object cannot account for the appearance of a child issued from each Australian.

The incoherence characterizing the language seems too pervasive for it to have gone unnoticed by the author. This seems particularly evident if readers analyze the criteria by which the system assigns pseudo-chemical compositions to referents and inevitably acknowledge how arbitrary this is (Pellandra 68-69). For example, common birds are supposedly composed of dry salt and air while monstrous rukhs ("Urgs") are made of earth that is both "amere" (*r*) and "mauvais" (*g*), yet the major difference separating the two types of creatures would appear to be one of size rather than elemental composition, and Urgs live above seawater yet do not seem to contain either water or salt. With such troublesome inferences in mind, Pellandra convincingly reads Sadeur's assertions about the inscrutable mysteries and abundant secrets (Foigny 164-165) in the language as an "escamotage astucieux" that justifies inconsistencies while enriching a certain illusion of authenticity in the narrative (Pellandra 69).

As I hope to have shown, from an extradiegetic point of view, these insufficiencies suggest a reading of Sadeur's linguistic expositions as ironic commentary about the impossibility of even the most ideal language to capture and communicate knowledge without error. His representation of the Australians' language takes on a cynical stance in the face of hopes to eliminate pitfalls and disadvantages from human speech and writing. If readers conclude that these seeming deficiencies

were not only conscious on the part of Foigny, but deliberate, then these problems can appear as the outcome of a major thought experiment, arguing against the potential of an ideal language to facilitate knowledge transmission without major limitations. On such a reading, Foigny leads his audience to conclude that the early modern dream of an ideal, neo-Adamic or Cratylic language is an illusion, since any human community coexists with ineffable objects of reflection, on the side of abstract thought, and on the side of the most concrete human experiences, like reproduction, taboos foreclose upon certain topics before they can be addressed.

Material

Sadeur's remarkable discoveries relating to the flora and fauna of the Southern Land yield further commentary on the issue of how knowledge can or cannot be transmitted and put into practice. This component of Foigny's reflections implies that even if Promethean learning could be contained within living, abundant, material forms requiring almost no prior expertise to exploit, ineluctable societal phenomena would prevent human beings from fully taking advantage of it. As Foigny imagines scenarios in which the possession of plants and animals coincides with retention of unprecedented knowledge, he arrives at a vision in which arbitrary taboos of uncertain origin prevent humans from reaching their full potential as knowing beings. The presence of these behavioral prohibitions constitutes a second disclaimer within the novel.

The hero discovers incredible plants and animals in Australia, explicitly presenting them as natural resources that could benefit Europeans immensely. The hermaphrodites exploit botanical materials for purposes of healing and combat. For example, the narrator claims that the "fruit de repos" coming from the "Balf" tree has served him as a panacea against all manner of battle wounds, which healed within three days thanks to the topical application of its juice. He suggests that it could end practically any epidemic (183) while fostering ideal rest and recovery from injuries:

> […] le dormir nourrissant qu'il provoque, tel qu'on veut sans aucune incommodité, & toutes les plaies que son jus guerît en tres peu de tems, m'obligent de croire qu'il n'est aucun mal en Europe duquel il ne seroit le remede très asseuré. (182)

These fruits even eliminate the early modern emotional ill of melancholia that could otherwise be lethal:

> […] l'éloignement de mon pays joint à des coütumes toutes extraordinaires, que je suis obligé de pratiquer me donnent plusieurs ennuis : aussi tôt que je mange un fruit du repos, mes ressentiments s'addoucissent, mon cœur devient gay, & je me trouve d'un humeur qui me rend tres content. C'est ce qu'on estimeroit à poids d'or dans les pays septentrionaux, où les tristesses en tuent la pluspart, & où les chagrins causent des langueurs qui sont pires que la mort. (183)

As a result of these remarkable benefits from this resource, the common sufferings of gout, colic, and migraines are completely unknown to Suains, and Sadeur must explain their specific symptoms in order for the mentor to conceptualize them (144).

Alongside these medicinal qualities of the plant, it also offers the inhabitants of the Southern Land extraordinary military applications. As mentioned above, its fruit juice can be applied to soft materials to make them harder and stronger yet lighter than steel, and mixing it with saltwater in differing proportions can yield additional possibilities, making hard objects soft like heated wax and changing their color at will (184). Thus, with almost no practice at all, possession of this fruit can make practically anyone into a demiurge capable of creating objects and inventions with a bare minimum of additional raw material, costing nearly nothing. It would seem to be thanks to such possibilities that the Australians create their arsenal of unparalleled effectiveness. They use both bladed and projectile-launching implements in war. Not only do these four-armed troupes wield halberds of prodigious size and astounding lightness, but they have also invented a form of spring-loaded artillery that renders firearms obsolete. Soldiers brandish mechanical cannons with multiple barrels that Sadeur labels 'organs,' launching small, spherical projectiles with enough force to traverse up to six human bodies with a single shot:

> I'appelle orgues, dix, douze, & quinze tuyaux, qui ont certains ressorts au bout, lesquels étant lâchez poussent des bâles avec tant d'impétuousité : qu'elles percent les

> cinq & six hommes d'un coup. L'agilité dont ils les lâchent fait qu'il est presque impossible de se sauver : & on est plûtôt frappé, qu'on n'a pensé à plier ou à se contregarder. (158)

Furthermore, they even combine hundreds of such pipe-cannons into a prodigious siege engine, something like a titanic tank bristling with guns, capable of firing a thousand balls at once (197).

Alongside Sadeur's descriptions of weapon technologies, he also dwells on the potential benefits of certain animals that could be usefully domesticated, but which Australians view with disdain and avoid due to traditional taboos. In particular, the hero describes remarkable pigs that Australians had made use of in the past but now generally destroy or exclude from their communities. These animals, called "Lums," (172) or "Hums" (180) function as natural, automatic plows whose tusks work as natural shares. They instinctively dig and upturn soil in straight lines, better than the best European agricultural laborers, and their only obvious drawback is that they can be destructive and leave excessive waste when the season is not appropriate for sowing (173). Sadeur is confident that if they were brought to Europe, they would render human agricultural labor unnecessary:

> […] les Hums rendroient des services incroyables puisqu'ils exempteroient les hommes de ces peines étranges qu'il faut avoir pour labourer la terre. (180)

Another type of quadruped, called "Fuefs," (173) or "Suefs" (180) resemble both camels and horses but feature a spine with a sunken area that works as a natural saddle to bear as many as eight people at a time. Alternatively, they can carry a sort of tower, like something on the back of a fantastical battle elephant, in which four humans can ride (174). They require a wondrously small amount of infrequent nourishment and yet are just as fast and three times as strong as typical horses (180). Two pounds of grass sustain one such creature for more than three days, and the beast can carry a burden for as much as twelve hours without stopping to graze (180). In Europe, the narrator imagines, they might cut the cost of shipping and transport of goods and merchandise down to a tenth of the expense it currently requires (180). In a still more dramatic vein, the hero marvels that the giant, armored, carnivorous birds occasionally darkening skies over the continent can be trained to bear

human riders more easily than a Spanish horse, guided with reins to travel as much as thirty-five leagues in a day (181). Once again, while Sadeur repeatedly suggests the potential usefulness of these animals, rigid attitudes in place among the Australians have led them to eschew the wise use of the creatures. The hermaphrodites imagine that exploiting any of them as livestock would inconvenience or perturb the wider society in some way coded in moral terms, for example by interfering with each individual's sense of emotional autonomy, damaging the pristine and uniform landscape, or requiring individuals to alter habits to accommodate caretaking (Moreau 55, Foigny 173-174). As Isabelle Moreau affirms, the Australians see these animals and all that they associate with them either as unacceptable disruptors of an extreme, rationally ordered world, or simply as a taint on its purity (55-56), and as such they are rejected.

From Sadeur's point of view, by contrast, they appear much more as priceless resources than as stains in an otherwise immaculate context. At the same time, they constitute uncanny knowledge in physical, living form, which in principle ought to be transmissible by their mere exchange from one person's possession to another. While some of these plants and animals might at first seem quaint or even unhelpful today from a presentist perspective, their fictitious, combined potential to transform seventeenth-century Europe, through the delivery of the material knowledge comprised in them, is far more remarkable than the actual advances in optics, military fortification, and maritime navigation that took place in our historical past. In fact, their hypothetical impact on the world of Foigny's first readers can scarcely be overstated. These fantastical resources, delivered exclusively into the hands of a powerful political leader, could have led easily to pan-European, if not global, conquest. In fact, within the universe of Foigny's fiction, Sadeur's depiction of Australian weaponry and tactics offers European readers a sort of phantasmic, colonialist strategy book for obtaining knowledge that would create inestimable economic and military advantages for themselves.

If his early audience entertained such imaginings, then this no doubt called attention to the reasons for which, within the narrated world, the Australians had not realized these astounding gains in learning. As we have seen, taboos against sullying the continent's anxiously maintained uniformity, purity, and solemnness prevent the hermaphrodites' society from evolving in this way. Here, a limiting constraint on knowledge

transmission emerges, functioning as another disclaimer. In Foigny's thought experiment, a second line of inquiry hereby ends in bemused disappointment. The author evokes the notion that random cultural traditions and injunctions might well prevent human beings from achieving such masterful knowledge of nature, even if the most fantastic botanical and zoological resources were freely available. Strangely, it is the supposed knowledge, or moral assumptions, passed down from ancestors like revealed truths, that shape taboos so as to prevent Australians from practicing the *savoir-faire* that walks their lands on four legs and flies overhead.

Education

Among the hermaphrodites, unexpected obstacles to learning and knowing emerge not only from the language they use and the material resources they consume, but also from their educational system. Even though their mode of teaching younger generations makes use of the best available linguistic clarity and objects that constitute knowledge in themselves, it nonetheless succumbs to a Sisyphean cycle whose net benefit to the larger community remains null. This results in large part from the endless repetition of a social rite in which they replicate honor-driven behavior modeled by ancestors. The practice utterly curtails cultural change. By depicting the activity, the author accounts for the Australians' paradoxical fusion of extreme technological acumen and atavistic, violent ethnocentrism and isolationism. It also uncovers a third disclaimer, calling into doubt a more complex facet of his representation of an ostensibly ideal society. In turn, Foigny's text prompts readers to wonder whether rituals that people perpetuate without question might necessarily prevent knowledge from being transmitted without error. They might imagine that this problem could even arise, ironically enough, when participants believe that sharing knowledge is the very purpose of the practices themselves. The novel's description of a typical Australian education allows for such a reading, while meriting some explication.

Quite straightforwardly at first, Sadeur explains that the inhabitants of the southern continent all benefit from a nearly identical and universal education. Each child of this society enjoys cycles of three years of basic instruction, followed by four years of training in writing:

> […] jusqu'à trente cinq ans, auquel âge ils sont tous consommez en toutes les sciences naturelles, sans pouvoir distinguer quelque différence de capacité entre eux. (139)

This degree of expertise attained, they debate topics of advanced study and invent extraordinary methods of manipulating the *fruit du repos* and other plant-based ingredients that even allow living animals to be created out of inert matter. Each new discovery brings honor to its inventor as it is written in the venerated "livre des curiositez publiques" (154). However, as René Démoris has argued, although these apparent feats of white magic honor their inventors, they seem to have no other effect on the Australians' way of life, which continues unmodified by new technological advances (404). Indeed, demonstrating these marvels appears to serve no purpose other than creating a public spectacle and prompting the community to enact the rite of recording a new entry in the book (404). Were these feats to be replicated and their secrets widely diffused, this might upset the equality of knowledge and abilities among individuals in Foigny's utopian land. Instead, the only differentiation possible derives from gaps in age, which the educational practice counterbalances by ensuring that knowledge flows to youth in indirect proportion to the age of each teacher, such that each pedagogue can be replaced by something of a cognitive clone upon the elder's ritual suicide. Thus, within the educational context, knowledge transmission in the Southern Land is subject to a cyclic system of exchange that renders new learning incapable of impacting social morays, since young people's desire to know counterbalances elderly people's desire to communicate knowledge, and the lessons taught do not confer any power or prestige that could alter social status. This is why teaching does not introduce inequities through the dissemination of knowledge, and new discoveries cannot engender technological advancement or cultural change (Démoris 405).

The moot nature of the discoveries recorded in the catalogue of curiosities appears ironic in light of its age and size, which imply that it contains a practically infinite supply of tantalizing information. In addition, a core feature of the writings in the codex ensures that it evades wider implementation both by the Australians and by anyone else who might seek to take possession of it. In the list of twelve marvels written in the catalogue of inventions that Sadeur describes, eight require a fantastical ingredient only available in the Southern Land, such as a

special fruit, leaf, or root, or use common substances like seawater or morning dew that remain unremarkable in the experience of European readers (156-157). Without access to such ingredients or to means of activating inert water that remain unknown, the knowledge supposedly contained in the book of curiosities defies learning by Europeans due to a lack of material resources. For this reason, from the point of view of characters and readers from Northern Lands, communicable knowledge of Australian technology equates to possession and transmission of its botanical materials, coupled with recipes recorded in their weighty, revered tome. Without combining both written information and physical resources, the knowledge in the book cannot be replicated and thereby proven and acquired by anyone outside of the Southern Land.

From readers' point of view, this strange system of alchemico-magical innovation and ritual recording of formulae, yielding recipes that lie forgotten in a venerated cookbook of sorts, takes shape as a third disclaimer undermining still another mode of sharing knowledge. The creation of new learning halts at the very point where it has the most transformative potential. No cultural mechanism exists for putting newly discovered knowledge into practice outside this ritual context. This absence shows how, with regard to educational practices as well, traditional assumptions and behaviors modeled by ancestors actually prevent knowledge from being transmitted for the benefit of future generations. Here, Foigny lays out the results of a third line of inquiry in his thought experiment, showing how the Australians' system of teaching continues to replicate inherited ritual behavior mechanistically, as though there were a divine injunction to do so, without subjecting such practices to rational evaluation. As a consequence, he guides readers to extrapolate, inherited ritual behaviors might well impede the transmission of knowledge in any human society, even if their practitioners allege knowledge transfer as their primary purpose.

Passion and Proof

As I hope to have shown above, whether grammar and lexica, natural resources, or educational practices occupy a reader's attention, Foigny's text demonstrates how traditional attitudes and behaviors, imitated from preceding generations, can inhibit the transfer of learning from person to person. Among the hermaphrodites, these perpetuated traditions take on various forms, from a dubious, pseudo-Aristotelian categorizing scheme to taboos against proximity to animals, to the ritual burying of new

discoveries in a sacred book. With these aspects of the novel in mind, Sadeur's uniqueness becomes paramount to interpreting its wider messages. Crucially, the hero's fundamental differences from the Australians, and most notably his religious background, spare him from unthinking acceptance of their taboos and adherence to their behavioral norms. This would suggest that he ought to be able to acquire and communicate knowledge in ways that the Australians do not and perhaps cannot duplicate. However, in his case, erotic passion surges from inside himself, rather than social pressure from the outside, to prevent knowledge transmission, despite his relative freedom from many constraints placed upon the native inhabitants of the Southern Land. This return of the repressed could be considered the novel's fourth main disclaimer, and as such deserves some hermeneutic attention.

The issue comes to the forefront as events transpire and lead to Sadeur's expulsion from their land. Alice Stroup has shown that Sadeur's downfall and escape can be read as the most important disclaimer at work in the novel, denouncing the viability of a social and moral model based on a neo-Stoic repression of passions:

> Australians can practice Senecan precepts because they have no passions that need mastery. Sadeur cannot remain in Australia precisely because he is, whatever his external sexual characteristics, a European subject to his passions. On this view, Foigny's *Terre australe connue* unmasks Stoicism as an unsuitable guide to conduct. […] Sadeur's fate is an allegory of human imperfectability in this world. (185)

In addition to this commentary on passions as they relate to human imperfectability, I would like to emphasize another aspect of this human potential for improvement. Among other facets of this symbolism, the hero's downfall rejects the potential benefit that the learning and sharing of knowledge could contribute to improving humanity's lot. Evidence for such a reading emerges most noticeably after Sadeur's oft-discussed, forbidden "conjonction charnelle" (215) with a single-sex woman that earns him a sentence of suicide from the Australians. His audacity and ingenuity help him to evade this punishment and undertake a return journey to Europe.

His odyssey northward, beset by wild animal attacks, a kidnapping, and devastating bouts of melancholia, depicts a disrupted transmission both of knowledge and the physical proof that would make it learnable. The hero has assimilated lessons with the potential to transform European life radically, introducing extraordinary agricultural, military, and medical technologies. Yet teaching these secrets to other Europeans would require material resources that he is unable to keep hold of as mishaps thwart him repeatedly. Reading this segment of the narrative while highlighting exchanges and losses of knowledge and proof shows signs that Foigny's thought experiment yielded still further pessimistic conclusions. En route and at his voyage's end, Sadeur communicates a narrative about a different world, yet fails to deliver substantial proof that would allow others to acquire the knowledge that he had once attained himself. In the end, the extraordinary knowledge that he possesses in Australia is reduced from procedural know-how to declarative reports. His erudition and skill finally dwindle to an account that has become hearsay, yet also resembles a book of divine revelation, with both irony and a heavy air of tragedy.

A close look at later chapters can substantiate this interpretation. After his condemnation, Sadeur takes flight out of the Southern Land riding on the back of the enormous bird he has tamed, carrying his manuscript written in Latin, and equipped with food for his mount, many bottles of healing, botanical draughts, and a substantive supply of Australian fruits to eat. He carries these supplies in three watertight and nearly indestructible pouches (and floatation devices (222)) that he fabricates with leaves and wondrous liquids harvested from plants. He wears one pouch as a belt, another as a 'hollow scarf,' and straps the 'briefcase' to the back of the bird (219-220). This would seem sufficient to ensure his safety and proof of his experiences. Yet by the time he disembarks at the port of Livorno in 1661, he carries nothing but a different, small briefcase with his manuscript pages and four rolls of strange material contained inside. Readers see these objects through the eyes of the fictitious editor who rescues Sadeur from drowning by the docks, and later publishes the tale (9). Upon opening the little briefcase, this editor, responsible for the note "Au lecteur," describes Sadeur's manuscript:

> […] m'ayant prié d'ouvrir sa valise, j'y trouvai une espece de livre fait de fueilles, long de demi pied, large de six doits, et épais de deux : c'estoit un recueil de ses

> avantures écrit en Latin, partie à Crin dans la terre Australe, partie à Madagascar. Il y avoit encore quatre petits rouleaux chacun de deux aûnes de longueur, & d'un pied de largeur, d'un ouvrage fort délicat, & qui auroit eu du lustre si l'eau ne l'eut pas terni. (11-12)

The hero's rescuer notices and describes the material support of the manuscript itself but makes no descriptive reference to the briefcase. This could be taken to mean that the latter is unremarkable and therefore is probably not of the traveler's own making (and not made of leaves). Perhaps he acquired it from a European crew member in transit. As for the pages of the bound book, readers learn exactly how they were created with liquid by-products of marvelous fruit trees, in a similar fashion to the equipment that the hero dons for his escape from the Southern Land. While detailing some of the wonders recorded in the book of public curiosities, Sadeur remarks in passing:

> Une feüille d'une arbre telle qu'on voudra, lavée le matin du jus de l'arbre du fruit de repos, devient ferme & beaucoup plus dure que nôtre fer : étant relavée de la méme eau, elle blanchit & devient mollasse comme nôtre fin papier : c'est dequoy je me suis servy pour écrire ces lignes. (156)

These pages clearly display signs of their exotic origin. With regard to the four scrolls accompanying the book, their specific dimensions suggest that they are no doubt what remains of Sadeur's belt-pouch, softened with water or saliva, then used as a medium to continue writing his narrative once he ran out of pre-prepared sheets. However readers may envision these particular objects, they constitute a relatively unremarkable trace of what once bore convincing, concrete evidence to corroborate the traveler's tale. In the end, the hero is left with little but a written version of his account, allied with the feeble, circumstantial evidence provided by the unorthodox nature of the medium upon which he has inscribed it. Later, as the editor prints Sadeur's text on paper for distribution in Europe, even this very last bit of material corroboration of his story disappears.

The circumstances surrounding this loss of proof can be read as further commentary on how knowledge transfer can stall and allow learning to evaporate. Sadeur obviously loses the capacity to prove what

he claims happened to him with material evidence, but not all at once. On my allegorical reading of these pages, Foigny exhibits three disclaimers in succession, each symbolizing some obstacle related to the hero himself that prevents him from passing on his newfound knowledge. Sadeur first loses knowledge portrayed as the capacity for physical domination, then as the means to satisfy one's own desires, and finally as the skill and proof needed to persuade others of one's point of view. Indeed, if readers retrace his trajectory from his condemnation and exclusion by the Australians to his arrival in Livorno, it becomes clear that each subsequent stopover on his long return journey symbolically robs him of a different aspect of the knowledge he has attained. To begin, the most consequential, concretized knowledge in his grasp, the trained bird upon which he flies through the air, is the first major item to escape his possession. While he is flying on his bird over open ocean, two raptors of equal size attack his mount and force Sadeur to jump into the water below. The three aerial predators then continue their skirmish until a heavy fog hides them from view and reduces the narrator's visibility in an eerie fashion (224-225). The ambushed "Urg" can be taken here as a symbol of knowledge in its manifestation as physical power. Sadeur has learned to tame the creature, thereby conferring upon himself superhuman mobility and an intimidating weapon, and this expertise loses all value when a doubly powerful manifestation of might and strength whisks his mount away.

Next, out of the fog comes a group of odd sailors, clothed so as to cover their thighs and chests while exposing their genitalia. These figures capture the hero and take him to their island, where he loses all of the food and drink inside his "bandoüillère" (226). They greedily devour these contents before attempting to make a human sacrifice of him (226). Here, Foigny redoubles and hyperbolizes his symbolism of repressed passions returning, which had begun with Sadeur's major transgression with the woman. These people exhibit sexual organs (225) and give free reign to bodily appetites for the hero's food and drink, excitedly consuming every last morsel and drop that they can extract from him (226).

Finally, these islanders crudely replicate and in a sense surpass the violent urges of the crucifiers of the Christ, as they place their victim on a scaffold, pierce his skin in four places and eagerly drink his blood (227). The abductors parasitically draw sustenance from both his shoulder-bag and his very body, reflecting a theft of his capacity to

satisfy his own desires through knowledge in his purview. Despite the horrors of this ordeal, Sadeur retains his belt-pouch because it is so firmly affixed to his person that they prefer to take it from his corpse rather than risk damaging it during removal while he remains alive (226). As a result, while his tormentors have stolen his knowledge and resources needed to take pleasure on his own and satisfy desire, he nonetheless conserves rudimentary know-how and rations for survival. This saves him from death when a crew of newly arrived Europeans interrupt the sacrificial rite and he flees, then collapses with exhaustion, paralyzed by melancholic thoughts. He uses his saliva to create a hole in the belt-pouch and reinvigorates himself with some bottles and fruits (228). Yet he will soon lose this last source of sustenance as well, for when the band of sailors from Northern Lands brings him back to their ship, he empties his belt-pouch, sharing his victuals with the captain and first mate. The taste and appearance of these items elicit marvel from the onlookers, suggesting their potential value as proof of his adventures (229). Coupled with the highly specific, circumstantial detail of Sadeur's narration in Latin, the food and drink help convince the captain of the truth of the traveler's claims: "Ie donnois tant de particularitez au capitaine de ce que i'avançois, qu'il n'en pouvoit douter" (229). While Sadeur succeeds in convincing the captain, he no longer possesses the material resources to persuade others in the same way, since his belt and the manuscript inside it (knowledge of how to describe and report) are all he retains thereafter.

To a certain degree, this sequence echoes each Australian's life trajectory from education to war to teaching and thence to death, as Sadeur transitions three times here, each of which also marks a substantial loss of control. In the end, on his deathbed in Livorno, his once extensive knowledge, like that of elderly Australians, stops short both of altering anyone's relationship to nature and of impacting existing social phenomena in any significant way. As the young hermaphrodites' desire to learn counterbalances the elders' drive to teach, so Sadeur's reduced physical autonomy and diminished stores of material proof render moot the value and power that his knowledge might otherwise bring him.

Foigny allegorically portrays extraordinary learning here as a futile enterprise fated to exhaust itself, losing momentum with every inevitable vicissitude of life, in the end leaving little but reports written by absent people, permanently separated from the materials needed to implement

knowledge beneficially. He suggests that, depending on one's point of view, all teachings that remain accessible over a lifetime are likely limited to either revelations or hearsay.

Revelations

Sadeur's fate takes on an exquisitely ironic valence, a sign of an eighth and final major disclaimer, when read beside certain arguments that Suains presents to the narrator as revelations of his own. The two characters' dispute about the nature of religious traditions, and institutional reliance on texts of revelation and reports of miracles, establishes an uncanny resemblance between the narrative supposedly published by the editor in Livorno and the sacred books on which his Christian faith is based. Examining one of Suains' remarks in particular is useful for interpreting the effect of this irony.

At a tense moment, the elder launches a line of questioning that undermines the logical possibility for revelations and miracles to confirm the truth of a religious tradition. The informant presses Sadeur to concede that, following the death of a group of individuals having witnessed a miracle or received a revelation, all that remains is hearsay. Suains implies furthermore that it is not differing revelations but rather divergent, increasingly inaccurate rumors and widespread credulity that have led to the sectarian conflicts plaguing Europe:

> […] la Religion qu'ils observent n'est fondée, ny sur la parole de Dieu, puis qu'ils disputent entre eux si elle l'est veritablement, ou si elle n'est pas : ny sur aucune merveille qui l'autorise, puis que personne de ceux qui croyent ne se peut vanter d'en avoir veu, & que les autres qui ne croyent pas, les rejettent, comme supposées : & consequemment elle n'a nul autre fondement que la credulité de ceux qui se laissent plus facilement persuader. (122-123)

Evidently, such arguments against belief in revelations and miracles can be read as topical critiques characteristic of libertine writing, being pastiched here for any number of purposes, as a function of intentions that readers might attribute to the author (Ronzeaud in Foigny 121). However, there is also more than this operating here. In particular, I wish to highlight how interactions between the dialogue and the fictitious

editor's narrative in the opening of the novel can be seen as a device for estranging and distancing such notions for readers, independently of the particular doctrinal outlook they may hold to be true.

In line with the novel's many references to suspending judgement in a skeptical mode (Ferguson 264-265), a mirroring effect between Suains' argument, Sadeur's presentation of his claims, and the editor-cum-rescuer's framing of the narrative inspires readers to consider the phenomena of revealed religion and reported miracles from an abstract, proto-anthropological point of view. This process prompts a moment of reflection in readers before they mentally assert what they consider to be true about the matter. From this perspective, Foigny can be seen as leading his readers to replay in their minds the last stages of a thought experiment that he completed in the course of writing. This imaginary reevaluation can fleetingly portray instances of revelation and miracles in light of nothing more than a theoretical effect they could have on human societies. Readers might well conclude this process by acknowledging that in one way or another, verbal or written narratives about astounding, unverifiable phenomena, inherited from the dead, sculpt the contours of most societal practices by inspiring passions and positing taboos. What is more, such narratives thus indirectly shape not only what knowledge communities possess, but more disconcertingly, what they are capable of learning in the future. In the case of the Australian hermaphrodites, a prohibition against associating with animals blocks people from the knowledge of how to ride giant birds or battle-camels, and a traditional practice inhibits the population at large from learning to replicate and benefit from the discoveries written in the book of public curiosities. In Australia, such knowledge cannot be acquired. Sadeur affirms the bounds of potential knowledge acquisition in the land as he points out that their injunction against speaking of the supernatural, which must have been articulated in narrative by someone in the past, leads them to a dubious conflation between the unspoken, the impossible, the incomprehensible, and the unknowable. The inherited taboo holds them in ignorance:

> Et certes la connoissance que j'ay pû avoir de cette Nation, fait que je tiens pour asseuré qu'elle est d'autant plus incapable de connoissances surnaturelles : qu'elle croit impossible, ou incomprehensible tout ce qu'elle ne peut comprendre. (125-126)

This reflection in the text comes full circle as Sadeur nonchalantly compares the hermaphrodites' ritual tome to a Christian book of saints' lives: "Le livre de semblable merveilles est gros comme une vie de Saints, & il est presque plein" (157). This comparison raises the question of what analogous, false conflations may be hiding in plain sight among Europeans, perpetuated by taboos and injunctions to practice rituals, and born of revelations whose verification remains forbidden. By the same token, it delivers a subtle warning against confounding that which is unknown, and all that is bracketed off as unspeakable, impure, and untouchable, from that which is truly unknowable.

On a deeper level also, the reflections inspired by reading this reference alongside Suains' arguments, Sadeur's proposition of truth-value for his narrative, and the editor's narrative framing, shed an eerie light on the nature of revelation and tales of miracles. In this context, they are a principal root of the fundamental desires, taboos, and practices that make a society distinct. As such narratives engender the appearance and distribution of these cultural markers, in random and unidentifiable cases, they appear to impose arbitrary shackles on the realization of human potential to acquire knowledge. As such, they function as a twisted, burlesque parody of the extension of Divine Grace. Suains condemns the notion that God could ever bestow revelations on some people while withholding them from others (122), yet Foigny's experimentation here opens up to a more disturbing vision, in which some such narratives might not bestow truth, but rather produce obstacles to human self-improvement through the acquisition and sharing of knowledge.

Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated, a number of disconcerting results emerge from Foigny's multi-faceted thought experiment with a series of potential media for reliably transmitting knowledge. Whether he imagines an ideal language as a vehicle for error-free information, learning as a material resource, or perfectly rigorous and cyclical modes of teaching, whether he poses the problem in terms of a whole community or an individual, in each case a disclaimer emerges from his fabulation. Through this imagery inspiring caution, he prompts readers to wonder whether humans can ever arrive at a means for acquiring and disseminating knowledge so as to transcend their postlapsarian limitations. By representing a fictitious language, Foigny leads readers to

surmise that traditional and potentially arbitrary taboos, inherited from prior generations, pose major obstacles to the reinvention of Adamic speech as a solution to the problem of knowledge transmission. Similarly, Sadeur's extended description and extolment of the Balf tree, the warthog-like Lums and the battle-camels called Fuefs are clearly at odds with the irrational way in which the Australians exploit the plant while loathing the animals.

Additionally, while one might not readily suspect an educational tradition of preventing the appropriate circulation of knowledge, the imagined institution drives teachers and pupils to experiment and record, stopping only to accept or confer a fleeting honor, without reflecting on why they follow tradition so mechanically, so that neither Australians nor outsiders reap benefits with regard to learning. As Sadeur escapes the Southern Continent, the novel shows that he is also vulnerable to losses and stalls of knowledge as an individual. As readers watch his wondrous fruits and draughts disappear in the mouths of the greedy, the uncouth, and the ignorant, unprecedented knowledge of how to manipulate nature fades into second- and third- hand written accounts of unobservable and unreplicable marvels, eerily resembling the revealed teachings of religion. At last, this similarity leads to a sobering and strange question about those very teachings, positing an uncanny anxiety. It could be that revelation and miracles play a predominant role in establishing and perpetuating desires, taboos, and ritual behaviors in human societies, keeping humans in a state of ignorance, even while purporting to enlighten them.

In this way, if revelations eliminate the possibility of learning new knowledge instead of conferring it, then perhaps no bird, liquor, fruit, or manuscript, no matter how wondrous, will suffice to escape them. Read in this light, the results of Foigny's thought experiments are not promising for humanity's future. They suggest the possibility that human beings' passionate desire to know, our most innate character, will forever drive us away from the Tree of Knowledge. In the same movement, however, they paradoxically chart a course and beckon readers to sail toward the unknown, however imposing the risk of a shipwreck may be.

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