The imprimatur of Wilkins’s first printed publication, *The Discovery of a World in the Moone. Or, A Discourse Tending to Prove That 'tis Probable There May Be Another Habitable World in That Planet* (London, 1638), referred to the book as ‘παράδοξα’ (‘paradoxes’). The contemporary usage of ‘paradox’ signified an idea that went against the common opinion, or even common sense: it encompassed paradoxical encomia praising such things as baldness or gout; moral or theological paradoxes including Donne’s ‘A defence of womens inconstancy’; and works such as Walter Hamond’s *A Paradox Prooving That the Inhabitants of the Isle Called Madagascar ... Are the Happiest People in the World* (London, 1640). Thus, it was a suitable generic category for Wilkins’s unprecedented (in English) argument that the moon was another world like the earth and that it was likely to be inhabited, which certainly contradicted common opinion. The paradox, though, was a classical genre that carried a good deal of literary baggage. Beloved by Renaissance scholars and rhetoricians, the paradox enabled displays of wit and erudition, a place for learned jokes; it also shaded easily into satire, when serious contemplation of moral or theological questions resulted in attacks on contemporary mores. Mathematical and theological paradoxes were places where normal logic broke down, requiring a new kind of thinking. Paradoxes were difficult to untangle: the author’s own beliefs were often obscured by the voices of personae (such as Erasmus’s speaker, Folly), shifts in
standpoint, and jokes or game-playing. The genre was marked by resistance to finality and an emphasis on readers doing the interpretative work for themselves.3

Of course we need to remember that it was not Wilkins himself, but his ecclesiastical licenser, who labelled the book a paradox.4 However, this response of an early reader points to a fundamental problem in early-modern science writing, and particularly for those writing about cosmology: how to ensure their texts were taken seriously. As I will show in this chapter, Galileo’s observations of the moon, announced in his Sidereus Nuncius (Venice, 1610), prompted a wide range of English responses to the possibility of a world in the moon in texts that spanned a number of genres. These (mainly fleeting) references to the moon and the new astronomy indicate the range of authorial stances available to Wilkins, and also demonstrate the different interpretative possibilities available to readers in discussions of the moon. Many of the texts that referred to the world in the moon did so for comic or satirical effect. Although Wilkins only commented specifically on one of these works, I will argue that his own authorial decisions about tone and content were influenced by his understanding that these references, alongside a diverse classical and patristic literature on the moon, played a significant role in his readers’ pre-existing notions about the possibility of a world in the moon. Wilkins was no doubt also aware of the fact that William Gilbert’s pioneering work on magnetism had itself sparked satirical or playful responses.5 More than anything else, these other voices made it clear that Wilkins’s work deserved the title of paradox in the sense that it was ‘against common opinion’, as his own Essay towards a Real Character would later define the word. Wilkins certainly had no illusions about this, and he had to shape his work in response to common opinion.

Wilkins’s Discovery (1638) and the revised and expanded volume A Discourse concerning a New World and Another Planet (London, 1640) are also interesting as examples of a literary form relatively new at the time, the popular science book.6 It was in these volumes that for the first time Galileo’s lunar discoveries

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4 The book was licensed by Thomas Weekes (or Wykes), domestic chaplain to the Bishop of London, William Juxon.
5 For example, Ben Jonson’s play The Magnetic Lady (1632); see R.E. McFarland, ‘Jonson’s Magnetic Lady and the Reception of Gilbert’s De Magnete’, Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900 11 (1971), 283–293.
6 In the remainder of the chapter I will refer to A Discourse concerning a New World and Another