

définition du fantastique

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definition of the fantastic

Alvaro, the main character of Cazotte's tale *Le Diable Amoureux*, lives for two months with a female being whom he believes to be an evil spirit: the devil or one of his henchmen. The way this being first appeared clearly suggests that she is a representative of the other world. But her specifically human (and, what is more, feminine) behavior, and the real wounds she receives, seem, on the contrary, to prove that she is simply a woman, and a woman in love. When Alvaro asks where she comes from, Biondetta replies: "I am a sylphide by birth, and one of the most powerful among them. . . ." But do sylphides exist? ("I could make nothing of these words," Alvaro continues. "But what could I make of my entire adventure? It all seems a dream, I kept telling myself; but what else is human life? I am dreaming more extravagantly than other men, that is all. . . . What is possible? What is impossible?")

Thus Alvaro hesitates, wonders (and the reader with him) whether what is happening to him is real, if what surrounds him is indeed reality (in which case sylphides exist), or whether it is no more than an illusion, which here assumes the form of a dream. Alvaro is later induced to sleep with

this very woman who *may* be the devil; and, alarmed by this eventuality, he questions himself once more: "Have I been asleep? Is it my fortune that all this has been no more than a dream?" His mother will reflect in the same fashion: "You have dreamed this farm and all its inhabitants." The ambiguity is sustained to the very end of the adventure: reality or dream? truth or illusion?

Which brings us to the very heart of the fantastic. In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination — and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings — with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.

The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary; and the latter deserve more than a mere mention. But we shall postpone their discussion for the last chapter of our study.

Is such a definition at least an original one? We may find it, though formulated differently, in the nineteenth century. First of all, in the work of the Russian philosopher and mystic Vladimir Solovyov: "In the genuine fantastic, there

is always the external and formal possibility of a simple explanation of phenomena, but at the same time this explanation is completely stripped of internal probability." There is an uncanny phenomenon which we can explain in two fashions, by types of natural causes and supernatural causes. The possibility of a hesitation between the two creates the fantastic effect.

Some years later M. R. James, a British author specializing in ghost stories, adopted virtually the same terms: "It is sometimes necessary to keep a loophole for a natural explanation, but I might add that this hole should be small enough to be unusable." Once again, then, two solutions are possible.

Here is a more recent German example: "The hero continually and distinctly feels the contradiction between two worlds, that of the real and that of the fantastic, and is himself amazed by the extraordinary phenomena which surround him" (Olga Riemann). We might extend this list indefinitely. Yet let us note a difference between the first two definitions and the third: in the former, it is the reader who hesitates between the two possibilities; in the latter, it is the character; we shall return to this difference.

It must further be noted that recent French definitions of the fantastic, if they are not identical with ours, do not on the other hand contradict it. We shall give a few examples drawn from the "canonical" texts on the subject. Castex, in *Le Conte Fantastique en France*, writes: "The fantastic... is characterized... by a brutal intrusion of mystery into the context of real life." Louis Vax, in *L'Art et la Littérature Fantastiques*: "The fantastic narrative generally describes men like ourselves, inhabiting the real world, suddenly confronted by the inexplicable." Roger Caillois, in *Au Coeur du Fantastique*: "The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality."

These definitions are all included within the one proposed by the first authors quoted, which already implied the existence

of events of two orders, those of the natural world and those of the supernatural world. But the definitions of Solov'yov, James, et al. indicated further the possibility of supplying two explanations of the supernatural event and, consequently, the fact that *someone* must choose between them. It was therefore more suggestive, richer; and the one we ourselves have given is derived from it. It further emphasizes the differential character of the fantastic (as a dividing line between the uncanny and the marvelous), instead of making it a substance (as Castex, Caillois, et al. do). As a rule, moreover, a genre is always defined in relation to the genres adjacent to it.

But the definition still lacks distinctness, and it is here that we must go further than our predecessors. As has already been noted, they do not specify whether it is the reader or the character who hesitates, nor do they elucidate the nuances of the hesitation. *Le Diable Amoureux* offers insufficient substance for a more extended analysis: here the hesitation occupies us only a moment. We shall therefore turn to another book, written some twenty years later, which permits us to raise more questions; a book which magisterially inaugurates the period of the fantastic narrative, Jan Potocki's *Saragossa Manuscript*.

A series of events is initially related, none of which in isolation contradicts the laws of nature as experience has taught us to recognize them; but their accumulation raises a problem. Alfonso van Worden, the work's hero and narrator, is crossing the mountains of the Sierra Morena. Suddenly his *zagal* (valet) Moschite vanishes; some hours later, the other valet, Lopez, vanishes as well. The local inhabitants assert that the region is haunted by ghosts, those of two bandits who had recently been hanged. Alfonso reaches an abandoned inn and prepares to go to sleep, but at the first stroke of midnight, "a beautiful negress, half naked and bearing a torch in each hand," enters his room and invites him to follow her. She leads him to an underground chamber where he is

received by two young sisters, both lovely and very scantily clad. They offer him food and drink. Alfonso experiences strange sensations, and a doubt is born in his mind: "I no longer knew whether they were women or insidious succubae." They then tell him their story, revealing themselves to be his own cousins. But as the first cock crows, the narrative is broken off; and Alfonso recalls that "as everyone knows, ghosts have power only from midnight till cockcrow."

All this, of course, does not transcend the laws of nature as we know them. At most, one might say that they are strange events, unexpected coincidences. The next development is the decisive one: an event occurs which reason can no longer explain. Alfonso goes to bed, the two sisters join him (or perhaps he only dreams they do), but one thing is certain: when he awakes, he is no longer in a bed, he is no longer in an underground chamber. "I saw the sky. I saw that I was in the open air. . . . I was lying under the gallows of Los Hermanos, and beside me — the bodies of Zoto's two brothers!" Here then is a first supernatural event: two lovely girls have turned into two rotting corpses.

Alfonso is not yet convinced of the existence of supernatural forces: a conviction which would have suppressed all hesitation (and put an end to the fantastic). He looks for a place to spend the night, and comes upon a hermit's cottage; here he encounters a man possessed by the devil, Pascheco, who tells his story, a story which strangely resembles Alfonso's own: Pascheco had slept in the same inn; he had entered an underground chamber and spent the night in a bed with two sisters; the next morning *he* had awakened under the gallows, between two corpses. This similarity puts Alfonso on his guard. Hence he later explains to the hermit that he does not believe in ghosts, and he gives a "natural" explanation of Pascheco's misfortunes. He similarly interprets his own adventures:

I did not doubt that my cousins were women of flesh and blood. I was convinced of this by some emotion more powerful than

all I had been told as to the power of the demons. As to the trick that had been played upon me of placing me under the gallows — I was greatly incensed by it.

So be it — until new developments rekindle Alfonso's doubts. He again encounters his cousins in a cave, and one night, they come to his bed. They are about to remove their chastity belts, but first Alfonso himself must remove the Christian relic he wears around his neck; in place of this object, one of the sisters bestows a braid of her hair. No sooner are the first transports of love over, than the stroke of midnight is heard. . . . Someone enters the cave, drives out the sisters and threatens Alfonso with death, obliging him to drink a cup of some unknown liquid. The next morning Alfonso awakens, of course, under the gallows, beside the corpses; around his neck there is no longer the braid of hair, but in its place a noose. Returning to the inn where he had spent the first night, he suddenly discovers, between the floorboards, the relic taken from him in the cave. "I no longer knew what I was doing. . . . I began to imagine that I had never really left this wretched inn, and that the hermit, the inquisitor [see below] and Zoto's brothers were so many phantoms produced by magic spells." As though to weigh the scale more heavily, he soon meets Pascheco, whom he had glimpsed during his last nocturnal adventure, and who gives him an entirely different version of the incident:

These two young persons, after bestowing certain caresses upon him, removed from around his neck a relic which had encircled it, and from that moment, they lost their beauty in my eyes, and I recognized in them the two hanged men of the valley of Los Hermanos. But the young horseman, still taking them for charming persons, lavished the tenderest endearments upon them. Then one of the hanged men removed the noose from around his neck and placed it around that of the horseman, who thanked him for it by renewed caresses. Finally they closed their curtain, and I do not know what they did then, but I believe it was some hideous sin.

What are we to believe? Alfonso knows for sure that he has spent the night with two lascivious women — but what to make of the awakening under the gallows, what of the rope around his neck, what of the relic in the inn, and what of Pascheco's narrative? Uncertainty and hesitation are at their height, reinforced by the fact that other characters suggest to Alfonso a supernatural explanation of the events. For example, the inquisitor, who will arrest Alfonso and threaten him with torture, asks him: "Do you know two Tunisian princesses? Or, rather, two infamous witches, execrable vampires and demons incarnate?" And later on Rebecca, Alfonso's hostess, will tell him: "We know that they are two female demons whose names are Emina and Zibeddé."

Alone for several days, Alfonso once again finds the forces of reason returning. He seeks a "realistic" explanation for these incidents.

I then recalled the words which had escaped Don Emmanuel de Sa, governor of this city, which made me think that he was not altogether alien to the mysterious existence of the Goméz creatures. It was the governor who had given me my two valets, Lopez and Moschite. I took it into my head that it was upon his orders that they had left me at the disastrous valley of Los Hermanos. My cousins, and Rebecca herself, had often led me to believe that I was being tested. Perhaps at the inn I had been given some drug to put me to sleep, and subsequently nothing was easier than to transport me, in my unconscious state, beneath the fatal gallows. Pascheco might have lost an eye through some other accident than his amorous relations with the two hanged men, and his hideous story might well have been an invention. The hermit who had constantly sought to pluck out the heart of my mystery was doubtless an agent of the Goméz, who wished to test my discretion. Finally Rebecca, her brother, Zoto, and the leader of the Gypsies — perhaps all these people were in league to put my courage to the test.

The uncertainty is not thereby settled: minor incidents will once again incline Alfonso toward a supernatural solution.

Outside his window, he sees two women who appear to be the famous sisters; but when he approaches them, he finds their faces utterly unknown to him. He then reads a satanic tale which so resembles his own story that he admits: "I nearly reached the point of believing that fiends, in order to deceive me, had animated the bodies of the hanged men."

"I nearly reached the point of believing": that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life.

Who hesitates in this story? As we see at once, it is Alfonso — in other words, the hero, the central character. It is Alfonso who, throughout the plot, must choose between two interpretations. But if the reader were informed of the "truth," if he knew which solution to choose, the situation would be quite different. The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated. It must be noted that we have in mind no actual reader, but the role of the reader implicit in the text (just as the narrator's function is implicit in the text). The perception of this implicit reader is given in the text, with the same precision as the movements of the characters.

The reader's hesitation is therefore the first condition of the fantastic. But is it necessary that the reader identify with a particular character, as in *Le Diable Amoureux* and in *The Saragossa Manuscript*? In other words, is it necessary that the hesitation be represented within the work? Most works which fulfill the first condition also satisfy the second. Nonetheless there exist exceptions: for example in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "Véra." Here the reader may question the resurrection of the count's wife, a phenomenon which contradicts the laws of nature but seems to be confirmed by a series of secondary indications. Yet none of the characters

shares this hesitation: neither Count d'Athol, who firmly believes in Véra's second life, nor the old servant Raymond. The reader therefore does not identify with any character, and his hesitation is not represented within the text. We may say that this rule of identification involves an optional condition of the fantastic: the fantastic *may* exist without satisfying this condition; but it will be found that most works of fantastic literature are subject to it.

When the reader emerges from the world of the characters and returns to his own *praxis* (that of a reader) a new danger threatens the fantastic: a danger located on the level of the interpretation of the text. There exist narratives which contain supernatural elements without the reader's ever questioning their nature, for he realizes that he is not to take them literally. If animals speak in a fable, doubt does not trouble the reader's mind: he knows that the words of the text are to be taken in another sense, which we call *allegorical*. The converse situation applies to *poetry*. The poetic text might often be judged fantastic, provided we required poetry to be representative. But the question does not come up. If it is said, for instance, that the "poetic I" soars into space, this is no more than a verbal sequence, to be taken as such, without there being any attempt to go beyond the words to images.

The fantastic implies, then, not only the existence of an uncanny event, which provokes a hesitation in the reader and the hero; but also a kind of reading, which we may for the moment define negatively: it must be neither "poetic" nor "allegorical." If we return now to *The Saragossa Manuscript*, we see that this requirement is fulfilled in both respects. On the one hand, nothing permits us to give, immediately, an allegorical interpretation to the supernatural events described; on the other hand, these events are actually given as such, we are to represent them to ourselves, and not to consider the words which designate them as merely a combination of linguistic units. A remark by Roger Caillois gives us a clue as to this property of the fantastic text:

This kind of image is located at the very heart of the fantastic, halfway between what I have chosen to call infinite images and limited images.... The former seek incoherence as a principle and reject any signification; the latter translate specific texts into symbols for which an appropriate lexicon permits a term-by-term reconversion into corresponding utterances.

We are now in a position to focus and complete our definition of the fantastic. The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work — in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled. Nonetheless, most examples satisfy all three conditions.

How are these three characteristics to take their place within the model of the work as we have articulated it in the preceding chapter? The first condition refers us to the *verbal* aspect of the text, more precisely, to what are called "visions": the fantastic is a particular case of the more general category of the "ambiguous vision." The second condition is more complex: it is linked on the one hand to the *syntactical* aspect, insofar as it implies the existence of formal units which correspond to the characters' estimation of events in the narrative; we might call these units "reactions," as opposed to the "actions" which habitually constitute the argument of the narrative; on the other hand, this second condition refers to the *semantic* aspect, since we are concerned with a rep-

resented theme, that of perception and of its notation. Lastly, the third condition has a more general nature and transcends the division into aspects: here we are concerned with a choice between several modes (and levels) of reading.

We may now regard our definition as sufficiently explicit. In order to justify it fully, let us compare it once again to several other definitions, this time definitions which will permit us to see not how ours resembles them but how it is distinguished from them. From a systematic point of view, we may start in several directions from the word "fantastic."

First of all let us take the meaning which, though rarely articulated, comes to mind straight off (that of the dictionary): in the fantastic texts, the author describes events which are not likely to occur in everyday life. We might indeed characterize such events as *supernatural*, but the supernatural, though a literary category, of course, is not relevant here. We cannot conceive a genre which would regroup all works in which the supernatural intervenes and which would thereby have to accommodate Homer as well as Shakespeare, Cervantes as well as Goethe. The supernatural does not characterize works closely enough, its extension is much too great.

Another endeavor to situate the fantastic, one much more widespread among theoreticians, consists in identifying it with certain reactions of the reader: not the reader implicit in the text, but the actual person holding the book in his hand. Representative of this tendency is H.P. Lovecraft, himself the author of fantastic tales as well as of a theoretical work devoted to the supernatural in literature. For Lovecraft, the criterion of the fantastic is not situated within the work but in the reader's individual experience — and this experience must be fear.

Atmosphere is most important, for the ultimate criterion of authenticity [of the fantastic] is not plot structure but the creation of a specific impression.... Hence we must judge the fantastic tale not so much by the author's intentions and the mechanisms of the plot, but by the emotional intensity it provokes.... A tale is

fantastic if the reader experiences an emotion of profound fear and terror, the presence of unsuspected worlds and powers.

This sentiment of fear or perplexity is often invoked by theoreticians of the fantastic, even if they continue to regard a possible double explanation as the necessary condition of the genre. Thus Peter Penzoldt writes: "With the exception of the fairy tale, all supernatural stories are stories of fear which make us wonder if what is supposed to be mere imagination is not reality after all." Caillois, too, proposes as a "touchstone of the fantastic... the impression of irreducible strangeness."

It is surprising to find such judgments offered by serious critics. If we take their declarations literally — that the sentiment of fear must occur in the reader — we should have to conclude that a work's genre depends on the *sang-froid* of its reader. Nor does the determination of the sentiment of fear in the *characters* offer a better opportunity to delimit the genre. In the first place, fairy tales can be stories of fear, as in the case of Perrault (contrary to Penzoldt's assertion). Moreover, there are certain fantastic narratives from which all terror is absent: texts as diverse as Hoffmann's "Princess Brambilla" and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "Véra." Fear is often linked to the fantastic, but it is not a necessary condition of the genre.

Strange as it seems, efforts have also been made to locate the essence of the fantastic in the *author*. An example of this is to be found in Caillois who, in any case, has no fear of contradictions. Here is how Caillois revives the romantic image of the inspired poet: "The fantastic must have something of the involuntary about it, something submitted to — an interrogation as troubled as it is troublesome, rising suddenly from a darkness which its author was obliged to take just as it came...." Or further: "Once again, the fantastic which does not proceed from a deliberate intention to disconcert but which seems to develop despite the work's author, if not

unknown to him, turns out to be the most persuasive of all." Arguments against this "intentional fallacy" are today too familiar to be reformulated here.

Other attempts at definition deserve still less attention since they could as well be applied to texts which are not fantastic at all. Thus it is not possible to define the fantastic in terms of opposition to the faithful reproduction of reality, or in terms of opposition to naturalism. Nor in the terms used by Marcel Schneider in *La Littérature Fantastique en France*: "The fantastic explores inner space; it sides with the imagination, the anxiety of existence, and the hope of salvation."

The Saragossa Manuscript has furnished us an example of hesitation between the real and (let us say) the *illusory*: we wondered if what we saw was not a trick, or an error of perception. In other words, we did not know what interpretation to give to certain perceptible events. There exists another variety of the fantastic in which the hesitation occurs between the real and the *imaginary*. In the first case, we were uncertain not that the events occurred, but that our understanding of them was correct. In the second case, we wonder if what we believe we perceive is not in fact a product of the imagination: "I have difficulty differentiating what I see with the eyes of reality from what my imagination sees," says one of Achim von Arnim's characters. This "error" may occur for several reasons which we shall examine below; here is a characteristic example of it, in which the confused perception is imputed to madness: E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Princess Brambilla."

Strange and incomprehensible events occur in the life of the poor actor Giglio Fava during the Carnival in Rome. He believes that he has become a prince, has fallen in love with a princess, and has had incredible adventures. Now, most of those around him assure him that nothing of the kind has taken place but that he, Giglio, has gone mad. This is the claim of Signor Pasquale: "Signor Giglio, I know what

has happened to you. All Rome knows as well, you have been forced to leave the theatre because your mind is deranged. . . ." Sometimes Giglio himself doubts his own reason: "He was even ready to think that Signor Pasquale and Maestro Bescapi had been right to believe him a little cracked." Thus Giglio (and the implicit reader) is kept in doubt, uncertain if what surrounds him is or is not the product of his imagination.

This simple and very common procedure may be contrasted with another which appears to be much rarer, and in which madness is utilized once again, but differently, in order to create the necessary ambiguity. Consider Nerval's *Aurélia*: this book, as we know, is the account of certain visions seen by a man during a period of madness. Although the narrative is given in the first person, the *I* apparently comprehends two distinct persons: a character who perceives unknown worlds (and lives in the past), and the narrator who transcribes the former's impressions (he lives in the present). At first glance, the fantastic does not exist here: neither for the former, who regards his visions not as due to madness but as a more lucid image of the world (he is thus in the realm of the marvelous); nor for the latter, who knows that the visions are the product of either madness or dreams, not of reality (from his viewpoint, the narrative is merely uncanny). But the text does not function in just this way, for Nerval recreates the ambiguity at another level, where we did not expect it; and *Aurélia* thus remains within the bounds of the true fantastic after all.

In the first place, the character has not entirely decided what interpretation to give to events. Sometimes he too believes in his own madness, but never to the point of certainty. "I understood, seeing myself among madmen, that hitherto everything had been only illusions. Yet the promises I once attributed to the goddess Isis seemed to turn into a series of ordeals I was destined to undergo." At the same time, the narrator is not sure that everything the character has

experienced results from illusion. He even insists on the truth of certain of the phenomena described: "I inquired in other quarters, no one had heard anything. And yet I am still certain that the cry was real, and the earthly air had echoed to it...."

Ambiguity also results from the use of two stylistic devices which suffuse the entire text: imperfect tense and modalization. Nerval habitually employs them together. The latter consists, let us note, in using certain introductory locutions which, without changing the meaning of the sentence, modify the relation between the speaker and his utterance. For example, the two sentences "It is raining outside" and "Perhaps it is raining outside" refer to the same fact; but the second also indicates the speaker's uncertainty as to the truth of the sentence he utters. The imperfect has a similar effect. If I say "I used to love Aurélia [*J'aimais Aurélia*]," I do not specify whether or not I still love her now; the continuity is *possible*, but as a general rule *unlikely*.

Now the entire text of *Aurélia* is impregnated by these two devices. Whole pages might be quoted from it in support of this assertion. Here are several examples taken at random:

It seemed to me that I was returning to a familiar house. . . . An old servant whom I called Marguerite and whom I seemed to have known since childhood told me. . . . I believed I was falling into an abyss which split the globe. I felt painlessly swept away by a flood of molten metal. . . . I had the sense that these currents were constituted of living souls, in a molecular state. . . . It became clear to me that the ancestors were taking the form of certain animals in order to visit us on earth. . . . [my italics].

Without these locutions, we should be plunged into the world of the marvelous, with no reference to everyday reality. By means of them, we are kept in both worlds at once. The imperfect tense (less apparent in the English translation) introduces a further distance between the character and the

narrator, so that we are kept from knowing the latter's position.

By a series of interpolated clauses, the narrator keeps his distance from others — from the "normal man," or, more exactly, from the normal use of certain words (for in a sense, *language* is the main theme of *Aurélia*). "Recovering what men call reason," he writes somewhere. And again: "But it appears that this was an illusion of sight." Or once more: "My apparently meaningless actions were subject to what is called illusion, according to human reason." An admirable sentence: the actions are "meaningless" (reference to the natural) but only "apparently" so (reference to the supernatural); they are subject to illusion (reference to the natural), or rather not to "what is called illusion" (reference to the supernatural). The imperfect tense, moreover, signifies that it is not the present narrator who thinks this way, but the character at that particular time. And again this phrase, which epitomizes the pervasive ambiguity of *Aurélia*: "A series of mad visions perhaps." The narrator here keeps his distance from the "normal man" and draws closer to the character, and the certainty that he is dealing with madness thus gives way to doubt.

Indeed, the narrator will go further: he will openly adopt the character's view that madness and dreaming are only a higher form of reason. Here is what the character had said: "The testimony of those who had seen me thus caused me a kind of irritation when I realized that they attributed to mental aberration the movements or words coinciding with the various phases of what for me constituted a series of logical events" (this corresponds to Poe's remark: "Science has not yet told us whether madness may not be the sublime form of intelligence"). And again: "Having come to this notion of dreams affording man a communication with the world of spirits, I hoped. . . ." But here is how the narrator speaks:

I shall try . . . to transcribe the impressions of a long disease which has occurred entirely within the mysteries of my own mind

— and I don't know why I use this word disease, for I myself have never felt in better health. Sometimes I believed my strength and activity to have doubled; imagination afforded me infinite delights.

Or again: "Whatever the case, I believe that the human imagination has invented nothing which is not true, in this world or in others, and I could not doubt what I had *seen* so distinctly." (Again perhaps an echo of Poe's "The mind of man can *imagine* nothing which has not really existed.")

In these two passages, Nerval's narrator seems to declare that what he has seen during his so-called madness is only a part of reality — that he has therefore never been ill. But if each of the passages begins in the present, the final proposition once again occurs in the imperfect tense and it thus reintroduces ambiguity into the reader's perception. The converse occurs in the last sentences of *Aurélia*: "I was able to judge more soundly the world of illusions in which I had lived for a time. Still, I feel happy in the convictions I have acquired. . . ." The first proposition seems to refer whatever precedes it to the world of madness; but then, why this happiness in the convictions acquired?

Aurélia constitutes, then, an original — and perfect — example of the ambiguity of the fantastic. This ambiguity turns on madness, certainly; but whereas in Hoffmann's "Princess Brambilla" we questioned whether or not the character was mad, in *Aurélia* we know in advance that the behavior of Nerval's protagonist is considered madness. What we are concerned to know (and it is on this point that the hesitation turns) is whether or not madness is actually a higher reason. The hesitation-previously concerned perception; now it concerns language. With Hoffmann, we hesitate as to the name for certain events; with Nerval, the hesitation shifts inside the name: to its meaning.

l'étrange et le merveilleux

3

the uncanny and the marvelous

The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from "reality" as it exists in the common opinion. At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous.

The fantastic therefore leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment. It seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre. One of the great periods of supernatural literature, that of the Gothic novel, seems to confirm this observation. Indeed, we generally distinguish, within the literary Gothic, two tendencies: that of the supernatural explained (the "uncanny"), as it appears in the novels of Clara Reeves and Ann Radcliffe; and that

of the supernatural accepted (the "marvelous"), which is characteristic of the works of Horace Walpole, M. G. Lewis, and Maturin. Here we find not the fantastic in the strict sense, only genres adjacent to it. More precisely, the effect of the fantastic is certainly produced, but during only a portion of our reading: in Ann Radcliffe, up to the moment when we are sure that everything which has happened is susceptible of a rational explanation; in M. G. Lewis, up to the moment when we are sure that the supernatural events will receive no explanation. Once we have finished reading, we understand — in both cases — that what we call the fantastic has not existed.

We may ask how valid a definition of genre may be if it permits a work to "change genre" by a simple sentence like: "At this moment, he awakened and saw the walls of his room. . . ." But there is no reason not to think of the fantastic as an evanescent genre. Such a category, moreover, has nothing exceptional about it. The classic definition of the *present*, for example, describes it as a pure limit between the past and the future. The comparison is not gratuitous: the marvelous corresponds to an unknown phenomenon, never seen as yet, still to come — hence to a future; in the uncanny, on the other hand, we refer the inexplicable to known facts, to a previous experience, and thereby to the past. As for the fantastic itself, the hesitation which characterizes it cannot be situated, by and large, except in the present.

Here we also are faced with the problem of the work's unity. We take this unity as self-evident, and we assert that a sacrilege has been committed when cuts are made. But matters are probably more complicated; let us not forget that in school, where our first, and decisive, experience of literature occurred, we read only "selected passages" or "extracts" from most works. A certain fetishism of the book survives in our own day and age: the literary work is transformed both into a precious and motionless object and into a symbol of plenitude, and the act of cutting it becomes an equivalent

of castration. How much freer was the attitude of a Khlebnikov, who composed his poems out of fragments of preceding poems and who urged his editors and even his printers to revise his text! Only an identification of the book with its author explains our horror of cuts.

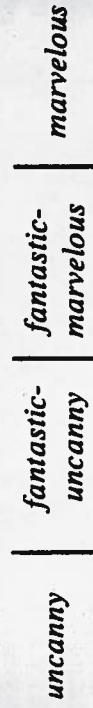
If we do decide to proceed by examining certain parts of the work in isolation, we discover that by temporarily omitting the end of the narrative we are able to include a much larger number of texts within the genre of the fantastic. The modern (French or English) editions of *The Saragossa Manuscript* precisely confirm this: without its end, which resolves the hesitation, the book clearly belongs to the fantastic. Charles Nodier, one of the pioneers of the fantastic in France, thoroughly understood this, and deals with it in one of his tales, "Inès de las Sierras." This text consists of two apparently equal parts, and the end of the first part leaves us in utter perplexity: we are at a loss to explain the strange phenomena which occur; on the other hand, we are not as ready to admit the supernatural as we are to embrace the natural. The narrator hesitates between two procedures: to break off his narrative (and remain in the fantastic) or to continue (and abandon it). His own preference, he declares to his hearers, is to stop, with the following justification: "Any other outcome would be destructive to my story, for it would change its nature."

Yet it would be wrong to claim that the fantastic can exist only in a part of the work, for here are certain texts which sustain their ambiguity to the very end, i.e., even beyond the narrative itself. The book closed, the ambiguity persists. A remarkable example is supplied by Henry James' tale "The Turn of the Screw," which does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical governess victimized by the disturbing atmosphere which surrounds her. In French literature, Mérimée's tale "La Vénus d'Ille" affords a perfect example of this ambiguity. A statue seems to come

alive and to kill the bridegroom; but we remain at the point of "seems," and never reach certainty.

Whatever the case, we cannot exclude from a scrutiny of the fantastic either the marvelous or the uncanny, genres which it overlaps. But we must not, on the other hand, forget Louis Vax's remark that "an ideal art of the fantastic must keep to indecision."

Let us take a closer look, then, at these two neighbors. We find that in each case, a transitory sub-genre appears: between the fantastic and the uncanny on the one hand, between the fantastic and the marvelous on the other. These sub-genres include works that sustain the hesitation characteristic of the true fantastic for a long period, but that ultimately end in the marvelous or in the uncanny. We may represent these sub-divisions with the help of the following diagram:



The fantastic in its pure state is represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvelous. This line corresponds perfectly to the nature of the fantastic, a frontier between two adjacent realms.

Let us begin with the fantastic-uncanny. In this sub-genre events that seem supernatural throughout a story receive a rational explanation at its end. If these events have long led the character and the reader alike to believe in an intervention of the supernatural, it is because they have an unaccustomed character. Criticism has described, and often condemned, this type under the label of "the supernatural explained."

Let us take as an example of the fantastic-uncanny the same *Saragossa Manuscript*. All of the "miracles" are explained rationally at the end of the narrative. Alfonso meets in a cave the hermit who had sheltered him at the beginning,

and who is the grand sheik of the Gómez himself. This man reveals the machinery of all the foregoing events:

Don Emmanuel de Sa, the Governor of Cadiz, is one of the initiates. He had sent you Lopez and Moschite, who abandoned you at the spring of Alcornoces. . . . By means of a sleeping potion you were made to waken the next day under the galleys of the Zoto brothers. Whence you came to my hermitage, where you encountered the dreadful Pascheco, who is in fact a Basque dancer. . . . The following day, you were subjected to a far crueler ordeal: the false inquisition which threatened you with horrible tortures but did not succeed in shaking your courage.

Doubt had been sustained up to this point, as we know, between two poles: the existence of the supernatural and a series of rational explanations. Let us now enumerate the types of explanation that erode the case for the supernatural: first, accident or coincidence — for in the supernatural world, instead of chance there prevails what we might call "pan-determinism" (an explanation in terms of chance is what works against the supernatural in "Inès de las Sierras"); next, dreams (a solution proposed in *Le Diable Amoureux*); then the influence of drugs (Alfonso's dreams during the first night); tricks and prearranged apparitions (an essential solution in *The Saragossa Manuscript*); illusion of the senses (we shall find examples of this in Théophile Gautier's "La Morte Amoureuse" and John Dickson Carr's *The Burning Court*); and lastly madness, as in Hoffmann's "Princess Brambilla." There are obviously two groups of "excuses" here which correspond to the oppositions real/imaginary and real/illusory. In the first group, there has been no supernatural occurrence, for nothing at all has actually occurred: what we imagined we saw was only the fruit of a deranged imagination (dream, madness, the influence of drugs). In the second group, the events indeed occurred, but they may be explained rationally (as coincidences, tricks, illusions).

We recall that in the definitions of the fantastic cited above, the rational solution was decided as "completely stripped of internal probability" (Solovyov) or as a loophole "small enough to be unusable" (M.R. James). Indeed, the realistic solutions given in *The Saragossa Manuscript* or "Inès de las Sierras" are altogether improbable; supernatural solutions would have been, on the contrary, quite probable. The coincidences are too artificial in Nodier's tale. As for *The Saragossa Manuscript*, its author does not even try to concoct a credible ending: the story of the treasure, of the holy mountain, of the empire of the Gomélez is more incredible than that of the women transformed into corpses! The probable is therefore not necessarily opposed to the fantastic: the former is a category that deals with internal coherence, with submission to the genre; the *fantastic* refers to an ambiguous perception shared by the reader and one of the characters. Within the genre of the fantastic, it is *probable* that "fantastic" reactions will occur.

In addition to such cases as these, where we find ourselves in the uncanny rather in spite of ourselves — in order to explain the fantastic — there also exists the uncanny in the pure state. In works that belong to this genre, events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar. The definition is, as we see, broad and vague, but so is the genre which it describes: the uncanny is not a clearly delimited genre, unlike the fantastic. More precisely, it is limited on just one side, that of the fantastic; on the other, it dissolves into the general field of literature (Dostoevsky's novels, for example, may be included in the category of the uncanny). According to Freud, the sense of the uncanny

is linked to the appearance of an image which originates in the childhood of the individual or the race (a hypothesis still to be verified; there is not an entire coincidence between Freud's use of the term and our own). The literature of horror in its pure state belongs to the uncanny — many examples from the stories of Ambrose Bierce could serve as examples here.

The uncanny realizes, as we see, only one of the conditions of the fantastic: the description of certain reactions, especially of fear. It is uniquely linked to the sentiments of the characters and not to a material event defying reason. (The marvelous, by way of contrast, may be characterized by the mere presence of supernatural events, without implicating the reaction they provoke in the characters.)

Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" is an instance of the uncanny bordering on the fantastic. The narrator of this tale arrives at the house one evening summoned by his friend Roderick Usher, who asks him to stay for a time. Usher is a hypersensitive, nervous creature who adores his sister, now seriously ill. When she dies some days later, the two friends, instead of burying her, leave her body in one of the vaults under the house. Several days pass. On a stormy night the two men are sitting in a room together, the narrator reading aloud an ancient tale of chivalry. The sounds that are described in the chronicle seem to correspond to the noises they hear in the house itself. At the end, Roderick Usher stands up and says, in a scarcely audible voice: "We have put her living in the tomb!" And, indeed, the door opens, the sister is seen standing on the threshold. Brother and sister rush into each other's arms, and fall dead. The narrator flees the house just in time to see it crumble into the environing tarn.

Here the uncanny has two sources. The first is constituted by two coincidences (there are as many of these as in a work of the *supernatural explained*). Although the resurrection of Usher's sister and the fall of the house after the death of

its inhabitants may appear supernatural, Poe has not failed to supply quite rational explanations for both events. Of the house, he writes: "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zig-zag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn." And of Lady Madeline: "Frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis." Thus the supernatural explanation is merely suggested, and one need not accept it.

The other series of elements that provoke the sense of the uncanny is not linked to the fantastic but to what we might call "an experience of limits," which characterizes the whole of Poe's *oeuvre*. Indeed, Baudelaire wrote of Poe: "No man has more magically described the *exceptions* of human life and of nature." Likewise Dostoevsky: "He almost always chooses the most exceptional reality, puts his character in the most exceptional situation, on the external or psychological level. . . ." (Poe, moreover, wrote a tale on this theme, a "meta-uncanny" tale entitled "The Angel of the Odd.") In "The Fall of the House of Usher," it is the extremely morbid condition of the brother and sister which disturbs the reader. In other tales, scenes of cruelty, delight in evil, and murder will provoke the same effect. The sentiment of the uncanny originates, then, in certain themes linked to more or less ancient taboos. If we grant that primal experience is constituted by transgression, we can accept Freud's theory as to the origin of the uncanny.

Thus the fantastic is ultimately excluded from "The Fall of the House of Usher." As a rule, we do not find the fantastic in Poe's works, in the strict sense, with the exception perhaps of "The Black Cat." His tales almost all derive their effect from the uncanny, and several from the marvelous. Yet Poe remains very close to the authors of the fantastic both in his themes and in the techniques that he applies.

We also know that Poe originated the detective story or murder mystery, and this relationship is not a matter of chance. It has often been remarked, moreover, that for the reading public, detective stories have in our time replaced ghost stories. Let us consider the nature of this relationship. The murder mystery, in which we try to discover the identity of the criminal, is constructed in the following manner: on the one hand there are several easy solutions, initially tempting but turning out, one after another, to be false; on the other, there is an entirely improbable solution disclosed only at the end and turning out to be the only right one. Here we see what brings the detective story close to the fantastic tale. Recalling Solov'yov's and James's definitions, we note that the fantastic narrative, too, involves two solutions, one probable and supernatural, the other improbable and rational. It suffices, therefore, that in the detective story this second solution be so inaccessible as to "defy reason" for us to accept the existence of the supernatural rather than to rest with the absence of any explanation at all. A classical example of this situation is Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians*. Ten characters are isolated on an island; they are told (by a recording) that they will all die, punished for a crime which the law cannot punish. The nature of each death, moreover, is described in the counting-rhyme "Ten Little Indians." The doomed characters — and the reader along with them — vainly try to discover who is carrying out the successive executions. They are alone on the island and dying one after another, each in a fashion announced by the rhyme; down to the last one, who — and it is this that arouses an aura of the supernatural — does not commit suicide but is killed in his turn. No rational explanation seems possible, we must admit the existence of invisible beings or spirits. Obviously this hypothesis is not really necessary: the rational explanation will be given. The murder mystery approaches the fantastic, but it is also the contrary of the fantastic: in fantastic texts, we tend to prefer the supernatural explanation; the detective

story, once it is over, leaves no doubt as to the absence of supernatural events. This relationship, moreover, is valid only for a certain type of detective story (the "sealed room") and a certain type of uncanny narrative (the "supernatural explained"). Further, the emphasis differs in the two genres: in the detective story, the emphasis is placed on the solution to the mystery; in the texts linked to the uncanny (as in the fantastic narrative), the emphasis is on the reactions which this mystery provokes. This structural proximity nonetheless produces a resemblance which we must take into account.

An author who deserves a more extended scrutiny when we deal with the relation between detective stories and fantastic tales is John Dickson Carr. Among his books there is one in particular which raises the problem in an exemplary fashion, *The Burning Court*. As in *Ten Little Indians*, we are confronted with an apparently insoluble problem: four men open a crypt in which a corpse had been placed a few days before; the crypt is empty, but it is not possible that anyone could have opened it in the meantime. Throughout the story, moreover, ghosts and supernatural phenomena are evoked. There is a witness to the crime that had taken place, and this witness asserts he has seen the murderer leave the victim's room, passing through the wall at a place where a door existed two hundred years earlier. Furthermore, one of the persons implicated in the case, a young woman, believes herself to be a witch, or more precisely, a poisoner (the murder was the result of poison) who belongs to a particular type of human beings, the *non-dead*: "Briefly, the non-dead are those persons — commonly women — who have been condemned to death for the crime of poisoning, and whose bodies have been burnt at the stake, whether alive or dead," we learn later on. While leafing through a manuscript he has received from the publishing house that he works for, Stevens, the young woman's husband, happens on a photograph whose caption reads: *Marie d'Aubray: Guillotined for Murder, 1861*.

The text continues: "He was looking at a photograph of his own wife." How could this young woman, some seventy years later, be the same person as a famous nineteenth-century poisoner, guillotined into the bargain? Quite simply, according to Stevens' wife, who is ready to assume responsibility for the present murder. A series of further coincidences seems to confirm the presence of the supernatural. Finally, a detective arrives, and everything begins to be explained. The woman who had been seen passing through the wall was an optical illusion caused by a mirror. The corpse had not vanished after all, but was cunningly concealed. Young Marie Stevens had nothing in common with a long-dead poisoner, though an effort had been made to make her believe that she had. The entire supernatural atmosphere had been created by the murderer in order to confuse the case, to avert suspicion. The actual guilty parties are discovered, even if they are not successfully punished.

Then follows an epilogue, as a result of which *The Burning Court* emerges from the class of detective stories that simply evoke the supernatural, to join the ranks of the fantastic. We see Marie once again, in her house, thinking over the case; and the fantastic re-emerges. Marie asserts once again (to the reader) that she is indeed the poisoner, that the detective was in fact her friend (which is not untrue), and that he has provided the entire rational explanation in order to save her ("It was clever of him to pluck a physical explanation, a thing of sizes and dimensions and stone walls").

The world of the non-dead reclaims its rights, and the fantastic with it: we are thrown back on our hesitation as to which solution to choose. But it must be noted, finally, that we are less concerned here with a resemblance between two genres than with their synthesis.

If we move to the *other* side of that median line which we have called the fantastic, we find ourselves in the fantastic-

marvelous, the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural. These are the narratives closest to the pure fantastic, for the latter, by the very fact that it remains unexplained, unrationalized, suggests the existence of the supernatural. The frontier between the two will therefore be uncertain; nonetheless, the presence or absence of certain details will always allow us to decide.

Gautier's "La Morte Amoureuse" can serve as an example. This is the story of a monk (Romuald) who on the day of his ordination falls in love with the courtesan Clarimonde. After several fleeting encounters, Romuald attends Clarimonde's deathbed — whereupon she begins to appear in his dreams, dreams that have a strange property: instead of conforming to impressions of each passing day, they constitute a continuous narrative. In his dreams, Romuald no longer leads the austere life of a monk, but lives in Venice in continuous revelry. And at the same time he realizes that Clarimonde has been keeping herself alive by means of blood she sucks from him during the night. . . .

Up to this point, all the events are susceptible of rational explanations. The explanations are largely furnished by the dreams themselves ("May God grant that it is a dream!" Romuald exclaims, in this resembling Alvaro in *Le Diable Amoureux*). Illusions of the senses furnish another plausible explanation. Thus: "One evening, strolling along the box-lined paths of my little garden, I seemed to see through the hedgerow a woman's shape. . . ."; "For a moment I thought I saw her foot move. . . ."; "I do not know if this was an illusion or a reflection of the lamp, but it seemed that the blood began to circulate once more beneath that lustreless pallor," etc. (italics mine). Finally, a series of events can be considered as simply uncanny and due to chance. But Romuald himself is ready to regard the matter as a diabolic intervention:

The strangeness of the episode. Clarimonde's supernatural [?]

beauty, the phosphorescent lustre of her eyes, the burning touch of her hand, the confusion into which she had thrown me, the sudden change that had occurred in me — all of this clearly proved the presence of the Devil; and that silken hand was perhaps nothing but the glove in which he had clad his talons.

It might be the Devil, indeed, but it might also be chance and no more than that. We remain, then, up to this point in the fantastic in its pure state. At this moment there occurs an event which causes the narrative to swerve. Another monk, Serapion, learns (we do not know how) of Romuald's adventure. He leads the latter to the graveyard in which Clarimonde lies buried, unearths the coffin, opens it, and Clarimonde appears, looking just as she did on the day of her death, a drop of blood on her lips. . . . Seized by pious rage, Abbé Serapion flings holy water on the corpse. "The wretched Clarimonde had no sooner been touched by the holy dew than her lovely body turned to dust; nothing was left but a shapeless mass of ashes and half-consumed bones." This entire scene, and in particular the metamorphosis of the corpse, cannot be explained by the laws of nature as they are generally acknowledged. We are here in the realm of the fantastic-marvelous.

A similar example is to be found in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "Véra." Here again, throughout the tale, we may hesitate between believing in life-after-death or thinking that the count who so believes is mad. But at the end, the count discovers the key to Véra's tomb in his own room, though he himself had flung it into the grave; it must therefore be Véra, his dead wife, who has brought it to him.

There exists, finally, a form of the marvelous in the pure state which — just as in the case of the uncanny in the pure state — has no distinct frontiers (we have seen in the preceding chapter that extremely diverse works contain elements of the

marvelous). In the case of the marvelous, supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader. It is not an attitude toward the events described which characterizes the marvelous, but the nature of these events.

We note, in passing, how arbitrary the old distinction was between form and content: the event, which traditionally belonged to "content," here becomes a "formal" element. The converse is also true: the stylistic (hence "formal") procedure of modalization can have, as we have seen in connection with *Aurélia*, a precise content.

We generally link the genre of the marvelous to that of the fairy tale. But as a matter of fact, the fairy tale is only one of the varieties of the marvelous, and the supernatural events in fairy tales provoke no surprise: neither a hundred years' sleep, nor a talking wolf, nor the magical gifts of the fairies (to cite only a few elements in Perrault's tales). What distinguishes the fairy tale is a certain kind of writing, not the status of the supernatural. Hoffmann's tales illustrate this difference perfectly: "The Nutcracker and the Mouse-King," "The Strange Child," and "The King's Bride" belong, by stylistic properties, to the fairy tale. "The Choice of a Bride," while preserving the same status with regard to the supernatural, is not a fairy tale at all. One would also have to characterize the *Arabian Nights* as marvelous tales rather than fairy tales (a subject which deserves a special study all its own).

In order to delimit the marvelous in the pure state, it is convenient to isolate it from several types of narrative in which the supernatural is somewhat justified.

1. We may speak first of all of *hyperbolic marvelous*. In it, phenomena are supernatural only by virtue of their dimensions, which are superior to those that are familiar to us. Thus in the *Arabian Nights* Sinbad the Sailor declares he has seen "fish one hundred and even two hundred ells long" or "serpents so great and so long that there was not

one which could not have swallowed an elephant." But perhaps this is no more than a simple manner of speaking (we shall study this question when we deal with the poetic or allegorical interpretation of the text); one might even say, adapting a proverb, that "fear has big eyes." In any case, this form of the supernatural does not do excessive violence to reason.

2. Quite close to this first type of the marvelous is the *exotic marvelous*. In this type, supernatural events are reported without being presented as such. The implicit reader is supposed to be ignorant of the regions where the events take place, and consequently he has no reason for calling them into question. Sinbad's second voyage furnishes some excellent examples, such as the *roc*, a bird so tremendous that it concealed the sun and "one of whose legs . . . was as great as a great tree-trunk." Of course, this bird does not exist for contemporary zoology, but Sinbad's hearers were far from any such certainty and, five centuries later, Galland himself writes: "Marco Polo, in his travels, and Father Martini, in his *History of China*, speak of this bird," etc. A little later, Sinbad similarly describes the rhinoceros, which however is well known to us:

There is, on the same island, a rhinoceros, a creature smaller than the elephant and larger than the buffalo: it bears a single horn upon its snout, about one ell long; this horn is solid and severed through the center, from one end to the other. Upon it may be seen white lines which represent the face of a man. The rhinoceros attacks the elephant, pierces it with its horn through the belly, carries it off and bears it upon its head; but when the elephant's blood flows over its eyes and blinds it, the rhinoceros falls to the ground, and — what will amaze you [indeed], the roc comes and bears off both creatures in its talons, in order to feed its young upon their bodies.

This virtuoso passage shows, by its mixture of natural and supernatural elements, the special character of the *exotic*

marvelous. The mixture exists, of course, only for the modern reader; the narrator implicit in the tale situates everything on the same level (that of the "natural").

3. A third type of the marvelous might be called the *instrumental marvelous*. Here we find the gadgets, technological developments unrealized in the period described but, after all, quite possible. In the "Tale of Prince Ahmed" in the *Arabian Nights*, for instance, the marvelous instruments are, at the beginning: a flying carpet, an apple that cures diseases, and a "pipe" for seeing great distances; today, the helicopter, antibiotics, and binoculars, endowed with the same qualities, do not belong in any way to the marvelous. The same is true of the flying horse in the "Tale of the Magic Horse." Similarly in the case of the revolving stone in the "Tale of Ali Baba," we need only think of recent espionage films in which a safe opens only when its owner's voice utters certain words. We must distinguish these objects, products of human skill, from certain instruments that are often similar in appearance but whose origin is magical, and that serve to communicate with other worlds. Thus Aladdin's lamp and ring, or the horse in the "Third Calender's Tale," which belong to a different kind of marvelous.

4. The "instrumental marvelous" brings us very close to what in nineteenth-century France was called the *scientific marvelous*, which today we call *science fiction*. Here the supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge. In the high period of fantastic narratives, stories involving magnetism are characteristic of the scientific marvelous: magnetism "scientifically" explains supernatural events, yet magnetism itself belongs to the supernatural. Examples are Hoffmann's "Spectre Bridegroom" or "The Magnetizer," and Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" or Maupassant's "Un Fou?" Contemporary science fiction, when it does not slip into allegory, obeys the same mechanism: these narratives, starting from irrational premises, link the "facts" they

contain in a perfectly logical manner. (Their plot structure also differs from that of the fantastic tale; we shall discuss science-fiction plots in Chapter 10.)

All these varieties of the marvelous — "excused," justified, and imperfect — stand in opposition to the marvelous in its pure — unexplained — state. We shall not consider it here: first, because the elements of the marvelous, as themes, will be examined below in Chapters 7 and 8; and also because the aspiration to the marvelous, as an anthropological phenomenon, exceeds the context of a study limited to literary aspects. In any case, the marvelous has been, from this perspective, the object of several penetrating books; and in conclusion, I shall borrow from one of these, Pierre Mabille's *Miroir du Merveilleux*, a sentence which neatly defines the meaning of the marvelous:

Beyond entertainment, beyond curiosity, beyond all the emotions such narratives and legends afford, beyond the need to divert, to forget, or to achieve delightful or terrifying sensations, the real goal of the marvelous journey is the total exploration of universal reality.