

**Fiction and History:
Conflicts over an Invisible Border in Early Modern Period**

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The role and the legitimacy of fiction during the 16th and 17th century sparked an intense debate. Numerous indications suggest that indifference about the mixing of exact history and imaginary facts becomes a more and more dated attitude at the end of 16th century.

I will examine three different cases: an epic by Luis de Zapata, *Carlo famoso* (1566), *The Agatonphile* by Jean-Pierre Camus (1620) and Gilles Ménage's annotations of Tasso's *Aminta*. The question of distinguishing fact from fiction in these works appears as particularly urgent and interacts with interpretation on several levels. This question asks that one identify, in more or less explicit ways, the criteria of the fictitious in the texts; furthermore, all three authors would like to impose on their readers a proper interpretation of their work, or the work of Tasso in the case of Ménage. What are the motivations, the conceptual means and the results of these three authors' attempts to highlight the status of their work, and consequently, the very nature of fiction?

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The role and the legitimacy of fiction during the 16th and 17th century sparked an intense debate. The debates concerned the relationship between fiction and history and their competing claims to knowledge and truth. For the most part, historical discourse held the privileged position. Yet, the relationship between fiction, knowledge, and truth are brought up again and again in the judgment of poetic fables. Here the debate does not oppose fact and fiction, history and poetry, as two distinct modes of representation (Duprat 2004 and 2009). Rather, in the

Renaissance, poetic theorists simply envision these poles in terms of rhetorical technique, because they lacked a conception of fiction as invention and creation. This explains the long competition of history and fable and their inevitable and long-standing overlap (Weinberg, 1961: 13-16; Lavocat 2016 : 101-110).

However, numerous indications suggest that indifference about the mixing of exact history and imaginary facts becomes a more and more dated attitude at the end of 16th century (Nelson, 1969 and 1973). Edward Riley submits that a certain anxiety about the distinction between true and false, real and imaginary, becomes evident in all fields of knowledge, particularly in theology (the council of Milan bans the use of apocryphal gospels in 1565) and historiography: Joseph Scaliger and Isaac Casaubon try to purge history of ancient and modern forgeries (Grafton 2007: 78). The work of Cervantes marks the appearance, in new terms, of a concern for distinguishing true from false and history from fiction. In *El colloquio de los Perros*, is it not said that that mixing truth and falsehood is a specialty of the devil?

There is a gap then, in this period, between poetic doctrine and the debates raging in other domains of knowledge, and also appearing in the poetics works themselves. I will examine three different cases: an epic by Luis de Zapata, *Carlo famoso* (1566), the *Agatonphile* by Jean-Pierre Camus (1620) and Ménage's annotations of Tasso's *Aminta*. The question of distinguishing fact from fiction in these works appears as particularly urgent and interacts with interpretation on several levels. This question asks that one identify, in more or less explicit ways, the criteria of the fictitious in the texts; furthermore, all three authors would like to impose on their readers a proper interpretation of their work, or the work of Tasso in the case of Ménage.

What are the motivations, the conceptual means and the results of these three authors' attempts to highlight the status of their work, and consequently, the very

nature of fiction? Here I will defend the hypothesis that these works serve as a sort of experimental grounds for their own authors, who feel the intellectual, religious, and moral necessity to trace clear boundaries between fact and fiction; but these attempts show this undertaking to be difficult if not impossible, and source of misunderstandings (as the works of Zapata and Camus show). This failure is perhaps the condition of a conciliation: in Ménage's interpretation of Tasso's *Aminta*, fiction, in the process of defining and legitimizing itself, is defined as a space that permits the combination of history and fable. This reasoned articulation will take many different forms in the seventeenth century.

I Luis de Zapata's odd and dangerous attempt to distinguish fact and fiction

The project of Luis de Zapata y Chavas has been judged bizarre and naïve by the rare contemporary critics who mention it (E. C. Riley in 1962 and W. Nelson 1969). This project clearly reveals the appearance of new concerns. In the preface of *Carlo famoso*, an epic in 50 cantos, the printer (who is without a doubt the author himself), explains at length his blend of fact and fiction that compose the work. He justifies himself by invoking tradition (“for the ancient poets and many historians did the same thing”)¹; then by the recreational value of fiction and finally with fiction's exemplary scope using an interesting argument based on possibility and a kind of counterfactual reasoning; celebrating great princes by attributing imaginary exploits to them is to imply that they would have accomplished these deeds had they been given the opportunity, under other circumstances, including fantastical ones.

¹ “Pues los Poetas antiguos y muchos historiadores han usado lo semejante” El Impresor al Lector, *Carlo Famoso*, Juan Mey, 1566 [without page numbers]

But this argument is not a sufficient defense, in the eyes of the author himself, against potential attacks from badmouths and “delicate minds.”² The author thus highlights for them each fictional passage with a mark in the margin (an asterisks) “even though they are rather obvious, in order for the blind and the jealous to be able to lay their hands upon them [the fictional passages]”³

The author therefore intends to prevent a conflict of interpretation that would be created in his opinion by ignorance and bad faith. He tries to anticipate a scruple that he presents as modern and unjustified, since the difference between history and fiction is (according to him) self-evident.

It is apparently impossible to know if the tagging of *Carlo famoso* with explicit markers of fiction happened after the work was written or if the opposition between history and fiction was present and operating at the moment of composition. In fact, everything happens as if the author had voluntarily accentuated the two poles, factual and fictitious, in the writing of his epic. On one hand *Carlo famoso* resembles a chronicle of Charles the fifth’s life from 1522 to 1558 with each year indicated at the head of the passage dedicated to it; on the other hand, the fiction is highlighted by thematic choices that seem especially to underline the fictitious nature of the accounts. For instance, as early as the first canto, asterisks surround a passage where Charles V while landing in England sees four satyrs chasing a deer (Stanzas 46-50). The poetic possibility, contrary to the one Ronsard postulates in 1572 in the preface to *La Franciade*, is not based on the idea of believability. Contrary to Ronsard, Zapata is an admirer of Ariosto, and he does not hold back from including, between asterisks, aerial voyages, enchanted castles, and battles with fantastical monsters.

² “Los ingenios tan delicados”, *Ibid.*

³ “ Va puesta en cada fiction esta señal * en la margen donde comienza y acaba para que aun que de suyo se vian, los ciegos, o de ingenio, o de embibia, las toquen assi con la mano”.

The process however introduces as much confusion as it resolves. First of all, especially in the first cantos, the markers that indicate the end of a fictional passage are sometimes omitted, and one realizes that it's impossible to add them in the author's place where they are missing. In fact, the understanding of criteria that determined if Zapata's passages were fictional is rather difficult. The criteria are sometimes referential, as we have already seen (satyrs do not exist). The criteria are at times enunciative (or propositional): outside the fictional markers a hermit explains to Charles V that the English population is descended from a cross between humans and satyrs, but he qualifies this information as an "abominable tale:" this proposition designated as false is not then fictional. The criteria are at times semantic and rhetorical: the battle between Antonio de Fonseca and a horrible multi-headed monster (in Canto V) happens outside fictional markers because the monster is an allegory for the plebs. The criteria are sometimes based on alethic properties of modality and related to a system of belief; in a storm the appearance of a sign in the sky (a man holding a dove) is designated as fiction; but Charles V's prayer that saves the vessel immediately afterwards is not. These competing and overlapping criteria sometimes make the tagging nearly incomprehensible and certainly dangerous. The prophecy of Charles V's birth and the ode praising the emperor from the inside of the magical cave of Salamanca (canto VI) appears inside two asterisks, markers of fiction. Why hasn't the author considered this an allegory, like the battle with the plebian monster? In another Canto (II), how are we to interpret the fact that the hyperbolic feelings of love the emperor feels for a lady of the English court appear between asterisks? Does the lady not exist, or the sentiments of the hero?

Luis de Zapata's project was in any case a resounding failure and even a personal disaster. The day of the publication of *Carlo famoso*, which he had published at his own expense and dedicated to Philip II, he was arrested by order

of the king, and locked in a fortress (Segura de Sierra). Then he was confined to his home until the end of his life. It is highly probable that his book was responsible for his disgrace. Zapata was one of Spain's elite, his father and grandfather had been heroes under the imperial crown; he had himself entered into the service of Phillip II at a very young age. A. Sanchez Jimenez has proposed that his diatribes against the avarice of princes, in imitation of Ariosto, could have been unsettling (Sanchez Jimenez, 2006). But it is also likely, that calling fiction a large part of the discourse by and about Charles V and his conquests was not well received.

Twenty-five years later, Louis de Zapata returns in another form to the difference between fact and fiction. In his *Miscelánea*⁴, he multiplies the number of anecdotes about the theme of confusing lies, inventions, fables, and truth⁵. In an interesting chapter dedicated to poets' errors, he expresses a liberal conception of believability (we would be able to believe in Pegasus, but not that he only had one wing). As so like many others before and after him, he evaluates with indulgence the anachronism of Dido and Aeneas' encounter⁶. Comparing his fate to Ariosto's⁷, Zapata expresses a perfect incomprehension as to why his major work was a failure, composed according to him for the glory of his king and of Spain following the example of *Amadis*!

⁴ Since 1592, at the age of 66, Zapata began to write his *Miscelánea*. He also translated Horace's *Ars Poetica* and wrote several treatises about hunting.

⁵ As indicated by the following subtitles (*Miscelánea de Zapata*, 1859): « De cosas que parecen mentira y son verdad » p. 63 ; « De invenciones engañosas » p. 440, 478 ; « De que hay tal engañar come con la verdad » ; p. 347 ; « De Disimulación y fingimento », p. 112.

⁶ See for example Lodovico Castelvetro, 1570: 104v. For an overview on this topic, see Lavocat (to appear).

⁷ On 1522, Alfonso I of Este stopped paying Ariosto his usual pension (perhaps because of a conflict concerning a heritage). He obliged him to accept the function of governor of Garfagnana, a remote and mountainous place. Ariosto complained a lot of what he considered as an exile, and renounced his position three years later.

Luis de Zapata's case seems to be that of an author who expresses the necessity to distinguish between history and fable. But this distinction goes against his Romanesque and chivalric culture, steeped in *Orlando furioso* and the Spanish novels that Don Quijote so enjoyed. Zapata's audience, and in particular the royal dedicatee, probably did not appreciate an attempt at clarification that certainly generated misunderstandings and errors of interpretation.

II Jean-Pierre Camus: in desperate search of a boundary

A half a century later, Jean-Pierre Camus, bishop of Bellay, waged an interminable battle against his real and imagined enemies, against his frivolous readers and without a doubt against himself. The abundant para-text of his excessive work⁸ attempts essentially to confirm that the stories written by him are not novels. In order to convince his readers, Camus strives to make a distinction between fact and fiction and proclaims that there is a boundary. He returns to this discussion so many times that one might suppose that each work for him demanded a repeated demonstration. Here I will limit my discussion to the material that follows the *Agatonphile* (1620) in a text called "Eloge des histoires devotes." ("Praise of devout stories"). Differing from Luis de Zapata, he does not divide his text with markers of fiction, but he enumerates in detail the status of the main episodes of *Agatonphile*. He insists on a distinction between what is factual and what is "parabolic", that is to say, what is not factual but what is nevertheless true from a moral perspective:

⁸ Camus wrote approximately sixty-five works. Among them twenty-six novels can be found; several of them of more than a thousand pages (*Iphigène* for instance).

Moreover, I gave myself the licence not only Christian, but religious and devout to parabolize, in such a way that what is not historical is parabolic; therefore there is nothing in this work that is not true, or according to the facts, or through allegory and morality, and from which one cannot but borrow instruction.⁹

Camus does not use the word “fiction,” too undervalued in his eyes, for his own works; but he admits the existence of “thousands of little inventions” beyond the non-factual “parabolic” (non-existent but true from a moral point of view) material. He does not detail these inventions because (he argues) they are not important. They simply serve to assure a sort of narrative and stylistic unity (which is no small matter!) without, according to him, changing the status of the work.

This effort at classification (that Camus compares to a dissection or taking apart a clock) rubs up against some obvious difficulties. Camus puts the episodes inspired by sacred history, those taken from stories of Roman martyrs or from the Annals of Baronius for instance, in the factual category. But he recognizes that he took the information about his heroes as martyrs from a less reliable source. The story of another character is inspired by a contemporary anecdote and Camus does not say where he learned about it. The different ways in which the original material has been transformed are described with a certain precision (transposing from another time, analogies, or even counter-factual narrative): but among these operations, how do we determine at what point of metamorphosis we flip from the factual to something we must call fictitious? In this 1620 work, Camus demonstrates a certain epistemological optimism about the possibility of separating “the seed from the straw,” that is to say “what is actually true and what is only true through allegory:” this distinction clearly marks a preference for truth by correspondence, in opposition to an older and competing conception of truth

⁹ « Or outre cela je me suis donné cette licence non seulement chrestienne, mais religieuse et dévoute, de paraboliser de sorte que ce qui n'est pas historique est parabolique, si qu'il n'y a rien en tout le cours de cette œuvre qui ne soit vray, soit en fait, soit en allégorie ou moralité, & dont on ne puisse tirer de l'instruction » “Eloge des histoires devotes”, *Agathonphile*, 1620: 852- 853.

through allegory. In other passages, Camus explicitly questions the value of allegory. But he tries still at this point, temporarily, to combine the ancient and modern conceptions of truth. Several years later in 1625, in the preface to the most Romanesque and the longest of his works, *Iphigene*, Camus considers separating the true facts from the fictitious material in which they are enveloped to be as difficult as separating the vines in a vineyard that produce white grapes from the ones that produce red grapes¹⁰. There is then an essential ontological difference between fact and fiction, but woven together in the strings of discourse (another of Camus's favorite metaphors), they are indistinguishable. Camus does not at all take this difficulty lightly since moral and religious values are for him based on accuracy. His awareness of this becomes more apparent with time. In addition, he sees himself surrounded by censors obsessed with authenticity and historical accuracy ready to weigh and judge out each one of his sentences¹¹.

The risk of confusion becomes greater as well because the period favors and perhaps even generates it. Religious schism and a form of skepticism about history intervene directly and make it impossible for Camus to be sure that his readers will correctly interpret his referential and "parabolic" work. In fact, if Protestants continue to believe in the fable of the female pope Jane, as many good historians before them had done, how can you prevent readers from taking things that are true to be fables?¹² Furthermore, how can you believe historians who base their stories on rumors and hearsay?

¹⁰ "Il seroit aussi malaisé de les trier, que de séparer dans une vigne confusément plantée les seps qui produisent les raisins blancs, d'avecque ceux qui les font noirs." "Avertissement au lecteur", *Iphigène*, 1625, without page numbers.

¹¹ "Il y a des gens de si fascheuse humeur, qu'aussi tost qu'une Histoire a, pour la portée de leurs esprits, une face trop estrange, pour eux c'est une fable, sans considérer qu'il y a mille choses que nous voyons tous les jours dont nous ne pouvons rendre de raison". *Ibid.*

¹² "Cette fable de la papesse Jeanne dont le docte & élégant Florimond de Remond a si clairement découvert l'imposture, a passé pour Histoire en la créance de plusieurs Historiens d'ailleurs assez graves & fideles. Et l'heresie qui se corrompt en ce qu'elle sçait [...] et qui blaspheme en ce qu'elle

In Zapata as in Camus, the effort to distinguish fact from fiction is inextricably linked to a process of self-justification. The two authors explicitly attempt to counter erroneous and bad faith interpretations. The stakes are more dramatic and of a religious nature for Camus, and the conception of fiction as invention is much more positive for the Spaniard. Camus, despite a proclaimed duality, is more inclined to see the difference between fact and fiction in terms of degrees when examining his own process of creation. He seems to have an intuition about the absence of internal criteria for fact and fiction, all the more so since, in opposition to the Spaniard, he does not make use of real proper names or the fantastical register. But he doesn't give up: he tried to counter fatally erroneous interpretations by the reader through an abundance of commentary (in the paratext) and through sacrificing the Romanesque (after 1625 he no longer writes long stories). His anxiety results also from the coexistence, which no longer seems self-evident, of two competing systems of truth: the truth as correspondence with an actual fact and the truth as allegory, the latter being discredited. For Zapata, there are first and foremost fictitious objects, whereas for Camus, there are first and foremost discursive objects whose relation to fact is poorly founded and lacks visibility. In announcing in 1632 that his brief stories must be defined as "histories parabled" or "parables historicized," he seems to have found a mode of compromise in a conflict that he himself had constantly sparked and dramatized. But the vehemence of tone in this preface, as in other later texts, suggests that he was not himself satisfied with this compromise.

The necessity to create a distinction between fact and fiction was at any rate imposed on the two authors because of a new intellectual context that brought both

ignore [...] ne peut estre, quoy que vaincue par mille preuves, persuadée que cette fausse papesse qui n'est qu'un fantosme, n'ait esté assise en un Siege qui est le but de leurs haines". *Ibid.*

of them to consider their work as hybrid. One could say that their efforts, in different ways, were not crowned by success.

III Ménage's commentaries on Tasso's *Aminta* : Arcadia as fiction

But there is another way of thinking about the relationship between fact from fiction in the 17th century; not a relationship of hybrids or necessary though impossible boundaries, rather a relationship based on combination, or even conciliation. I will try to show that combination goes hand and hand with the progressive affirmation of the legitimacy and even the autonomy of fiction.

Gilles Ménage, specialist in interpretation (his analysis of one of Petrarch's lines won him admission to the Crusca Academy in 1654)¹³ was a tireless polemicist. But none of the great quarrels that marked his career¹⁴ are concerned with the opposition between poetry and history or between fact and fiction. He takes up this distinction however in his Italian commentary on Tasso's *Aminta* when relating his disagreement with an unnamed friend about the interpretation of one of the passages in the play¹⁵.

Ménage inserts the controversy in his annotation of the line "Di questo nobil fiume," the 178th line in act one scene one. It is highly significant that the note is attached to this line when the controversy is over the following lines: "He [Aminta] is the son of Silvano, who is the son of Pan, the great god of the shepherds."¹⁶ The connection made between the verses may underline the fact that the status of the characters is in the eyes of Ménage is linked to the status of place.

¹³ On Ménage's career, see Leroy Turcan, 1991 ; about his relationships with French and Italian academies, Leroy-Turcan 1994.

¹⁴ See E. Samfiresco, 1902.

¹⁵ There is no other allusion to this debate in Ménage's work. here is no reason to believe that it is fictitious.

¹⁶ "Ed egli e figlio di Silvano, à cui / Pane fu Padre, il gran Dio de Pastori" *Aminta*, I, 1, 179-180.

The argument of Ménéage's anonymous opponent goes as follows: the setting of the fiction is Arcadia -- a fantastical place that is part of the past prior to Christ's birth. The Death of Christ in fact coincides with the death of Pan, as everyone in the 17th century was well aware¹⁷. Pan then could not have fathered Silvano who himself fathered Aminta, the eponymous pastoral hero, unless it was before the beginning of Christianity.

This interpretation emerges from a conception of the past that is mixed up with the fantastical, a conception very similar to the one Paul Veyne describes for the ancient Greeks (a conception that he finds operating still in Etienne Pasquier), which relies on a "secret plurality of worlds." (1983: 27).

Ménéage, however, tries to show with a number of citations supporting him, that the pastoral setting is referential: he enumerates the allusions in the play to the contemporary setting, to the city of Ferrara and to Tasso himself. This is precisely the reason that the note is attached to a phrase concerning the place ("questo nobil fiume." *Aminta* I, 1, 178). The deictic ("questo") in Ménéage's perspective is metaleptic¹⁸, it designates the actual place of the scene; furthermore Ménéage regrets that Tasso has allowed for the creation of an ambiguity by not calling the river in question by its real name, the Po.

Ménéage thus takes into account the objection of his opponent and responds to it: these allusions, according to the one who would like to situate the scene in a mythical past, are anticipations and prolepses. Ménéage's response is normative: even though the Virgilian anachronism concerning the encounter of Dido and Aeneas might be admissible, the mixed up temporality that this anticipation would create would be intolerable, and Tasso therefore would not practice such anticipation. Moreover, he reaffirms the accuracy of his interpretation by simply

¹⁷ Eusebius is the first who associated the legend of the death of Pan (told by Plutarch) with the death of Jesus-Christ (*Praeparatio Evangelica*, V-18, 13). See Borgeaud 1984 and Lavocat, 2005.

¹⁸ In the sense of Genette (1972) as a transgression of the borders of fiction.

declaring that his reading is obvious¹⁹. But the process that his opponent points out is frequently seen in the form of prophecies in *Orlando Furioso* as well as in *Jerusalem liberata*.

How then can one justify the presence of mythological creatures in this contemporary context? It is in effect here that the constructive power of fiction lies: Tasso “pretended” that there were mythical Gods and satyrs in the Italy of his day, just like Sannazar had done before him²⁰. And as for the argument about the beginning of the Christian era putting an end to the births of these creatures, Ménages bluntly dismisses it. One must, he writes, “believe like a Christian and write like a poet.”²¹ Ménage does not judge one way or the other concerning the real existence in the past of Pan and satyrs. He even makes in this regard a curiously convoluted statement: “As for the idea that the mythical gods are said to no longer procreate, this is true from a Christian perspective, but not from a poetic perspective.” How could a Christian truth concern mythical creatures of whom knowledge is described by the opinion (“are said”; “sono stimati”)? In the following note, dedicated in fact to Pan, Ménage dispenses dismissively with the enumeration of the allegorical qualities of the god of the shepherds under the pretext that this material is too well known. The Gods of antiquity seem to have fallen definitively into the fantastical register. They allow for the clear enunciation of the existence of a “poetic truth” that does not draw its legitimacy from any transcendence and that is not grounded in believability either.

¹⁹ « ma cio che'n questa pastorale si legge del sito di Ferrara, con un' infinità d'altre cose simili, non lascia luogo di dubitare ». *Aminta favola boscareccia di Torquato Tasso con le annotazioni d'Egidio Menagio*, 1655: 142.

²⁰ “Nè dubito punto, ch'el Tasso non habbia potuto fingere i Dei favolosi, ed i Satiri nell'Italia a' suoi tempi, si come inanzi à lui nella sua Arcadia fece il Sannazaro, dove in piu luoghi parla, e della sua casa, e de' suoi antenati, anzi di se stesso, chiamandosi col suo proprio nome”, *Ibid.*

²¹ “benche si debba credere da Christiano, si dee scriver da poeta”, *Ibid.*

In this manner, the space denoted by Tasso's play is in the eyes of Ménéage at the same time more historical and more fictional than for his opponent who displaced it into a fantastical past of uncertain stature. *Aminta*, and perhaps the pastoral in general (at any rate Sannazar's *Arcadia*²²), refers to the contemporary world. Ménéage is not at all using a specialized knowledge to decipher a coded message, he is not trying to elaborate a system of keys, like Huet will do for instance with *The Astrée*²³. Abundant in citations, he confines himself to the letter of the text and calls on what he considers to be easily sharable and obvious ideas. He does not try to separate fact from fiction, but he considers fictional space to be a world populated by characters with a heterogeneous referential status. The gods of fable are not only indicators of fiction (as in Zapata); in transforming the contemporary world into pastoral, they are the operators of fiction. Did they not after all engender the eponymous hero of the play?

This solution is temporary: mythical creatures are going to disappear from the stage and the status of fictional characters, at least in the novel, is going to become more homogenous. This solution is also not the majority position in the critical discourse of the age. In the *Dialogue de la lecture des vieux romans* (written around 1646 or 1647)²⁴ Chapelain, who stages a controversy with Ménéage and Sarasin about *Lancelot*, proposes another model. The reconciliation of history and fiction happens because old novels render an account of the language and the morals of the past in a more interesting and more particular way than annals and chronicles. Another conception of poetic truth is added to the philological and historical perspective. This other perspective is founded on believability, which is

²² Published for the first time in 1504, this work in prose and verses was considered in early modern Europe as the more prestigious reference model of pastoral literature after antiquity.

²³ Pierre-Daniel Huet, author of the important *Traité de l'origine des romans* (1670) also wrote in 1699 the most famous key of the *The Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé (1607-1627). It was included in 1733 in an edition of the novel, which was called "allegorical" because of the presence of keys.

²⁴ On this text, an about its relationship to history and fiction, see Ginzburg, 2006.

the condition necessary for a reasonable reader to adhere to the text and consequently amend his morals: the connection between logic and morality, the new basis of the legitimacy of fiction, was the foundation of classical poetics until the 1660's²⁵. The controversy that Ménége outlines in his annotations of Tasso suggests the possibility of another combination between history, truth, poetry, and fiction. The autonomy of fiction (in particular in relation to the religious domain) is not antagonistic to a referential disposition, something that is certainly a characteristic of the majority of the fictitious worlds during the first half of the 17th century. This autonomy is not inseparable either from believability or morality.

Plenty of other forms of connection between history and fiction are theorized and especially tested in the 17th century and beyond. One of these forms is the one that Calderon exposes in 1670 in the prologue of one of his auto-sacramental works *El verdadero Dios Pan*. Fable, an allegorical character, exposes in this text, under the guidance of sacred history, an allegory of a Pan-Christ. The prologues of several other operas of the 18th century where history, fiction, and fable are disputed and reconciled in the form of allegorical characters propose other arrangements.

In conclusion, I would like to underline a set of examples and references that are repeated from one text to another as if a set of common places about the distinction between fact and fiction had formed. This set includes most notably the anachronism of the encounter between Dido and Aeneas and references to the satyrs and mythological beings. One finds with many authors the idea that the mix of fact and fiction is diabolical but also the idea that the mix of history and fable characterizes ancient texts, for example Homer and the Bible. The distinction

²⁵ As A. Duprat has shown in her different works, in particular in 2009.

between fact and fiction is frequently considered to be at the same time obvious and imperceptible for limited, malevolent, silly, naïve, and heretical minds. One finds as well in Camus, as in Cervantes, the metaphor of trying to separate things (sheep, stems of grapevines, metals, etc.) to represent this barrier that has the reputation of being both ostensible and imperceptible. Camus at times even flirts with the suspicion that the barrier does not exist. The authors of this period are then aware of a question that contemporary theory has not resolved. Furthermore, certain authors of this period express an awareness of the troubling impossibility to control the interpretation of their work, and in particular to pronounce definitively on their work's referential status. The discovery of the reader's disastrous freedom of interpretation, in relation to the religious context of the era, anticipates certain contemporary questions as well.

In the end, the question of the barriers of fiction reveals its complicated stakes much more in and around works of fiction than in poetic treatises. I have tried to show that for these authors the distinction between history and poetry was not simply a rhetorical matter and that this distinction is solidly ripe with conceptual, moral, and religious meaning. The continual overlap and competition in the 17th century of history and poetry does not seem to be the product of an impossibility to distinguish between the two. Rather it seems this competition results from a reasoned attempt in several modes to articulate history and poetry by means of a great variety of different processes: "parable historicized", euhemerism²⁶, novels conceived like historical documents, roman à clef, allegory, fictitious allegations of facts, etc. One traditionally sees these combinations as ways to keep fiction marginalized and to limit its dangers. But we can just as well imagine that we are dealing with many ways of thinking about and experimenting

²⁶ Euhemerism, from the name of the Greek mythographer Euhemere, is an interpretation of ancient mythology, as allegory, exaggeration, alteration of historical events.

with the relationships between fiction, of which we have already a modern definition (that is to say as a product of human invention, an imaginary and non referential universe) and the real world.

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