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Rethinking the Real with Robinson Crusoe and David Hume

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I saw some few stalks of something green shooting out of the ground, which I fancy'd might be some plant I had not seen, but I was surpris'd and perfectly astonish'd, when, after a little longer time, I saw about ten or twelve ears come out, which were perfect green barley of the same kind as our European, nay, as our English barley.

—Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*

In this oft-discussed moment from Daniel Defoe's celebrated novel in which Robinson Crusoe marvels at the English barley that sprouts on the Caribbean island on which he is marooned, the ordinary becomes briefly available as an object of wonder. Defoe re-creates linguistically the surprise he describes by narrating Crusoe's astonishment but delaying the revelation of that astonishment's object; Defoe's language incrementally identifies the barley, moving from the general ("some few stalks of something green") to the plant's distinguishing characteristics (its "ears"), to naming it within ever more culturally specific frames ("our European, nay . . . our English barley" [63; emphasis added]). The buildup of the expectation that the object is worthy of astonishment intensifies the surprise when the barley's quotidian identity is revealed. The moment of the barley's identification reorients wonder from a response appropriate to foreign marvels to a possible way of viewing the familiar English plant. Although Crusoe's wonder initially wanes upon coming to the conclusion that the barley is no miracle, he eventually reveals a capacity to view it, and other such ordinary providences, "as if it had been miraculous"; he will describe the corn's growth as "next to miraculous," with no implied waning of wonder for all that the miracle is but a virtual one (106).

This episode encapsulates a pervasive phenomenon within eighteenth-century fiction: the cultivation of wonder as a response to the ordinary in a manner consistent with David Hume's critique of induction. Developing this claim, this essay will show how Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Hume's skeptical philosophy use the narrative mode of Protestant spiritual autobiography and the figure of the shipwreck in order to evoke the sense, central to Puritan theology, of life's contingency. By *contingency* I mean the sense, from the limited mortal's perspective, of persistent uncertainty regarding not only one's own salvation but also the very nature and duration of the laws that govern creation. This contingency renders life's continuity wondrous. In both Defoe and Hume, the cognitive uncertainty that Puritan spiritual autobiography cultivates—by emphasizing life's contingency—takes on a metafictional dimension because each text uses the autobiographical mode in ways that cast doubt upon their own truth status. The use of this narrative mode produces an epistemological indeterminacy that replicates the indeterminacy

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1 that both Crusoe and Hume's philosophical persona face. Each responds to this
 2 indeterminacy with a provisional belief in which one assents while recognizing the
 3 illusoriness of that to which one assents. This provisional belief creates a paradigm
 4 for the assent that fiction itself solicits. The wonder discussed here has a degree
 5 of epistemological anxiety because of the uncertainty regarding fiction's proto-
 6 cols, and yet each work models ways in which this epistemological anxiety can be
 7 recuperated as aesthetic pleasure, creating the basis for fiction as an aesthetic mode
 8 grounded in the experience of "as-ifness."¹

9 This argument presents an alternative to several important views of Hume's
 10 relationship to eighteenth-century fiction. Reading Defoe and Hume for their
 11 shared emphasis upon the wonder of a contingent universe revises Ian Watt's
 12 classic presentation of Defoe and Hume as ideological opposites (*Rise* 92). Reading
 13 Defoe and Hume together also departs from the well-established critical tradition
 14 of viewing fictional texts as exemplifications of earlier philosophical paradigms.²
 15 Most recently in this vein, Ian Duncan has identified in Hume a philosophical
 16 framework for early nineteenth-century fictional realism (124, 133). Working with a
 17 view of Hume that is similar to Duncan's, this essay suggests that we read Hume as
 18 both theorizing and participating in representational practices immanent in early
 19 eighteenth-century fiction.³ Watt, after all, presents Defoe as initiating the fictional
 20 realism that Duncan argues Hume theorizes. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest
 21 that *Crusoe* directly influenced Hume. Rather, both Defoe and Hume channel the
 22 spiritual allegory of the pilgrim as shipwrecked traveler, an allegory that obtains
 23 prominence via the discourse of Puritan spiritual autobiography as well as the
 24 influence of shipwreck narratives such as the Arabic philosophical novel *Hayy Ibn*
 25 *Yaqzan* and the story cycle of Sinbad the Sailor from *The Arabian Nights*.

26 In making the case that both Defoe's fiction and the Humean critique of
 27 induction have the effect of reframing the ordinary as an object of wonder, I
 28 intervene in the long-standing discussion over Enlightenment and "the disen-
 29 chantment of the world."⁴ Ever since Max Weber first articulated his so-called
 30 disenchantment thesis, critics have refuted his thesis on various grounds, arguing
 31 that supernatural forms of enchantment never really died out in the Enlightenment,
 32 that enchantment vanishes from the natural world only to take up residence cov-
 33 erly in other spheres, and that enchantment becomes thoroughly and explicitly
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 36 ¹ On fictionality's relationship to the "as if," see Paul Ricoeur 45, Wolfgang Iser 217–23, and John
 37 Bender 231. Iser draws upon Hans Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of "As If"* but emphasizes, contra
 38 Vaihinger, that as-ifness is not something that one unmasks but something that the fictional text
 39 discloses. I will be arguing that Humean skepticism exhibits the self-disclosing characteristics
 40 and the indeterminacy that Iser finds characteristic of the fictional text. See Iser 220.

41 ² For Cartesian, Lockean, and Hobbesian Crusoes, see Peter Hulme 112; Watt, *Rise* chaps. 1 and 2;
 42 Carol Kay chaps. 1 and 2.

43 ³ For a different account of Hume's relationship to eighteenth-century fiction, see Rebecca Tierney-
 44 Hynes.

45 ⁴ I follow Jane Bennett and depart from Charles Taylor in conceiving of both enchantment and
 46 wonder not as fundamentally theological orientations but as moods or affects that might arise in
 any encounter with the new and strange. See Bennett 5 and Taylor, *Secular Age* 25–26.

secularized.⁵ Each of these responses has an either/or logic to it; enchantment is either here or there; it is either open or covert; it is either supernatural or secular. In the account I give here, however, wonder responds precisely to the indeterminacy of a world poised between competing explanatory systems.⁶ Instead of arguing, then, like one recent study, that early eighteenth-century fiction produces enchantment by shielding the reader from reality's randomness, I suggest that eighteenth-century fiction produces wonder by plunging its reader into the radical indeterminacy that Hume's epistemology reveals (Molesworth 14). In arguing this, I show how eighteenth-century fiction enchants not despite but because of its skeptical impulses. Rather than predicating fiction's ability to enchant *either* on its mystified nature or on its demystified nature, I argue that its unlikely alignment with *both* providentialism and Humean skepticism makes eighteenth-century fiction an agent of enchantment. This intervention gets us beyond both the disenchantment thesis and those critiques of it that reinforce its either/or logic.

The revelation that the world before us confounds our efforts to know it not only encourages an attitude of cognitive provisionality consistent with fiction, it also becomes a source of vertiginous pleasure, an important component of which includes what James Noggle calls "the skeptical sublime" (4). Defoe's and Hume's mutual affinity for the skeptical sublime challenges assumptions about periodization and literary aesthetics—in particular, the assumed association of both eighteenth-century novels and empiricist philosophy with realism, understood in opposition to aesthetic experiences including the uncanny, the marvelous, and the sublime.

In the pages that follow, I locate Hume's critique of induction in a dissenting Protestant tradition of emphasis upon the contingency of experience and go on to interpret his famous meditation on his skeptical doubts at the conclusion to book 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) as a Crusoe-like riff on spiritual autobiography. The second half of the essay suggests that Hume's essay "Of Miracles" (1748) theorizes the pleasure of suspended disbelief in ways consistent with Defoe's novelistic practice, a practice that adopts what I identify as the Humean perspective of viewing the ordinary as if it were miraculous, an aesthetic pleasure that becomes crucial to the emergence of a discourse of fictionality.

Specters and Skeptics

Let me begin by briefly recapping Hume's critique of induction. Hume deconstructs the opposition between inductive belief and vulgar superstition by showing

⁵ Arguments that refute Weber's thesis in these three ways, respectively, include Jane Shaw, Sasha Handley, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Terry Castle, Jesse Molesworth, Victoria Nelson, Bennett, Simon During, and Michael Saler.

⁶ In this respect, I depart from Taylor's view that, in the eighteenth century, "particular providences, and miracles, are out" (*Secular Age* 233). Rather, I argue for special providence's continued relevance and power in the period precisely because it becomes contested and unstable, a situation that yields not a secure "buffered self," in Taylor's terms, but rather profound cognitive dissonances (37–41).

1 that the inductive belief that the future will *necessarily* be like the past is as irrational
 2 as classifying an extraordinary phenomenon as a miracle (*Treatise* 113; *Enquiry* 46).
 3 He proposes that “in the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect we are as
 4 ignorant of the ultimate principle, which binds them together, as in the most
 5 unusual and extraordinary” (*Treatise* 267). When we suppose the existence of a
 6 necessary connection between cause and effect, every moment that meets with our
 7 expectation must be hailed as a veritable miracle. Our perception that there is a
 8 “necessary connexion,” he maintains, “proceeds merely from an illusion of the
 9 imagination; and the question is, how far we ought to yield to these illusions”
 10 (ibid.). Hume offers no alternative to these illusions. All we will gain from his
 11 radical skepticism, in his own words, is “to be sensible of our ignorance,” not to
 12 “augment our knowledge.” In his resolution of these skeptical doubts, Hume
 13 defines real belief as “nothing but a conception more intense and steady than what
 14 attends the mere fictions of the imagination” (*Enquiry* 33).

15 Hume refuses to distinguish “rational” beliefs from superstitious ones. As
 16 Margaret Russett describes the implications of Hume’s attitude toward causality:
 17 “[S]uperstitious or magical thinking seems by this [Hume’s] account not a habit
 18 inimical to causality, but rather, its shameful secret” (172–73). Hume’s own shame-
 19 ful secret relates to his exposé of the superstitious thinking at the heart of our
 20 belief in causality, an exposé that itself exemplifies superstitious thinking. Hume’s
 21 hypervigilance toward the specter of necessary connection typifies a superstition
 22 characterized by the “irrational fears of unreal entities,” a definition of superstition
 23 that emerges in the late seventeenth century (Daston and Park 337). His skepticism
 24 magically transforms ordinary belief into belief in miracles, recasts common sense
 25 as a conspiracy theory, and, in Tobin Siebers’s phrase, “remains superstitious about
 26 any claim for the validity of belief” (34).⁷

27 Hume’s pronouncements upon the nature of superstition and skepticism point
 28 to their affinities. One of the qualities Hume attributes to superstition is that “it
 29 seizes more strongly on the mind [than philosophy], and is often able to disturb us
 30 in the conduct of our lives and actions” (*Treatise* 271–72). By Hume’s own admis-
 31 sion, skepticism produces the same effect: upon claiming that “very refin’d reflec-
 32 tions have little or no influence upon us,” Hume immediately rebuffs himself,
 33 acknowledging that his “present feeling and experience” attest, on the contrary, to
 34 philosophy’s having “heated my brain” with its “intense” effects (*Treatise* 268).

35 More particularly, Hume’s urgent doubt evokes religious conviction of the
 36 radical Protestant variety. For both, a grueling doubt renders fit a worthy faith.
 37 Hume understood that doubt is no stranger to faith, suggesting of “the conviction
 38 of the religionists, in all ages,” that “their assent in these matters is some unac-
 39 countable operation of the mind between disbelief and conviction, but approaching
 40 much nearer to the former than to the latter” (“Natural” 348). Though he contrasts
 41 such religious conviction to “solid belief” in “common affairs,” his own attitude to
 42 matters of fact is characterized precisely by this equivocation or what he refers to
 43 elsewhere as a “total suspense of judgment” (*Dialogues* 56).

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 46 ⁷ On the affinities between Hume’s skepticism and superstition see Donald W. Livingston 29.

Like Hume, Protestant dissenters were connoisseurs of uncertainty. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of a providentialism that cultivated a vigilant “watchfulness” in Protestant dissenters as they observed and pondered the meaning of divine signs (Jacob and Kadane 25; see also Manning 9 and Walsham 6). This watchfulness resulted in a “doubt-ridden” spiritual practice “governed more by negation than affirmation” (Jacob and Kadane 27, 34). David D. Hall suggests that, for Puritans, wonders expressed the “radical contingency” of the world. He explains: “[I]t came down to this, that nothing was secure, that no appearance of security could hide the mystery beneath” (94). Hume’s suggestion that the “necessary connexion” we perceive between cause and effect is illusory also reveals the world to be characterized by radical contingency.

The obverse of the stress that such radical contingency produces is the privilege of wonderment when events go smoothly, as Crusoe attests following his conversion: “[T]ho’ he [mankind] walks in the midst of so many thousand dangers, the sight of which, if discover’d to him, would distract his mind, and sink his spirits; he is kept serene, and calm, by having the events of things hid from his eyes, and knowing nothing of the dangers which surround him” (155). Like Crusoe’s, Hume’s vision is of a world in which the average person lives in ignorant bliss, lulled into a false sense of security by illusory appearances. Both Crusoe and Hume shatter these illusions by revealing the ordinary world to be beset by hidden mysteries and dangers. Their defamiliarization of the ordinary world generates a wonder at existence’s continuity that evokes the Puritan sense that “our whole life” is “a continued deliverance”: this refers not only to the belief that “we are daily delivered” from particular evils ranging from “the violence of the creature” to “the treachery of our own hearts” (Beadle 62, line 14–18) but also to the conviction that life’s very continuity depends upon “as it were a continued *Creation*” (Ames 42), a belief that resembles Hume’s proposal that all of the world’s operations are attributable to a contingent constant conjunction rather than a necessary connection between cause and effect. Both perceptions render life’s continuity as miraculous as its very existence in the first place.⁸ Complacency characterizes the vulgar rather than the skeptic, the sinner rather than the convert, whose faith is a covenant that is daily renewed in recognition of God’s ongoing deliverance. For Hume, this faith will take the form of faith in his senses, which is the endpoint of his skeptical odyssey, more precious for being hard-won.

Drawing a parallel between Puritan religious faith and Hume’s faith in his senses challenges the idea that “when the Enlightenment thinker takes, say the reliability of his senses ‘on faith,’ he is not making an *act* of faith resembling that of the religious believer” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 165). Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt contend that “the dialectic of faith and doubt belonged to the old regime; Enlightenment man comes to know only the play of certainty and uncertainty” (ibid.). I would submit that Puritan religious faith and the Enlightenment thinker’s trusting of his senses on faith are both acts hard-won and fraught with anxiety and thus, at least in terms of their affective dimensions, not as

⁸ For an elaboration of the principle of providential “conservation” described here, see William Ames 41–42.

1 fundamentally different as they might seem. As Susan Manning writes, “[A]t
 2 moments in Hume’s writing the engulfing emptiness of the sceptical position
 3 becomes a journey to the heart of darkness, a Calvinist quest for the meaning
 4 hidden at the centre of significance,” and the narrative payoff of this journey still
 5 hangs on the “crucial turn from despair to faith” (45, 46).

6 Hume’s understanding of sensory perception as a form of faith extends the view
 7 of earlier skeptical empiricists. Discussing the skeptical response to naive empir-
 8 icism, Michael McKeon suggests that Lord Shaftesbury views the “*claim* to histo-
 9 ricity in these narratives” as “a new brand of ‘faith’” (117; emphasis added).
 10 Humean skepticism extends this critique of narrations of matters of fact to matters
 11 of fact per se. Where Locke suggests that our own knowledge and reason is “*natural*
 12 *revelation*, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge,
 13 communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach
 14 of their natural faculties” (Locke 698), Hume takes this analogy a step further,
 15 suggesting that our trust in this “natural revelation” is itself a species of faith. The
 16 point of Hume’s skeptical critique, to borrow Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s charac-
 17 terization of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who promotes this view of Hume in the
 18 1780s, is “to prove that the sensuous evidence itself was a species of Faith and
 19 Revelation” (qtd. in Schrickx 815–16). It is here that a correlation emerges between
 20 the skeptic’s self-conscious faith in matters of fact and the Puritan’s faith in a divine
 21 grace; the skeptic regards the knowledge of the senses with the same lack of
 22 complacency as that with which the Puritan regards God’s grace. While McKeon
 23 treats *Crusoe* as a relatively stable embodiment of naive empiricism, *Crusoe*’s reli-
 24 gious ideology functions as a skeptical critique of naive empiricism, because it
 25 suggests that all is not as it seems (McKeon 120, 206). Where Terry Castle empha-
 26 sizes that, in the eighteenth century, faith in the reality of thoughts produces
 27 skepticism about matters of fact, the inverse is also true: in the eighteenth century,
 28 skepticism about the reality of thoughts (that is, about the skeptical impulse itself)
 29 ultimately produces a renewed faith in matters of fact (137).

30 31 Reluctant Pilgrims

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33 As a superstitious thinker in skeptic’s clothing, Hume fittingly employs “the lan-
 34 guage of Protestant spiritual autobiography,” including “images of light and dark,
 35 shipwreck and shoals,” when he launches into his famously morose introspection
 36 bemoaning the intellectual paralysis that his critique of causation induces toward
 37 the end of book 1 of the *Treatise*, “Of the Understanding” (Pinch 41). Hall suggests
 38 that “sea-deliverances” formed a genre of wonder-narrative emphasizing that
 39 “prophecy, prodigy, providence . . . were the stuff of everyday experience” (89); it
 40 thus makes sense that Hume would use the seafaring metaphor to reflect upon his
 41 conclusion that the regularity of everyday experience is as prodigious as that which
 42 interrupts it (see Starr 95 and Hunter 62–63). Noggle notes that, in seventeenth- and
 43 eighteenth-century literature, boundless seas frequently figure “the mind lost in
 44 radical skepticism” (4).⁹

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46 ⁹ On ship images in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, see Philip Vogt 16–18.

Hume's use of seafaring imagery simultaneously harnesses traditional Protestant imagery and revises the famous Lucretian figure in which the shore-bound spectator regards an imperiled ship with pleasure (see Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* book 2). As Hans Blumenberg discusses, the philosopher is traditionally associated with the spectator, whose pleasure reflects the Epicurean's "possession of an inviolable, solid ground for one's view of the world" (26). In Hume's hands, the philosopher's "solid ground" dissolves beneath his feet as, in Steve Mentz's terms, the philosopher's "dry" investigation becomes "wet." Rather than portray the philosopher as surveying the shipwreck of human life from the safety of the shore, the *Treatise* plunges Hume's first-person philosophical persona into the medium he is investigating: experience. Hume's reclaiming of the shipwreck as a paradigm for philosophizing is most obviously apparent in book 1's conclusion, which adopts the foolhardy sea voyager's point of view.

Reading *Crusoe* and the *Treatise* together, we can at once interpret Crusoe's marooned plight as a literalization of the post-Cartesian philosophical erosion of the self and Hume's philosophy as a secular reinterpretation of Puritan spiritual anxiety. More specifically, I will be arguing that Hume expresses the crisis of confidence that besets him at the end of book 1 in terms that suggest that his philosophical speculations and rhetorical flights of fancy have landed him in a bleak yet exotic location strangely evocative of Crusoe's lone island. Why would Hume assume the perspective of the shipwrecked traveler? In Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), the character Philo suggests that when we engage in "theological reasonings," "we are like foreigners in a strange country to whom everything must seem suspicious" (10). By demonstrating how metaphysical assumptions underwrite our common-sense beliefs, Hume recasts the ordinary world as a "strange country" in which we are all marooned.¹⁰

Recasting the ordinary world as a "strange country" figures the cognitive estrangement that skepticism induces, an estrangement that momentarily stalls habitual thought processes. Hume views the condition of being suspended between habitual perception and estrangement from habit as one of skepticism's most profound effects. In the *Dialogues*, Philo suggests that in a skeptical disposition "the mind must remain in suspense" between "scepticism" and "common life"; and "it is this very suspense or balance which is the triumph of scepticism" (*Dialogues* 10). This state of suspense evokes the Todorovian "hesitation" "between real and unreal" associated with the fantastic (Todorov 167). Both early eighteenth-century fiction's and empiricist philosophy's contradictory imperatives create this sense of hesitation or wonder, in the terms of eighteenth-century critics. In the case of both *Crusoe* and Hume's *Treatise*, the reader is, as Jayne Lewis observes of *Crusoe's* reader, "suspended between conviction of the story's reality and certainty that it has been made up" (Lewis 49).

¹⁰ On this passage, see Manning 167. See also Gilles Deleuze's characterization of Hume's empiricism as "a kind of universe of science fiction: as in science fiction, the world seems fictional, strange, foreign, experienced by other creatures; but we get the feeling that this world is our own, and we are the creatures" (162).

1 Defoe's and Hume's use of Puritan spiritual autobiography also suspends the
 2 reader between literal and figurative reading (see Starr, esp. chap. 3; Hunter;
 3 Damrosch 187–212; Valenza 138; Manning chap. 2). In both cases, this use of a
 4 confessional, first-person register belies a more complex relationship between text
 5 and "self." Defoe famously equivocates between presenting *Crusoe* as his protag-
 6 onist's literal autobiography and as Defoe's own "allegorical" autobiography (*Ser-*
 7 *ious Reflections* 4). Hume famously regards personal identity as "fictitious," thereby
 8 priming his reader to regard his sudden assumption of a pathetic first-person
 9 persona somewhat ironically (*Treatise* 259). However, his self-recorded struggles
 10 with periods of debilitating melancholy invite a more literal interpretation.

11 Hume's account of this melancholy in a 1734 letter adopts the spiritual auto-
 12 biographical mode while shifting its narrative model "off an Augustinian body/
 13 soul axis and onto a secularized Cartesian body/mind axis" (Valenza 152). Yet even
 14 as Hume secularizes the spiritual autobiography, he parallels his situation to that of
 15 spiritual diarists and wonders whether the "rapturous Admirations" of "Mysticks"
 16 and "Fanatics" "might discompose the Fabric of the Nerves & Brain, as much as"
 17 his own "profound Reflections" ("A Kind of History" 349). By comparing his
 18 skeptical reflections to mystics' fits of wonderment, Hume locates his philosophical
 19 discomposure within a tradition of sublime revelation.

20 Hume returns to the genre of spiritual autobiography and the discourse of
 21 sublime revelation in the conclusion to book 1 of the *Treatise*, where they are
 22 invoked in order to give expression to the "violent" intensity, as Robin Valenza
 23 characterizes it, of Hume's reaction to the philosophical conundrums he has raised
 24 (140). This section of the *Treatise* illustrates Noggle's contention that the eighteenth
 25 century witnesses a convergence between skeptical and sublime discourses, which
 26 share a vision of the human intellect overwhelmed by vast external objects (12). In
 27 the readings of *Crusoe* and the *Treatise* that follow, I want to show how a poetics of
 28 the skeptical sublime fosters the conditions for wonder at the ordinary. One must
 29 go through the experience of being shipwrecked, whether actually or vicariously,
 30 in order to wonder at the miracle of dry land. Or, in other words, wonder is what
 31 happens on the way back to reality from estrangement. In order to see how this
 32 works, we first have to accompany Crusoe and Hume on their perilous voyages into
 33 the skeptical sublime.

34 Hapless Mariners

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 37 The famous final section of book 1 of the *Treatise* vividly illustrates John Richetti's
 38 observation that "the modern philosopher-writer is a man alone, a sort of voluntary
 39 Robinson Crusoe" (Richetti 7). Having philosophically exiled himself with the
 40 articulation of his skeptical doubts, Hume pauses before "launch[ing] out" into
 41 "those immense depths of philosophy, which lie before [him]," finding himself

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 43 *inclin'd to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I*
 44 *have undertaken. . . . Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals,*
 45 *and having narrowly escap'd ship-wreck in passing a small firth, has yet the temerity*
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to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances. (Treatise 263)

Hume's slightly archaic, Scottish register—apparent in the use of “Methinks” and “firth,” referring to an estuary—signals his turn to the anachronistic spiritual autobiographical mode. Hume's comparison of himself to a man who goes to sea despite having narrowly escaped shipwreck evokes Crusoe's acknowledgment of the perversity of his desire to go to sea despite earlier ill-fated voyages. The parallel shifts from pre-marooned to post-marooned Crusoe when Hume, reduced “almost to despair,” resolves “to perish on the barren rock, on which I am present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity” (264).¹¹ Crusoe likewise terms his abode “The Island of Despair,” echoing Puritan spiritual autobiographies in which a crisis of despair precedes conversion (*Crusoe* 57; Starr 44).

Crusoe and Hume both imagine themselves ostracized and alienated from human society. Crusoe reflects that he “seem'd banish'd from human society . . . alone, circumscrib'd by the boundless ocean, cut off from mankind,” while Hume presents himself as one “who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all [*sic*] human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate” (*Crusoe* 124; *Treatise* 264). In his tally of the goods and evils he has experienced in being stranded on the island, Crusoe notes down matter-of-factly, “I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banish'd from human society” (*Crusoe* 54). Hume likewise bemoans that his philosophy has placed him in a state of “forelorn solitude” and imagines himself “some strange uncouth monster” (*Treatise* 264). Crusoe also describes his appearance as “monstrous” and “frightful” (*Crusoe* 119). Images of storms figure this sense of monstrosity and isolation, Hume imagining onlookers who dread “that storm, which beats upon me from every side,” while Crusoe explains that his despair “would break out upon me like a storm” and is tormented by a vision of a man who descends “from a great black Cloud” to berate him (*Treatise* 264; *Crusoe* 90, 70).

What are we to make of the fact that both Crusoe and Hume figure themselves as monsters dogged by their own personal storms? The readiness with which Crusoe and Hume imagine themselves in these vividly estranging terms suggests the susceptibility of both to self-conjured illusion, which in each case is the cause and not merely the effect of their fear. For example, after famously seeing a single footprint on the beach of his supposedly deserted island, Crusoe begins to persuade himself that the footprint may have been a “chimera” or “delusion” and that he may have “play'd the part of those fools, who strive to make stories of spectres, and apparitions, and then are frighted at them more than any body” (*Crusoe* 125). Hume's paranoia is comparable; as we have seen, his skeptical doubts, which he too refers to as “these chimeras,” conjure up monsters and storms, functioning as the

¹¹ In Puritan sea-journey allegories, rocks correspond to hazards for the soul, storms figure man's uncontrollable nature, and shipwreck signifies succumbing to temptation. See J. Paul Hunter 107, 99–200.

1 equivalent of Crusoe's "stories of spectres and apparitions" by which he proves to
 2 be "frighted" "more than any body." Earlier in the *Treatise*, Hume ventures that
 3 although "modern philosophy" "pretends" to be founded upon "solid, permanent"
 4 principles, in truth its tenets are as much like "the spectres in the dark" as the
 5 "fictions" of "the antient philosophers" (226). Hume exposes the phantasmic nature
 6 of modern philosophy's "solid, permanent" principles, showing how they confuse
 7 a feeling of solidity with the solidity of the object itself. It is precisely by bringing to
 8 light these "spectres in the dark"—what John Bender describes as "the apparitional
 9 quality of sensory perception"—that Hume frightens himself (Bender 226, 234).¹²

10 Hume's dramatization of his skeptically induced fears evokes his own charac-
 11 terization of superstition as "a state of mind" in which "infinite unknown evils are
 12 dreaded from unknown agents; and real objects of terror are wanting," leading the
 13 soul to find imaginary objects of terror "to whose power and malevolence it sets no
 14 limits" ("Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" 144–45). Like Crusoe, Hume confronts
 15 the possibility that what he thought was real (his skeptical doubts) may have been
 16 "chimeras" and that in critiquing induction he may have been making "stories of
 17 spectres and apparitions" by which he is "frighted" "more than anybody."

18 By likewise foregrounding reality's apparitional nature in the footprint scene,
 19 *Crusoe* also draws attention to what Bender calls "the apparitional quality of real-
 20 ism," reminding the reader that the quality that elicits Crusoe's belief in the
 21 footprint—its apparent reality—also solicits the reader's belief in Crusoe (Bender
 22 232). *Crusoe* thematizes, then, its own apparitional literary effects, its production of
 23 cognitive uncertainty paralleled in the three English sailors' response to Crusoe's
 24 "spectre-like figure": "like one astonish'd," the Captain wonders aloud, "is it a real
 25 man, or an angel!" (*Crusoe* 200). Crusoe's island experience estranges him from his
 26 fellow Englishmen to the extent that he challenges not only cultural but ontological
 27 categories. In the sailors' response to Crusoe, we begin to see how the sublime's
 28 aesthetics of fear crosses over into uncertainty's aesthetics of wonder.

29 Crusoe embodies here neither the recurrence of the repressed associated with
 30 the uncanny nor the terror associated with the sublime but the indeterminacy that
 31 produces wonder. The sailors' ontological wonder—is he man or angel?—mirrors
 32 the epistemological wonder into which the text's alternately allegorical and literal
 33 claims plunge the reader: is Crusoe real or fantasy? Crusoe and Hume both observe
 34 this correspondence between the fictional and the spectral. As Hume puts it,
 35 poetical enthusiasm is "the mere phantom of belief or persuasion" (*Treatise* 630). As
 36 Crusoe observes in "A Vision of the Angelick World," the phrase "seen a spirit"
 37 means "seen an apparition, for to see a spirit seems to be an allusion, not an
 38 expression to be used literally, a spirit being not visible by the organ of human
 39 sight" (*Serious Reflections* 3). Crusoe suggests here that to see an apparition is, lit-
 40 erally, to have a figurative experience and, like the reader of fiction, to be at once
 41 susceptible to the illusion and conscious of it.

42 Defoe and Hume frequently draw attention to the reader's susceptibility to self-
 43 conjured illusion. Defoe warns, "Above all, I would beg my reading, merry friends,
 44

45 ¹² On the Enlightenment's "internalization of the spectral," see Castle 17. On Hume and the
 46 gothic, see Jerome Christensen 33 and Duncan 132; Russett; and Sarah Tindal Kareem.

of the thoughtless kind, not to be so much surprised at the apparitions of their own brains" (*History and Reality of Apparitions* 392). Hume's essay "Of Miracles," having debunked miracles and argued for Christianity's dependence upon them, concludes with the wonderfully ironic observation that "whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to [the Christian Religion], is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience" (*Enquiry* 90). Apparitions and miracles abound in the acts of self-deception that take place in our "own brains" and "own person."

Even as Defoe and Hume point out the human susceptibility to self-conjured illusions, their own literary effects—and the wonder these effects invite—also depend upon the reader's vulnerability to such illusions. Before returning to the rhetorical parallels between Crusoe and Hume's respective epiphanies, let us see how Hume's manipulation of the most prominent figure in the *Treatise's* conclusion—the shipwreck—at once exploits and alerts his readership to this vulnerability. Richetti famously reads the conclusion to book 1 of the *Treatise* as "a comic transition" (200). However, Hume's own reflections in book 3 of the *Treatise*, "Of Morals," upon the difference in effect between faint and strong imaginative suppositions, suggest that the tone of book 1's conclusion may come closer to the tragic. Hume returns in book 3 to the Lucretian paradigm, this time without seeming to revise it: he engages in a thought experiment in which he places himself in the position of Lucretius's hypothetical spectator observing a situation that bears a striking resemblance to that described from a first-person perspective in the conclusion to book 1: a ship, "tost by a tempest, and in danger every moment of perishing on a rock or sand-bank" (*Treatise* 594). Revisiting from a third-person perspective the same shipwreck scene he earlier describes from a first-person perspective aptly conveys the toggling between immersion and estrangement inherent in Hume's philosophical position.

Also aptly, the apparent distance between these first-person and third-person perspectives reveals itself as illusory. As Richetti notes, in book 3, Hume revises his initial proposition as he observes that while the faint depiction of the ship is too weak for him to gain pleasure from his comparative safety, the strong depiction of the ship catalyzes not pleasure but distress, as he imaginatively hears the passengers' "lamentable cries" and finds himself unable to "withstand the motions of the tenderest compassion and sympathy" (*Treatise* 594; see Richetti 26). In other words, the power of empathy is such that the dry spectator who merely imagines the suffering of the ship's passengers gets wet, in Mentz's terms—perhaps even literally, with tears. The philosopher toggles between passenger and spectator and, in so doing, enacts the dialectic between immersion and detachment that Duncan finds characteristic of Hume's thought—immersion being figured by the philosopher's imaginative submersion in the sea (123).

Hume's treatment of the Lucretian shipwreck-with-spectator trope in book 3 helps explain his use of the shipwreck metaphor at the end of book 1, since, in assuming the role of the shipwreck's spectator in book 3, Hume in effect assumes the position of the reader of the conclusion to book 1. Hume's thought experiment in book 3 reveals that a vivid account of the shipwreck, such as the conclusion to

1 book 1 provides, disables the spectator from assuming the complacency that
 2 comedy usually bolsters in its audience. Instead of having his preconceptions
 3 confirmed, then, by being vicariously shipwrecked, the philosopher finds himself
 4 “surprised by an actual world” (Richetti 26). In Blumenberg’s words, “Terra firma is
 5 not the position of the spectator but rather that of the man rescued from shipwreck;
 6 its firmness is experienced wholly out of the sense of the unlikelihood that such a
 7 thing should be attainable at all” (21–22).

8 After examining the shipwreck scene in book 3, we are in a position to see that
 9 Hume’s assumption, in book 1, of the sea voyager’s persona puts the reader in the
 10 position of the vicariously immersed spectator, thereby conferring upon the reader
 11 the same opportunity to be surprised by an actual world. In other words, one must
 12 go through the experience of shipwreck in order to perceive and appreciate the
 13 miracle of “the reliability of firm ground,” in Blumenberg’s words (21). The ship-
 14 wreck metaphor at the conclusion to book 1, then, does not merely figuratively
 15 render Hume’s own skeptically induced disorientation but also acts upon the
 16 reader to produce the very disorientation it describes, an effect consistent with
 17 Hume’s view that sympathy is transmitted by contagion rather than imaginative
 18 projection (see Fleischacker). He produces, that is, through the medium of print,
 19 what he is feeling through the experience of philosophizing rather than inviting
 20 the reader to imaginatively project himself or herself into his philosophically
 21 induced feeling. Novel literary effects are necessary to recruit the attention of
 22 readers who, according to Hume’s own theory of man, are necessarily deadened by
 23 custom and habit.¹³ Literary interventions of this sort are precisely what lend the
 24 *Treatise* what Hume describes as “an air of singularity, and novelty as claim’d the
 25 attention of the public” (*Treatise* 643)—a novelty that contemporary reviews noted,
 26 as we shall see.

27 If such literary gambits are novel in philosophical texts, they are the bread and
 28 butter of sermons, Hume’s rhetorical strategy borrowing from those preachers
 29 whose popularity, Hume observes, depends on their capacity to “excite the most
 30 dismal and gloomy passions” (*Treatise* 115). Imaginative representations like the
 31 shipwreck that are at once powerfully affective and self-consciously literary engage
 32 attention by exploiting readers’ susceptibility to illusory representations at the
 33 same time that they alert them to this vulnerability, producing what Duncan calls a
 34 “doubled consciousness” (123). By engaging conviction and skepticism simulta-
 35 neously, the shipwreck figure therefore engages the very same “suspense of
 36 judgment” that is one of skepticism’s most profound effects.

37 38 Shared Epiphanies

39
40 It is not only figures like the shipwreck but also the Puritan spiritual autobio-
 41 graphical mode more broadly that conveys and cultivates “suspense of judg-
 42 ment.” While tortured by divisions, Puritan writing also exhibits the “ability to
 43 hold ‘either/or’ steadily in the mind as ‘both/and’ ” in a balancing act evocative of
 44 Humean double consciousness (Manning 18). Yet achieving such balance is rare for
 45

46 ¹³ On Hume’s use of the monster as a figure to combat readerly complacency, see Yota Batsaki 2.

both Puritan and skeptic; more often, the effect of such divisions is to produce a disorienting “sense of being at sea in a world of threateningly significant but seemingly random facts” (15). In both *Crusoe* and the *Treatise*, the image of tracking anonymous footprints figures the bewilderment of a seeker in search of revelation. While a literal footprint in the sand triggers Crusoe’s paralysis of judgment, the task of detecting more abstract footprints prompts Hume’s doubt: “[C]an I be sure, that in leaving all establish’d opinions I am following truth; and by what criterion shall I distinguish her, even if fortune shou’d at last guide me on her foot-steps?” (*Treatise* 265).

In the midst of their existential crises, both Crusoe and Hume express their doubts by asking open questions, a hallmark of seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies.¹⁴ At the height of his philosophical discomposure at the end of book 1, Hume asks, “Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? [O]n whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with these questions” (*Treatise* 269).

Hume’s plea for illumination echoes the questions Crusoe asks following his illness: “And what am I, and all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal, whence are we? Sure we are made by some secret power, who form’d the earth and sea, the air and sky; and who is that?” (*Crusoe* 74). Crusoe’s conscience eventually replies, upbraiding him for his doubts in terms evocative of Bunyan’s seventeenth-century spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding* (1666). In Hume’s case, a personified, feminized nature famously responds to his cry for help and proves to be a less severe mistress than Crusoe’s conscience, effectively “dispelling these clouds,” “obliterat[ing] all these chimeras,” and dissipating his “philosophical melancholy and delirium” (*Treatise* 269). Yet for Hume, philosophy swiftly shifts from ailment to cure. Hume finds that his hope of achieving modest philosophical acclaim “serves to compose my temper from that spleen.” He embraces, here, a “careless,” “diffident” philosophy that contrasts with his earlier melancholy and tormented skepticism (273).

The terms in which Hume frames this contrast help explain his choice of the Puritan spiritual autobiographical mode. As he emerges from the skeptical wilderness, Hume pronounces, “Philosophy on the contrary [from superstition], if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments” (*Treatise* 272). Hume’s decision to contrast “just” philosophy with superstition at this juncture retroactively casts the unmitigated skepticism that threatened to engulf him—and by his account produced severe and immoderate sentiments—as a thinking person’s superstition. Hume may couch his “spleen” as Puritan spiritual autobiography precisely to discredit it by identifying melancholy, elsewhere identified with superstition, as the mark of the spurious skeptic in contrast to the “diffidence” that characterizes the true skeptic (see Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” 144–45 and *Dialogues* 92). His convincing turn as a man in the throes of a philosophy-induced nervous breakdown suggests that too dogged a commitment to disbelief

¹⁴ On self-examination as preparation for communion, see G. A. Starr.

1 produces the “bold” sentiments and hypotheses associated with superstition.¹⁵
 2 Among superstition’s baleful qualities are that it “opens a world of its own, and
 3 presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new” (*Treatise*
 4 271). This characterization of superstition echoes Hume’s youthful characterization
 5 of the appeals of philosophy: “[T]here seem’d to be open’d up to me a new Scene of
 6 Thought, which transported me beyond Measure” (“A Kind of History” 346).
 7 Hume’s Crusoe-inflected autobiography in the *Treatise* confirms extreme skepti-
 8 cism’s parallels with superstition by opening up “a world of its own” replete with
 9 “new” “scenes, and beings, and objects” in the form, as we have seen, of shipwreck,
 10 monsters, and storms.

11 Undermining the view that Hume employs Puritan spiritual autobiography as a
 12 way of tarnishing unmitigated skepticism by association with superstition is his
 13 invocation of spiritual metaphors for philosophy in “A Kind of History of My Life”
 14 (1734), seemingly to much less calculated effect. But this objection assumes the
 15 Hume of “A Kind of History” to be continuous with the Hume of the *Treatise*, a
 16 perhaps naive or at the very least un-Humean assumption. Hume may deliberately
 17 conjure up “A Kind of History” in order to renounce this youthful autobiographical
 18 persona and embrace his new persona as the diffident skeptic. Just as Hume’s
 19 critique of induction unleashes doubts that prove to be stubbornly persistent, so
 20 his rhetorical strategies open up interpretive possibilities that defy resolution. In
 21 framing the crisis of belief in such a way as to produce uncertainty as to whether
 22 this is a genuine or ironic crisis of faith, Hume’s “breakdown” elicits the very same
 23 unknowing it dramatizes in the text.

24 Whether Hume invokes the Puritan spiritual autobiographical mode sincerely
 25 or ironically, having broken free from the superstitious hold of “refin’d reflections,”
 26 he comes to a reckoning that at once parallels and reverses Crusoe’s: “[A]fter
 27 drifting over tempestuous seas, being cast upon shores half a world apart, and
 28 coming close to perishing upon treacherous, unseen rocks,” both experience a
 29 conversion (Hunter 200–201). But where Crusoe overcomes his diffidence and is
 30 saved by his commitment to God, Hume overcomes his committed skepticism and
 31 finds salvation in a diffidence that vanquishes skepticism’s specters.

32 33 Signs and Wonders

34
35 Here I want to contextualize more precisely this kinship between superstition and
 36 skepticism and spell out this kinship’s implications for our understanding of fic-
 37 tion. As I have suggested, Hume’s critique of induction points out the similarities
 38 between everyday causality and belief in miracles by showing how both beliefs
 39 depend on supposing the existence of a necessary connection between events. The
 40 seventeenth-century Protestant doctrine of special providence also blurs the line
 41 between coincidence and miracle, suggesting that just as extraordinary events
 42 might be evidence of God’s hand, so the minute processes of daily life should be
 43 regarded as equally miraculous manifestations of God’s divine will, without which
 44

45 ¹⁵ On the hostile reactions to book 1’s rhetorically extravagant conclusion, see Adela Pinch 21,
 46 40–41, 199nn26–27.

the sun might fail to rise, the rain to fall, the crops to grow (Walsham 12). The creation of the category of special providence meant that Protestants could discredit Catholic miracles as “lying wonders” while tapping into a source of wonder that was not only legitimate but legitimizing of Protestants’ own divine sanction.¹⁶ While miracles violated natural law, special providences worked within it (Hunter 56–57). However, in practice, the distinctions between miracles, providences, and natural wonders were “very hazy indeed” (Walsham 230).

Special providence counterintuitively provides an epistemological paradigm for legitimate empirical belief because believers in special providences suspend their assumption that the future will be like the past, appreciating that such a turn of events is entirely contingent upon God’s grace. Like Humean skepticism, the “puritan propensity for detecting the finger of God in the most mundane events” emphasizes that the most ordinary beliefs depend on faith (Walsham 20).¹⁷ What does it feel like to suspend the assumption that the future will be like the past? In his analysis of the psychology of natural philosophy, one that is deeply indebted to Hume, Adam Smith describes such an experience as “the feeling of something like a gap or interval betwixt [conjoined objects]” when “[the fancy] naturally hesitates, and, as it were, pauses upon the brink of this interval” (“Principles” 41). Smith terms this feeling “wonder.” This feeling is often linked, in the eighteenth century, to the experience of extraordinary, rather than ordinary, special providences—indeed, to miracles, as Hume observes in his discussion “Of Miracles”:

The passion of surprise and wonder, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others. (Enquiry 78)

This passage presents the skeptic (who cannot believe in miracles) as retaining common sense while partaking “of the satisfaction at second-hand.” The skeptic’s susceptibility to wonder causes him or her to enter vicariously into the miracle, to act *as if* he or she believes in the miracle by suspending disbelief—that is, skepticism. This “as if” belief in miracles is analogous to the skeptic’s belief in matters of fact, as Hume characterizes it: in both cases, feeling overrides skepticism and compels belief, a belief that the skeptic inhabits unselfconsciously even as his or her underlying skepticism enables him or her to regard this unselfconscious belief from an estranged vantage point: this is “that very suspense or balance” that Philo identifies as skepticism’s triumph (*Dialogues* 10). This simultaneous holding in the

¹⁶ For uses of this phrase, see Alexandra Walsham 227. Significantly, Charles Gildon applies the phrase to *Crusoe* in reference to its substitution of “Fictions” for scriptural truth. See Gildon 127–28.

¹⁷ Here I would suggest that the doctrine of special providence encourages the “affirmation of ordinary life” described by Taylor, rather than pulling in the opposite direction, as he presents it. *Sources of the Self* 211–302.

1 mind of willed and unwilled belief resembles “the poised holding of opposites”
 2 that Manning identifies in Puritan writing (18). While Lorraine Daston rightly
 3 observes that willed philosophical skepticism differs from unwilled religious faith
 4 (23–24), both Humean skepticism and Calvinist faith involve a similar toggling
 5 between willed and unwilled belief, whether between predestination and free will
 6 or between philosophical skepticism and belief in matters of fact.

7 Arriving at this position, in which belief in matters of fact coexists with an
 8 appreciation of their contingency, shifts the skeptic toward the insight that the
 9 everyday instances of cause and effect upon which life depends might be a spec-
 10 tacular series of remarkable coincidences: vertiginous suspense gives way to awed
 11 amazement when the skeptic can be at once immersed in the everyday and
 12 appreciate the good fortune of its consistency. As Hume puts it in the *Enquiry*, the
 13 mysterious correspondence between perceptions and objects provides “ample
 14 subject” for “wonder and admiration” (36). In Smith’s terms, *wonder* at a break in
 15 the expected “chain of events” gives way to *admiration* at the “connecting chain”
 16 (41–42). Philosophy begins in doubtful wonder, then, and concludes in wondering
 17 admiration or recognition. This insight rescues Hume from extreme skepticism;
 18 no longer marooned by doubts, the skeptic is able to wonder *at* the world while
 19 being *in* it.

20 The point that there are similarities between the characteristics that Hume
 21 attributes to his own philosophy and those that he attributes to miracle narratives is
 22 not a new one. Adela Pinch has pointed out that both “gain people’s credibility
 23 because the stories raise ‘agreeable’ emotions” (20). I submit that the correspon-
 24 dence is even more pronounced and that Hume’s philosophy aims not just to
 25 produce “agreeable emotions” but “*surprise* and *wonder*” specifically. I have already
 26 suggested that Hume’s ambiguous use of the figure of the shipwreck and of the
 27 Puritan spiritual autobiographical mode suspend the reader between competing
 28 interpretations, cultivating that hesitation that Smith terms “wonder.” Wonder is
 29 also often defined in the eighteenth century as an emotional response to novelty
 30 (see, e.g., Kames 258–59). Early reviews of Hume’s *Treatise* note his “Novel Sort of
 31 Diction” and remark that “[t]hose who demand the new will find satisfaction here”
 32 (qtd. in Mossner 120, 131). What reviewers at the time regarded as the gratuitous
 33 shock value of Hume’s philosophy can be understood as a rhetorical strategy for
 34 recruiting readers’ attention by producing wonder.¹⁸

35 Wonder results not only from skepticism’s style but also from its substance. As
 36 Pinch observes, Hume defines the feeling elicited in the reader of George Berkeley’s
 37 works as “that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the
 38 result of scepticism” (*Enquiry* 107; see Pinch 20). Hume’s characterization of this
 39 sentiment evokes Smith’s characterization of wonder as “fluctuation . . . uncertain
 40 and undetermined thought” (39). Hume’s account of reading Berkeley, then, sug-
 41 gests that the unruly feelings that skepticism produces in the reader—like those
 42 experienced by the skeptical philosopher himself—resemble wonder, the emotion
 43 that Hume says miracle narratives elicit.

44
 45 ¹⁸ On wonder’s association with a heightened state of attention, see René Descartes 362 and Henry
 46 Home Kames 269–70.

Imminent Revelations

But what do the feelings supposedly elicited by skeptical philosophy have to do with fiction? Pinch addresses this question when she wonders, “[M]ight the vertigo of skeptical demystification be as narcissistically gratifying as incredible stories?” (20). As Pinch’s question implies, epistemological doubt arguably traffics in the same sensations as the period’s fiction. Just as skeptical demystification gratifies the philosopher (and by extension, his or her reader) with the self-satisfaction of enlightenment, so, Hume suggests, the skeptic via miracle narratives gains a “pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.” By way of example, Hume observes: “With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travelers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners?” (*Enquiry* 78). Hume cites the popularity of travel narrative, the very genre into which he inserts himself in the conclusion to book 1 of the *Treatise*, as illustrating the insatiable appetite for wonder. One might speculate that Hume is here subtly distancing the *Enquiry* from the *Treatise*’s extravagant rhetoric. However, Hume does not censure either the suppliers or the consumers of such secular wonders, for the very next sentence qualifies the circumstances in which wonder is dangerous: “But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense,” because narratees of religious miracle narratives “renounce” “what judgment they have” (*Enquiry* 78–79). By contrast, the “love of wonder” that the “relations of wonderful adventures” in the *Treatise* and *Crusoe* both stimulate and fulfill depends upon readers not renouncing but assuming responsibility for their capacity for judgment. By dint of being only a virtual miracle, the marvelous satisfies the love of wonder while safeguarding common sense.

The Humean relationship between miracle narratives and wonder that provides a template for self-conscious faith in matters of fact also provides a paradigm for suspended disbelief in fiction. In claiming this, I am asserting a kinship between three unlikely relatives: the seventeenth-century Calvinist doctrine of special providence; Hume’s Enlightenment skepticism; and the doctrine of “willing suspension of disbelief” as coined by Coleridge.¹⁹ Both the Calvinist attitude to miracles and Humean skepticism involve a proto-willing suspension of disbelief. Neither seventeenth-century Puritan theology nor Hume’s philosophy sanctions belief in miracles, albeit for completely different reasons. Nevertheless, both condone reattaching the “surprise and wonder” associated with miracles to more appropriate objects. For Hume, those objects are the regular laws of nature reconceived as a spectacular series of coincidences; for Protestant theology, those objects are “special providences” which, suggests seventeenth-century theologian William Ames, may be “called a Miracle” “by a metonymy of the effect” (42). The world’s regular operation may not be a miracle, but by this logic it may be “called a Miracle”—viewed *as if* it were miraculous—by virtue of the wonder—the

¹⁹ On skepticism’s role in the willing suspension of disbelief, see Thomas McFarland 141, 143 and Gallagher 346.

1 “effect”—it produces.²⁰ As Alexandra Walsham sums up the Calvinist attitude to
2 prodigies, “Sometimes the best course of action was a willing suspension of dis-
3 belief” (178).

4 Defoe’s fiction encourages an “as if” belief congruent with both the doctrine of
5 special providence and Hume’s critique of induction. My position in observing a
6 congruency between Defoe’s novel and the Humean critique of induction presents
7 an alternative to the recent argument that early eighteenth-century novels conspire
8 to shield their readers from the “Humean Real” (Molesworth 50–51). While Hume
9 indeed argues that “fancy” shields us from the real, he also makes clear that
10 renouncing fancy and confronting the real is not an option; indeed, as the con-
11 clusion to book 1 demonstrates, the real can be apprehended only via fancy—that
12 is, in the form of storms, shipwreck, and monsters. Such language suggests that if
13 the Humean real is “terrible,” it is terrible in the way of the sublime—that is to say,
14 vertiginously thrilling (Molesworth 171). This confrontation with the real—or
15 fancy’s version of the real—is certainly the climax of Hume’s narrative but not the
16 whole story, as we have seen, which concludes with the journey back from the brink
17 to the real world that constitutes Hume’s mitigated skepticism.

18 Eighteenth-century fiction shares this epistemology of mitigated skepticism, at
19 once finding terror in life’s randomness and wonder in life’s coincidences, apparent
20 in *Crusoe’s* oscillation between the sublime terror of the random footprint—the
21 impression without a discernible cause—and the wonder of the sprouting corn.
22 Like the *Treatise*, *Crusoe’s* plot prepares its reader to be “surprised by an actual
23 world” by cramming improbable events between its covers; as the title page boasts,
24 the narrative concerns not only the “strange surprizing” account of how Crusoe
25 was marooned but also the account of how he was “as strangely delivered by
26 Pyrates” (*Crusoe* 1). Shipwreck, cannibals, pirates—the narrative’s succession of
27 improbable events resembles a “whole collection of wonders” or “chain of won-
28 ders,” as Crusoe puts it (203, 15). In this respect, *Crusoe* embodies what Jesse
29 Molesworth calls “Humean verisimilitude”—the idea that the past is not a reliable
30 guide to the future—except insofar as *Crusoe’s* plot suggests that wonders will
31 never cease (Molesworth 113). And yet, as generations of readers have noticed, its
32 succession of wonders notwithstanding, the book can also be formulaic, repetitive,
33 boring. In this way, Defoe’s fiction suspends its reader, as does Hume’s skepticism,
34 between reflective uncertainty and habitual assent.

35 At other times, *Crusoe’s* juxtaposition of the exotic and the banal works to make
36 the banal wondrous rather than boring. In achieving this effect, the novel harnesses
37 the perspective cultivated by the tradition of special providences that told people to
38 register both “the *Extraordinary*, as well as the *Ordinary* stated Signs of God’s Pre-
39 sence,” as Increase Mather puts it (9). While critics have often discussed provi-
40 dence’s impact on the eighteenth-century novel in terms of general providence’s
41 pressure to produce “morally probable” stories—that is, narratives consistent with
42 God’s grand design—the effect I am isolating here, on the contrary, celebrates
43

44 ²⁰ On wonder’s vexed role in authenticating miracles, see James A. Herrick 93–96, chap. 8. For
45 contemporary discussions, see Thomas Hobbes 293, R.B., Increase Mather 9–11, and Defoe,
46 *System of Magick*.

particularity, including both extraordinary phenomena *and* ordinary phenomena made extraordinary by cultivating the Puritan habit of reapprehending the banal as a source of wonder.²¹ Within such a context, *Crusoe's* prolonged attention to the quotidian is consistent with its promise to deliver the strange and surprising.²² *Crusoe* offers both strange, surprising adventures and ordinary life made strange through literary devices—for example, the technique that Watt calls “delayed decoding”—delaying the identification of the described object—which allows Defoe to narrate Crusoe’s wonder at the sprouting corn in a way that replicates the surprise for the reader (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 175). Such devices allow the reader to regard the novel’s representations of ordinary events—not just the corn but the whole fabric of modern life, isolated and decontextualized on Crusoe’s island—as if they were real and as if they were rare, just as Crusoe comes to regard the corn “as if it had been miraculous” (*Crusoe* 63–64).

Defoe’s and Hume’s reinvention of the real as an object of wonder is part of a bigger story—one that includes how eighteenth-century critics conceptualize the marvelous and the probable as part of a spectrum rather than as binary opposites and theorize how narrative might produce the pleasures of wonder and recognition simultaneously.²³ Generic distinctions between realism and the marvelous lose their usefulness in a period that finds reality to be apparitional (in which case apparition narratives might be more realist than matter-of-fact ones) and that argues that the marvelous may become credible through its grounding in concrete detail.²⁴ For Defoe, Hume, and other eighteenth-century writers, to enchant the real is not to give up on enlightenment but rather to insist upon the paradox that “to understand less, to be ingenuous, to remain stupefied: these are reactions that may lead us to see more” (Ginzburg 13). It is to insist, that is to say, on an enlightenment that inheres in the suspension of knowing, a suspension that the estrangement effect of rendering the real marvelous makes possible. The pull in the early eighteenth century at once toward skepticism, toward probabilistic knowledge, and toward providential belief, allows this suspension and therefore this form of enchantment to flourish in multiple sites. In such enchanted moments, the real’s virtual qualities become a source less of epistemological anxiety and more emphatically of aesthetic pleasure. Instead of understanding skepticism’s relationship to belief as one of subtraction, the account I have offered here insists upon skepticism’s addition of “*pleasurable* doubt to the Calvinist co-ordinates” (Manning 44). In Defoe’s and Hume’s narratives, we encounter the precursors to our own slippery sensibilities—the “ironist’s faith” or the “modernist’s vertiginous sense of contingency”—as well as the insight that the invented narratives that tell of such

²¹ On general providence and eighteenth-century novels, see Lennard J. Davis 112–13. On the banal as a source of wonder, see Starr 18 and Hunter 76.

²² For a different view, see Franco Moretti 373.

²³ On wonder as a spectrum, see Johann Jacob Breitinger 1:129 and Kames 258–72. On inducing the poetic sensations of wonder and recognition simultaneously, see Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten 55.

²⁴ On the latter point, see Breitinger 1:425–26.

1 feelings are also their richest source (Gordon 655). Precisely by exploiting the
 2 power of words on a printed page to both uncannily simulate and unnervingly
 3 undermine a sense of the real—both to enchant and to disenchant—these narra-
 4 tives do not merely recount but also produce the real as a source of wonder.

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