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Correr la pluma: Multigeneric Composition in Don Quijote and Persiles

As criticism, after a long hiatus, has once again turned to genre, the ambivalent nature of Cervantes's relationship to the literary models available to him has attracted renewed attention. While Cervantes incorporated elements from every existing variety of prose fiction in his work, he consistently modified this material, making it unmistakably his own. Although the techniques involved cover a broad range from parody to pastiche, the result is always a subtle dialogue with existing forms, in which certain aspects of conventional genres are rejected and others are embraced. Debates over Cervantes's attitude towards pastoral, picaresque, and chivalric fiction have tended to settle into a general acknowledgement that he wrote in all of these modes, but never in a pure form.¹ The meaning of the contamination he introduced, however, has not yet been fully understood. Was the goal of his interrogation of the genres of romance a criticism of their lack of verisimilitude? If so, his rejection of the narrowness of the picaresque would seem a step in the opposite direction. Martinez-Bonati has suggested a reading of *Don Quijote* as an all-embracing work incorporating a variety of genres, each of which points to the inadequacy of the others. Questions still arise, however, concerning the value of such a project. Was Cervantes a Romantic ironist *avant la lettre*, seeking to demonstrate the superiority of the artistic imagination? Was he showing off his originality, making

an ostentatious display of the subtlety of his *ingenio*? In this paper I will examine some fundamental features of Cervantes's treatment of prevailing genres in order to arrive at a sense of the general program to which his creative practice may be said to correspond. In the process, I will attempt to shed some light on two of the perennial bugbears of Cervantes criticism: the role of the interpolated tales in the 1605 *Don Quijote*; and the extraordinarily high opinion Cervantes held of his last work, the posthumous *Persiles*. Throughout I will be concerned to show that Cervantes's re-elaboration of the literary system he found available to him was part of an effort to extend the limits of representation to include a fuller view of what it means to be human. Ultimately, he found that this could only be accomplished by breaking apart conventional paradigms.

A necessary first step in the examination of Cervantes's approach to genre is to attempt a brief description of the generic system of prose fiction as it existed in Spain around 1600. For the purposes of the present paper, I will reduce the complex variety of this field to a double opposition between four types of romance on the one side, and the comic realism of the picaresque on the other. The four varieties of romance are: chivalric, sentimental, pastoral, and Byzantine. The first two belong primarily to the first half of the sixteenth century, the latter two to the second half, during which they had to compete with a picaresque genre whose strength was growing. Nonetheless, elements of chivalric and sentimental romance continued to exercise an influence on the literary imagination of the early seventeenth century, as the presence of both these genres in the 1605 *Don Quijote* shows.

The relationships of conflict and complementarity among the varieties of romance have been the subject of several now classic

studies. Already in 1915, Huizinga argued that the chivalric and pastoral modes were much more than mere literary styles; they represented the contradictory ideals of virtue and happiness, respectively. The chivalric ideal requires that individual desire be sublimated for the sake of pure, abstract justice, while pastoral aims at erotic satisfaction through fantasy. Poggioli has separated pastoral into two sub-genres, which he terms the pastoral of innocence and the pastoral of happiness. Though both are connected to Huizinga's formulaic opposition of pastoral and chivalric ideals, it is the pastoral of innocence, in which a utopian harmony with the natural world predominates, which was understood as the polar opposite of the chivalric vision in the sixteenth century. Poggioli has shown that Renaissance chivalric often includes a brief incursion into this more utopian, introspective pastoral, designed to supplement the exclusivity of its focus on action. His theory of the "pastoral oasis" is a major contribution to the understanding of the internal dynamics of genre in Early Modern literature. The conclusions of Vilanova's seminal essay can be used to further extend the analysis to include the "Byzantine" hero of the so-called *novela de peregrinaje*. More than as a direct adoption by Spanish writers of the hero of Greek romance, this figure should be viewed as a later variant on the chivalric hero, transformed to correspond to the ideals of the Counterreformation. Less in control of his own destiny than the knight errant, the hero of Byzantine romance submits his fate to the determination of divine Providence.

Whereas the importance of these three genres of romance throughout the Golden Age is generally recognized, the impact of sentimental romance on sixteenth-century fiction continues to be underestimated. Dubbed some years ago "the lost genre" by Deyermond, sentimental

romance influenced the composition of all works of fiction written in Spain between 1490 and 1550. The impact of Diego de San Pedro and Juan de Flores can still be felt in Cervantes's greatest works. Grieve has shown that sentimental romance unites opposite tendencies within one genre, alternating between an inward, self-consuming lovesickness and sudden bursts of outward-directed aggression. It flounders between the linear movement of chivalric and the static harmony of pastoral, lacking in either case the supplement to erotic fulfillment (military conflict, the order of nature) which makes sublimation possible. In this sense, however, sentimental romance could be described as a stripping-down of these other forms to an underlying essence. The isolation of the male hero and his choice between aggressivity and empty longing would then become characteristics of romance in general, displaced by the external mold into which it is cast. On this view, all the traditional varieties of romance share the isolation of the male protagonist and the objectification of his beloved. If he is active, he is fighting other men, be they rivals for her affection or villains he must defeat in order to win the glory which will make him worthy of her. If he is passive, his desire is turned inward or is elevated through contemplation of the beauty of Nature (and of his beloved's beauty seen as its manifestation). In no case is the form his desire ultimately takes a result of anything she does or says.

Núñez de Reinoso's *Clareo y Florisea* (Venice, 1552) is an important early manifestation of a single work into which all four of these romance genres have been incorporated. Midway through this strange and disordered book, the Byzantine frame (imitated from a translation into Italian of Achilleus Tattius) gives way to a chivalric one. Pastoral elements appear in both halves, and the situation of the narrator as she

tells her story is derived from Bernardim Ribeiro's sentimental/ pastoral *Menina e moça*. The four types, however, are juxtaposed, loosely held together by a rambling narrative, with no attempt to subject them to mutual critique or synthesis. Nonetheless, Núñez de Reinoso's romance at least provides evidence of an awareness that these four genres together form the basic generic repertoire of prose fiction at mid-century, and of an impulse to incorporate all of them into one work.

At the time Núñez de Reinoso was writing, comic prose was limited primarily to short *novelle* in imitation of Italian models. But such works need not be comic, and the existence of tragic and romance *novella*-types prevented the emergence of the low comic as a specific genre of fiction. The picaresque gave lower genres in prose a length and substantiality which could legitimately challenge the elevated genres, thus establishing a separate comic genre. Guillén's notion of the *pícaro* as a "half-outsider" relates the picaresque to pastoral. Both pastoral and picaresque are revealed in Guillén's analysis as genres of alienation which challenge the prevailing values of urban Counterreformation Spain, though they do so in radically opposed ways, picaresque offering resistance from within, pastoral providing an escape to a better world which makes reality seem inadequate by contrast (97). Both can be opposed to chivalric and Byzantine romance, genres of conformity which offer no serious challenge to prevailing values. At the broadest level, of course, the low-mimetic stylization of the picaresque is opposed to all forms of romance which are united by the elevated conception they share of the characters, their motives, and the dignity of their passions. The Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope provides a further basis on which to differentiate the genres of romance and the picaresque. The former take place in an abstract, reversible adventure time, a time

which, as Bakhtin phrases it, "does not add up." The romance world is correspondingly static; the characters cannot undergo change, but can only patiently endure their ordeal (*Dialogic* 86-110). The picaresque, on the other hand, takes place in the concrete time of the everyday world, which acts on the characters and within which they act. Their temporal experience, like a road, is taking them somewhere, is leading them to some transformation (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 243-44). Much of Cervantes's work is taken up with the pitting of each of these chronotopes against the other, in order to suggest that each contains what the other lacks: romance depicts human beings whose highest ideals are accomplished, but only in accordance with pre-cut patterns; the novel of everyday life depicts a process of becoming which, however much it may fall short of the perfection of the hero of romance, nonetheless has the advantage of presenting a character who is affected by reality and by other people, who is not simply encased in an invisible, isolating shield which would leave him or her, if it were to break, as defenseless as a man of glass.

Both of the major works of fiction Cervantes wrote after 1600, *Don Quijote* (1605 and 1615) and *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (posthumous, 1617) incorporate all five of the genres analyzed above as constituting the core of the generic system of prose fiction at that time. In *Don Quijote* these elements are fairly easy to identify and have for the most part been widely recognized and commented upon, with the possible exception of the sentimental romance. Even here, however, the role of the sentimental romance hero as the model on which the figure of Cardenio is based has been perceived, for example by Dudley ("Wild Man"). The technique of incorporation employed in *Don Quijote* is almost exclusively that of juxtaposition. Don Quijote meets Marcela, but he cannot cross over into the pastoral space she occupies, for they

inhabit "worlds of different style" (Martínez-Bonati 196). This juxtaposition has the effect of a critical confrontation of one genre by another. All are relativized, all are made to appear inadequate to the absent, perhaps irrecoverable fullness of Truth.

Despite frequent acknowledgement of the multigeneric nature of *Persiles*, most recently by Wilson (6), the presence of all the major genres of prose fiction in this work as a system has gone unrecognized, probably due to the fact that several of them appear in a disguised form. For example, in the first half of the work, during which the protagonists are traveling on the North Sea, there are episodes which correspond to each of the four romance genres, but they have been transposed to fit the oceanic context: Book One oscillates between lovesick pining and violent rivalry (sentimental romance); the Fishermen's Isle is a piscatory scene which displays many bucolic motifs; the main plot, especially in the episode of Policarpo's attempt to kidnap the protagonists in order to satisfy his desire for Sigismunda, follows the outline of a Byzantine romance; and the adventures of Periandro's Tale, in which he captains a ship of pirates for justice (*corsarios justicieros*) represents a kind of maritime chivalric. This transposition of the different varieties of romance into one semantic context makes it possible to move freely from one to another. It also shows that Cervantes's understanding of the genres he was working with operated on a deeper level than the immediate fictional objects, that he was concerned directly with the underlying chronotopes of these genres. The picaresque begins to appear in Book Three, with the episode of the false captives; it comes to be embodied in Bartolomé el Manchego, who eventually even writes a letter from a Roman jail cell which has all the features of a kind of miniature picaresque novel, right down to the autobiographical act of

writing by a character whose very literacy is problematic, constitutive of the prototype of the genre, *Lazarillo de Tormes*.²

The fundamental divergence between *Don Quijote* and *Persiles* lies in the difference in the technique for incorporating various genres into one work. Whereas the focus in *Don Quijote* is on the inadequacy of each conventionalized generic world, its inability to give a full picture of human reality, the emphasis in *Persiles* falls on the superiority of human beings to the means available for representing them. In the former case, the result is an ironic juxtaposition of styles, and a comic effect is produced when each of them draws the reader's attention to the inadequacies of the others. In *Persiles*, the characters are able to move from one generic world to another, implying that they are superior to the stylizations by means of which the author presents them to us. Cervantists have long been disconcerted by Cervantes's return to romance after the ironic critique of it he offered in *Don Quijote*. Yet *Persiles* does not so much represent a turnaround as a continuation. The two works correspond to the critical and synthetic phases of a single project, which as a whole constitutes a radical restructuring of the literary system. Because *Don Quijote* is primarily taken up with the negative side of this program, the connections between the two works have not been fully understood. Though the earlier work points to the limitations of existing genres, suggesting that none of them is capable of representing accurately the totality of human experience, this should not be taken as a call for the development of a new, realistic genre which would be able to accomplish what the others had not. We have tended to see in *Don Quijote* an anticipation of the realist novel, which took another two and a half centuries to reach its canonical expression. The remainder of this paper constitutes a plea that we look closer to home,

and try to see some of the ways in which *Don Quijote* may have been an anticipation of a major work of Cervantes's own, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*.

The view of Cervantes as the creator of the realist novel is founded in general on the assumption that the critique of romance in *Don Quijote* is primarily an attack on its flattering portrayal of human beings and the inverisimilitude of its representation of reality. To perceive the compatibility of *Don Quijote* and *Persiles* one must learn to see that Cervantes's primary objection to romance is not its inverisimilitude as such, but the static isolation of its characters from one another. Not only were the characters of romance predetermined and fixed, according to an ideal model of virtue, but as a result they were complete and autonomous, not truly responsive to one another. When Cervantes adopts a romance model, he also modifies it, often in ways that seem designed to challenge the limits it places on the representation of human experience, in particular the self-contained perfection of the hero.

Cervantes consistently eliminates the elements of the supernatural from the romance material he incorporates (though he does include the folkloric motif of the witch in both *El coloquio de los perros* and *Persiles*). The question we must ask when interpreting this change is what the function of the supernatural was in the original work, and what takes its place in Cervantes's new solution. An excellent test case is offered by *El curioso impertinente*. In the original romance version of this story (in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Canto 43) the husband, supernaturally disguised as the man he suspects his wife of loving, tests her fidelity. After he discovers her willingness to be seduced (and loses her in the process), he takes solace in exposing other men's overconfidence in their wives' fidelity, offering each man who is his guest an opportunity

to drink from a cup by means of which to test their wives' fidelity in their absence. Here all is isolation and autonomous action. The husband does the testing himself, he enjoys the suffering of other husbands who are similarly cut off from their wives by his magic cup, from which none has drunk successfully, and the wives are tested in their absence. Magic here serves as an instrument to avoid the interpersonal contact which would normally come with trusting someone and subsequently discovering that that trust had been broken. The elimination of supernatural elements from the tale enriches those aspects of the story which the magic was calculated to suppress. By having Anselmo enlist his own friend in the seduction of his wife, Cervantes creates a situation in which each of the three main characters is involved in a complex struggle with the other two, and in which they each, however much they may deceive one another in the process, are sincerely engaged in this struggle, and not just pretending to be: Anselmo persuades Lotario to try to seduce Camila, and in fact does so only too well, for Lotario decides to sincerely try to seduce her on his own behalf; as a result, Camila falls. Whatever else Cervantes may wish us to believe about her virtue, it is clear that he makes the claim that it would withstand any but a sincere appeal on the part of someone truly in love. That is, she could withstand any attempt to control and manipulate her by another who was himself unmoved, but Lotario's open admission of passionate desire, of an involvement that depends upon responsiveness from her, overcomes all resistance:

En efecto, él, con toda diligencia, minó la roca de su entereza, con tales pertrechos, que aunque Camila fuera toda de bronce, viniera al suelo. Lloró, rogó,

ofreció, aduló, porfió y fingió Lotario con tantos sentimientos, con muestras de tantas veras, que dio al través con el recato de Camila y vino a triunfar de lo que menos se pensaba y más deseaba. (*DQ*, I, xxxiv, 419)

Of course, the most important instance of Cervantes's critique of romance is the parody of the romances of chivalry in *Don Quijote*. In addition to the parody of specific elements of chivalric romance, such as Moorish enchanters and the expectation of finding a castle at every turn, there is an extended parody of the knight's penance which takes place in the Sierra Morena chapters of the First Part. This parody must be seen not only in its immediate and obvious relation to chivalric romance *per se*, but also in its relation to the romance chronotope generally (and even beyond it, to the legally imposed penance of the *galeotes* and the religious institution of penance). Here it is an entire conception of human existence and interrelatedness that is under scrutiny, and not one limited to the chivalric romance alone. The middle section of the 1605 *Quijote* is permeated by a parody of penance in all its forms which has at its heart a humanist attack on arbitrary, externally imposed rules for feeling and acting and on the resulting inauthenticity in human relations.

This parody begins with the release of the *galeotes* and their refusal to carry their chains to Toboso to lay them before the feet of Dulcinea. Ginés de Pasamonte answers Don Quijote:

Lo que vuestra merced puede hacer, y es justo que haga, es mudar ese servicio y montazgo de la señora Dulcinea del Toboso en alguna cantidad de avemarías

y credos, que nosotros diremos por la intención de vuestra merced, y ésta es cosa que se podrá cumplir de noche y de día, huyendo o reposando, en paz o en guerra . . . (DQ, I, xxii, 275)

Immediately following this episode, Don Quijote and Sancho enter the Sierra Morena fleeing the Santa Hermandad; they meet Cardenio, whose life in the mountains as a mad penitent lover, as much as anything in *Amadís* or *Orlando furioso*, inspires Don Quijote to imitate him. As I have already suggested, the genre from which the figure of Cardenio comes is the sentimental romance; further, the scenes Don Quijote specifically mentions from chivalric romance which he is now thinking of imitating are scenes with touches of the pastoral. The romance genres are grouped together around the theme of penance, which comes to signify the romantic conception of life. The penance of the lovesick knight, shepherd, or noble is the most obvious motif through which inaction and lack of involvement with others functions in the romance plot as if it were active participation. Penance is thus the purest form of what I will term the chronotope of the ordeal, according to which the hero's passive endurance of a trial or danger which he undergoes in isolation results in a change in his relation to the woman he loves. In penance, the lover does nothing and avoids seeing or speaking to his lady; his inactivity is penance because he says it is, by pure fiat. Penance is the weakest element in romance, the most open and extreme manifestation of its one-sidedness. As a result, it is a natural target for parody.

Let us look a bit closer at the terms of this parody. The hybridization involved in these scenes brings together religious discourse and secular

literature, and effects a redirection of what Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, terms “carnavalesque inversion.” The usual targets of such parodies, according to Bakhtin, were the doctrines and rituals of the Church. In secularizing the carnivalesque tradition, Cervantes participates in the development of a critical perspective for imaginative literature in the Renaissance, associated by Bakhtin with Rabelais. The key passages for the carnivalesque parody of penance come at the end of Chapter 25 and near the beginning of Chapter 26:

—Digo, señor, que vuestra merced ha dicho muy bien: que para que pueda jurar sin cargo de conciencia que le he visto hacer locuras, será bien que vea siquiera una, aunque bien grande la he visto en la quedada de vuestra merced.

—¿No te lo decía yo? —dijo don Quijote—. Espérate, Sancho, que en un credo las haré.

Y desnudándose con toda priesa los calzones, quedó en carnes y en pañales, y luego, sin más ni más, dio dos zapatetas en el aire y dos tumbas la cabeza abajo y los pies en alto, descubriendo cosas que, por no verlas otra vez, volvió Sancho la rienda a Rocinante, y se dio por contento y satisfecho de que podía jurar que su amo quedaba loco. (*DQ*, I, xxv, 318)

This is a typical example of what Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, terms the “carnavalesque.” The replacement of the head with the “material bodily lower stratum,” and the unveiling of these normally covered lower parts is an inversion which aims to banish deep-rooted

human anxieties through laughter (*Rabelais*, Ch. 6, esp. 335). Also worth noting is the seemingly insignificant occurrence of the word *credo*. In the *galeotes* adventure, Ginés de Pasamonte offers to say “*avemarías y credos*”; both of these words appear, separately, in the Sierra Morena episode. Though one could hardly expect Cervantes to be consciously aware of such repetitions, they do mark the trace of the creative process, in which the release of the *galeotes* and Don Quijote’s absurd carnivalesque parody of penance are linked. *Avemaría* appears in the following passage, repressed in Juan de la Cuesta’s second edition:

—Ea, pues, manos a la obra: venid a mi memoria cosas de Amadís, y enseñadme por dónde tengo de comenzar a imitaros. Mas ya sé que lo más que él hizo fue rezar y encomendarse a Dios; pero, ¿qué haré de rosario, que no le tengo?

En esto le vino al pensamiento cómo le haría, y fue que rasgó una gran tira de las faldas de la camisa, que andaban colgando, y dióle once ñudos, el uno más gordo que los demás, y esto le sirvió de rosario el tiempo que allí estuvo, donde rezó un millón de *avemarías*. (*DQ*, I, xxvi, 319-20)

The removal of a strip of cloth from the shirttail of the already half-naked Don Quijote mischievously suggests that the “penance” he is undergoing is really a striptease whose potentially infinite prolongation (one million Hail Marys) never becomes a true sublimation. The use of folk humor typical of the carnivalesque (nudity, hyperbolic numbers, somersaults) lends to the parody of the amorous penance of

knights errant and other romance heroes who participate in the ordeal chronotope a vitality beyond that of any purely literary parody. Within the space of the fiction, at least, the ridiculed form is completely banished. Indeed, this passive suffering for love, represented in the work by Cardenio's life in the woods as a wild man, disappears once Don Quijote imitates it. The next time he appears Cardenio's madness is cured, never to return. This rejection of the chronotope of the ordeal entails also a rejection of the monadic self-enclosure of the masculine hero with his desire, and the corresponding objectification of the female. In the scene which follows, Dorotea tells her story and then plays the Princess Micomicona; this freedom to act confirms the full consequences of the transformation the parody brings about.

The explosion of the chronotope of the ordeal by laughter paves the way for a new chronotope which Cervantes develops in the Inn. The scenes in the Inn do not participate fully in either the ordeal or everyday chronotopes. Perhaps the most appropriate term would be to say that they belong to a festival chronotope, one in which a special kind of festive time predominates, a time of freedom in which to set aside the decisions and behavior of the past, to set out in a new direction; it is a time for the wearing of masks and playing of roles, but above all a time for unmasking and stepping out of pre-established roles. Force gives way to persuasion, isolation to companionship, issues of morality and ideology are expressed at the level of a personal appeal. These features are most strongly felt in the final confrontation between Dorotea and all the other guests at the Inn on one side, and Fernando on the other. When Dorotea's highly rhetorical and deeply moving speech leads Fernando to submit his will to hers, he speaks these words, which form a culminating moment in the dialogic reformulation of romance in the

1605 *Don Quijote*: “Venciste, hermosa Dorotea, venciste; porque no es posible tener ánimo para negar tantas verdades juntas” (*DQ*, I, xxxvi, 452). This is a new type of romance, in which the female, meeting the male halfway, plays a more active role than in any earlier romance form. It has a negative side as well, however. Anselmo, playing by the old romance rules, according to which he is entitled to test his own wife since after all she is his objectified property (a “treasure” says Lotario), and only he experiences authentic desire, precipitates himself, his wife, and his friend into disaster. The final, desperate cry of Agi Morato, father of Zoraida, shows us just how haunting a personal appeal can be when it steps out from behind all the shielding conventions of morality and obligation, and still fails: “— ¡Vuelve, amada hija, vuelve a tierra, que todo te lo perdono; entrega a esos hombres ese dinero, que ya es suyo, y vuelve a consolar a este triste padre tuyo, que en esta desierta arena dejará la vida, si tú le dejas!” (*DQ*, I, xli, 507).

In relation to this festival chronotope, the role of *Don Quijote* is decisive: he is the catalyst who brings it about, the carnival king whose temporary crowning ushers in the atmosphere of free play within which it becomes possible for the characters who had been hiding from each other to come out and face one another. Three moments clearly set off his short-lived reign: the release of the galley slaves is equivalent to his symbolic crowning (he has set free men held by the king’s authority); the slashing of the wineskins is his moment of greatest carnival triumph, as he floods the Inn with wine for the Bacchanal; and his being once more caged is his symbolic uncrowning. During this time all the reunions and reconciliations in the Inn take place. Before and after, there are the violent scenes of the tragic failure of Grisóstomo’s love for Marcela, and the farsical, low-mimetic parody of it, the goatherd’s story

of Leandra.³ Cervantes has used carnival imagery in the dialogue with existing genres in order to purge them of their tendency to force the characters to behave towards one another in overly formulaic, predetermined ways. The result is an impressive series of scenes in which characters exceed the expectations of readers and go beyond what initially seemed the limits of their capability: Camila, in her tremendous performance with Lotario; Fernando, in letting himself be persuaded; Agi Morato, in his sudden shift from tyrannical authority figure to suffering victim.

The foregoing analyses have set the stage for an attempt at describing what might be termed the "Cervantine program for fiction." (The use of this term is problematic for a project like his, however, based as it is on the rejection of the programmatic.) We are now to be in a position to evaluate Cervantes's fiction from his own point of view, to ask ourselves what he wanted to write, when and how he best succeeded, and what aspects of his writing were not produced so much for their own sakes as for the sake of what they made possible. Cervantes subjected to a thorough critique the entire system of genres based on the ordeal chronotope, rejecting the passive suffering or active aggression of the male as the sole basis for determining the fate of the couple. At the same time, he accepted that stories concerned with the courtship of wealthy, beautiful young people constitute the perennial center of gravity for fiction. He sought a form of mimesis which would allow characters to step outside the narrow roles they were given by generic conventions, and to directly influence one another from within the fiction. He sought to create fictions which, though based on the conventional marriage plot, represented the richest possible realization of human beings. This meant writing an impure form of romance in

which the erotic desires of the protagonists achieved fulfillment through their mutual involvement. It also meant representing this fulfillment as a full-fledged event in the lives of the human beings he created, an interpersonal event in which both members were equal participants. Wilson has correctly emphasized the importance of this mutuality in the Greek romance type on which Cervantes based *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (15). Anything less than mutual participation of each in the fate of the other would be a fall back into some formulaic version or other of the romance of ordeal, a generic model that presents the plot as the only truly active agent, and the characters as its mere passive carriers. Cervantes needed his heroes to break out from the mold into which they had been poured, to spill over, and in so doing to confront one another in their essential relatedness. This meant producing a composition in which available conventionalized depictions of human beings confronted one another, and where each was overcome in the process.

The resemblance between the above reading of Cervantes's lifelong engagement with romance and El Saffar's well-known views on the subject is not unintentional. I have tried to reformulate some of El Saffar's valuable insights, grounding them in an analysis of Cervantes's self-positioning with respect to his literary antecedents, rather than relying on speculation about his inner spiritual life or on the theories of Jungian psychology. I find that there is much that is plausible in the genealogy of Cervantes's late fiction in both *Novel to Romance* and *Beyond Fiction*. An understanding of the solutions Cervantes worked out to the dead end of the chivalric hero's sublimation of erotic desire through legitimized violence requires, however, neither the assumption of a conversion late in life nor the authority of psychoanalytic

theory. From within the literary-historical horizons of Cervantes's work starting with *Galatea*, the necessity for a broader framework for the representation of human beings can be felt, and it can be traced historically to the concerns of Christian Humanism, as Forcione has shown in *Cervantes and the Humanist Vision*. Such a framework makes it possible to understand the invention of strategies for increasing the role of female characters without projecting our own contemporary concerns directly onto the Cervantine imagination. While the trajectory of Cervantes's fiction holds undeniable interest for feminism, its value is best preserved by separating the first stage of interpretation, in which we try to reconstruct plausibly Cervantes's own artistic designs, from a second stage in which we address the light thereby shed on the prehistory of our own historical situation. The application of such a two-step process ensures that the larger question of the relationship between the development of the novel and parallel changes in the social roles of men and women will not be obscured by a too-eager desire to conflate the two, giving innovative authors like Cervantes too much credit for cultural changes which take place gradually, over centuries. This article attempts to set some of the parameters for the first, more narrowly literary-historical phase of that process.⁴

Cervantes achieved the all-inclusive composition at which he aimed twice, in two very different works, *Don Quijote* and *Persiles*. In the remainder of this article, I will examine some of the general differences between these two works, trying, in the process, to come to terms with the vast inequality in the evaluation made of them today, an inequality made all the more uncomfortable by the fact that Cervantes was at least as proud of *Persiles* as of the work we today consider so much greater, perhaps more so, to judge from the pitch he makes for his

upcoming book in the Dedicatoria to the 1615 *Quijote*:

. . . y con esto me despido, ofreciendo a Vuestra Excelencia los *Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, libro a quien daré fin dentro de cuatro meses, *Deo volente*; el cual ha de ser o el más malo o el mejor que en nuestra lengua se haya compuesto, quiero decir de los de entretenimiento; y digo que me arrepiento de haber dicho *el más malo*, porque según la opinión de mis amigos, ha de llegar al extremo de bondad posible. (DQ, II, 39)

I will also give some consideration to the preponderance of interpolated narration in the 1605 *Don Quijote*, one that, once again, serves to indicate a difference between Cervantes's aesthetic sensibility and our own.

In *Don Quijote*, a critical mode of interaction of the different generic models predominates. The fixed forms are brought together in the form of collisions between forces which are diametrically opposed. Again and again we find the figure of the masculine hero trying to unilaterally resolve his erotic urges, remaining safely protected from the requirement that in order to love one must make oneself vulnerable to another person. Grisóstomo, Anselmo, and Cardenio (before he is cured) are all in this respect versions of the *ingenioso hidalgo* whose love for Dulcinea is such a ridiculous excess that it explodes the pretense of self-sufficiency with carnival laughter. The result of this is only a brief and hard won moment of mutual recognition between Dorotea and Fernando in the Inn. Viewed in this way, *Don Quijote*, Part One is a work in which a great deal of energy is spent in what Cervantes himself may very

reasonably have considered ground-breaking for some other, later project. To some degree, *Don Quijote*, especially in the 1605 work, is a buffoon whose function is to provide a caricature of the literary model which the other characters must overcome. Helped on by his buffoonery, they do overcome it, with laughter. The bounds of representation are only occasionally exceeded in this work; more often they are simply exposed, and the reader is left to infer that the human does indeed exceed them, though almost no examples of this are given.

Bakhtin has described the hero of the novel in terms which capture very well this critical dialogue with existing formal categories:

There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs . . . no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. There always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found. . . . Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, it bears within itself other possibilities.
(*Dialogic* 37)

It is in this sense alone that *Don Quijote* should be called "perspectivist": by means of juxtapositions of finite stylizations, it shows that no one generic model can tell the whole story of human experience.

Persiles takes up where *Don Quijote* leaves off. It also incorporates into its structure examples of all the major genres of prose fiction, but the seams which would separate them have been smoothed over.

Above all, characters pass from one of these worlds to another in a way which is not yet permitted in *Don Quijote*. Don Quijote and Cardenio embrace over the abyss which separates their generic worlds, but they do not cross it. The same can be said for Ginés de Pasamonte, El Caballero del Verde Gabán, and even Sancho. The protagonists of *Persiles*, though, transgress the boundaries separating the various worlds incorporated into the work without difficulty. *Persiles* is an adventure romance, and has often been criticized for its supposed conventionality. Yet it raises the adventure romance to a level of self-consciousness it had never before attained. In many ways it is *Don Quijote* turned inside out. The characters of *Don Quijote* exceed their elevated, idealized literary models because they have something those literary models lack, namely reality; those of *Persiles* exceed reality because they are true to the higher, more idealized plane. *Don Quijote* confronts one conventionalized figure with another in order to show that there is no single stylization which is valid, since each is in its own way inadequate. *Persiles* liberates its figures from one conventionalized setting after another, leaving them free but increasingly empty. To quote Bakhtin once more, this time from *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

As regards the adventure hero . . . it is impossible to say who he is. He has no firm socially typical or individually characterological qualities out of which a stable image of his character, type or temperament might be composed. . . . To the adventure hero anything can happen. He . . . is not a substance, but a pure function of adventures and escapades. . . . The circle of connections that heroes can establish, the circle of events in

which they participate, is not predetermined and not limited by their character, nor by any social world in which they might actually have been embodied. (102)

What sets *Persiles* apart from most adventure romance is the self-consciousness the work exhibits in its light touches of irony, and the explicit awareness of its protagonist: "—Yo . . . soy hecho como esto que se llama lugar, que es donde todas las cosas caben, y no hay ninguna fuera de lugar. . ." (II, xii, 227). El Saffar has argued that the theme of *Persiles* is "the ineffability of absolute truth" ("Periandro" 13). More specifically, I would like to suggest here that the *Persiles* is concerned with the impossibility of ever reducing a human being to a single coherent representation (hence Periandro's statement above). Whereas *Don Quijote* settles for the ironic juxtaposition of mutually critiquing styles, *Persiles* insists on pushing stylization until it breaks apart and the protagonists are forced out of one fictional world and propelled into another. Again and again, the major characters in the work burst the bounds of the representation which generates them. This is most dramatically the case in the second half, which takes place in continental Europe. Feliciano, Antonio, Ruperto, and Isabela provide clear examples of the capacity these figures have to explode the generic limits placed on them, not through ridicule and parody, but due to a sublime force within them which exceeds the bounds of any single mimetic field.

I do not intend the term "sublime" here in a loose, colloquial sense, but rather wish to suggest that Cervantes's posthumous romance can best be understood in the context of this aesthetic category, popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and currently undergoing a revival. Certainly the Kantian notion of the sublime is consistent with

the idea of a dimension of the human which is not “given” in any representation, but which nonetheless makes itself felt in that very inadequation. Such a view is present throughout the “Analytic of the Sublime,” though Kant’s interest is in the limitations, not of artistic representation, but of the representation we make to ourselves of nature’s vastness and power. Faced with the most overwhelming phenomena of nature, our capacity to comprehend rationally is exhausted. Yet, Kant argues, we still find in ourselves an awareness which we are unable to represent, but which matches the unbridled grandeur outside us. Later aestheticians applied this concept to the representations of artists, to their ability to suggest to us the working within them of another power, higher than what actually appears directly. Jean-Luc Nancy has described the sublime as the trace of an inadequation between the representation and what it purports to represent:

[T]he sublime. . . implies an unbordering or a going overboard of the beautiful, for the presentation of presentation itself . . . does not take *place*, does not have at its disposal the unified space of a figure, but rather is given in the schematic spacing and throbbing of the trace of figures, and thus only comes to pass in the syncopated time of the passage of the limit to the limit. (43; emphasis in the original)

In *Persiles* the human being does not have a place within the representation, does not *take* place, but rather is *like* a place (“soy hecho como esto que se llama lugar”), a place which, as it moves through time, passes through one limit after another, represented as a sequence of separate

spaces, deferred along the wavering line of the plot. As further evidence that *Don Quijote* anticipated the flights of Cervantine fantasy found in *Persiles*, I would like to draw attention to the similarity between this compositional technique and that recommended by the Canon of Toledo in a speech often taken as the model for *Persiles*:⁵

[E]l canónigo, con todo cuanto mal había dicho de tales libros, hallaba en ellos una cosa buena: que era el sujeto que ofrecían para que un buen entendimiento pudiese mostrarse en ellos, porque daban largo y espacioso campo por donde sin empacho alguno pudiese correr la pluma, describiendo naufragios, tormentas, rencuentros y batallas, pintando un capitán valeroso con todas las partes que para ser tal se requieren. . . todas aquellas acciones que pueden hacer perfecto a un varón ilustre, ahora poniéndolas en uno solo, ahora dividiéndolas en muchos. (I, xlvii, 566-67)

While it is true that subsequent literary history found the multi-voiced ironic heterogeneity of *Don Quijote* more fruitful than the sublime heterogeneity of *Persiles*, it seems likely that Cervantes would have envisioned himself the initiator of a new flourishing of romance. Of course today there is no question of introducing any serious revision of the relative status of *Don Quijote* within Cervantes's *oeuvre*. A fuller appreciation of the totality of his achievement should still be sought, however, especially among Cervantists, and some effort might be made toward reducing the extreme inequality of the weighting, not only of *Persiles* in relation to the canon of Cervantes's fiction, but also of those

aspects of Cervantes's greatest masterpiece which do not directly involve Don Quijote and Sancho.

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NOTES

¹ For two outstanding early examples, see Blanco Aguinaga and Avalle-Arce. Later studies on genre in Cervantes are too numerous to list. Martínez-Bonati's monograph on *Don Quijote* remains the fullest treatment.

² Márquez Villanueva (177-78) has studied Bartolomé's letter in relation to the slave-girl's letter in Part Two of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*.

³ A similar view of Don Quijote as a carnival king has been put forward by Dudley ("Don Quijote") and by Durán.

⁴ Despite overlap between her view of *Persiles* and my own, similar objections can be made in the case of Wilson's recent study, in which ideological concerns felt with particular urgency today are brought to bear on the text, with only secondary attention paid to formal procedures and aesthetic effects.

⁵ For example, by Forcione in his analysis of this passage (*Aristotle* 95-104).

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