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Poetry ‘Bodied Forth’ in Time: The Final Ironies of Cervantes’ Viaje del Parnaso

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Introduction

In the second decade of the seventeenth century, a certain poet, of advanced years, recalls how he embarked on a journey to Mount Parnassus in search of the literary reputation which had eluded him in Madrid. His timing was somewhat unfortunate. The illustrious Greek Mount had come under threat from squadrons of poetic infidels who would, if triumphant, overthrow centuries of Apollonian dominion. Duly ‘recruited’ by the messenger god Mercury to review a list of contemporary writers, the poet identifies those who might defend Parnassus against this audacious assault. He sets sail with this chosen poetic throng on a ship made of verses and undertakes a burlesque odyssey. On Parnassus he experiences, and expresses, absurd divine interventions and a bizarre battle in which books are wielded as weapons. With victory for Apollo secured (though the triumph is fragile), he ends up back in Madrid, via Naples, with no real understanding of how he got there.

This is the story of Miguel de Cervantes’ final poetic enterprise, a Viaje del Parnaso, undertaken in terza rima and ‘a paso tardo y lento’ (I, l. 111).\(^1\) The rhyme scheme conveys a debt to Dante, aligning Cervantes’ Viaje, at a very slant angle, with his Italian predecessor’s visionary journey through the triple realms of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. But the footsteps metaphor more specifically tracks the trajectory of another Italian, announced in the opening line of the poem, ‘un quidam Caporali’, who had undertaken his own expedition to Parnassus in 1582, initially on foot (‘paso a paso’ [I, l. 7]), before purchasing a decrepit mule, whose progress was no less hesitant (‘de […] tartamudo paso’ [I, l. 9]).\(^2\) In terms suggested by George Lakoff and Johnson

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\(^1\) All references to Cervantes’ poem are taken from the following edition: Miguel de Cervantes, Poesías completas, ed., intro. & notas de Vicente Gaos, 2 vols (Madrid: Castalia, 1984), I, ‘Viaje del Parnaso’ y ‘Adjunta al Parnaso’.

\(^2\) While acknowledging Cervantes’ debt to the ‘Voyage to Parnassus’ genre, Ellen D. Lokos is sceptical about the centrality ascribed by most commentators to Cesare Caporali’s
we might call Cervantes' metaphorical action in imitative following both 'self-propelled' and 'purposeful', but his choice of guide also suggests something of the subversion to come. In the history of ambitious epics, Virgil followed Homer, Statius followed Virgil, and Dante followed both Statius and Virgil, even to the extent of a triple embodiment of the latter as figura of poet, prophet and guide. Yet Cervantes would have us believe that he wishes to tackle the heights of the rota Virgilii with the guidance of Cesare Caporali, an unlikely standard-bearer for intellectual heritage. So while there is certainly a sense of belatedness in the cultural transfer, the influence that is signposted here falls rather short on Bloomian anxiety, as the subsequent melding of more authoritative models throughout the poem will evidence. Equally significant ('tardo y lento') is the protagonist's sluggish tread, a slow gait that draws attention to the sloughing of 'Cervantes' body through space and time. Accordingly, in this opening image of the aging poet-protagonist, the creative late life is defined provocatively—as a time of crisis, but also as a time of transformation.

James Gibson, an early translator (1883) of the poem, refers to the Viaje del Parnaso as one of the 'children of Cervantes's old age', the author being sixty-seven when the poem was published towards the end of 1614. In fact, Viaggio in Parnaso (1582). Lokos identifies a deliberate act of generic subversion on the part of Cervantes who signposts Caporali's work in the opening verse and who had asserted an imitative relationship in the prologue to the Novelas Ejemplares (Ellen D. Lokos, The Solitary Journey: Cervantes’s ‘Voyage to Parnassus’ [New York: Peter Lang, 1991], 11–12).


4 For Statius' use of the footsteps metaphor in the epilogue of the Thebaid, see Philip Hardie, The Epic Successors of Virgil: A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1993), esp. p. 110; for Dante's self-fashioning as a 'fulfilment of Statius and Virgil', and how Statius is employed by Dante as 'testimonial' to Virgil, see Teolinda Barolini, Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1984), Chapter 3, 'Epic Resolutions', 188–287 (pp. 270 & 261 respectively).

5 Frederick de Armas identifies in the prologue to Cervantes' early pastoral work, La Galatea (1585), a 'succinct statement of his intention to follow the Virgilian literary career', that is, eclogue as an apprenticeship for higher forms. For De Armas, Cervantes' epic ambitions are realized in the completion of Don Quijote Part II. I would note that the 'swerve' on the epic that we find in the Quijote, the parodic vision infused with melancholic resonance, is also very much in evidence in the Viaje, also a chronologically culminating work. See Frederick de Armas, 'Cervantes and the Italian Renaissance', in The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2002), 32–57 (p. 39).

6 Journey to Parnassus, composed by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, translated into English Tercets with Preface and Illustrative Notes by James Y. Gibson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1883), x. Gibson wrote: 'Though one of the children of Cervantes' old age [...], it has a sprightliness and vigour worthy of his prime'.

7 There are grounds for speculating that the eight verse chapters were completed in 1612 and the prose 'adjunta' written and/or added pre-publication. Key events of 1612 are referred to in the last chapter of the poem: the royal marriage of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria in Naples (May) and the return of the Duke of Pastrana from Paris to Madrid (August); while the letter from Apollo to Cervantes included in the prose appendix is dated 22 July 1614.
the Englishman is a rare exception in recognizing the literary merit of a poem which, as recently as 2005, could still be referred to as the ‘última frontera’ for Cervantine commentators. A review of the literature reveals that ‘relative’ neglect or defective readings (‘víctima de lecturas defectuosas’) tend to dominate responses, alongside identification and interrogation of models, and/or the difficulty of establishing a stable generic classification. Models discussed and debated include: Classical and/or Menippean satire; traditions of encomiastic and adoxographic literature; Dantean allegory; burlesque/mock epic; dream narratives; links to the carnivalesque and the countervoyage (notably Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* and Brandt’s *Ship of Fools*); and even the poet-protagonist’s picaresque dimensions. The imperatives of irony and ambiguity have also been noted, yet ultimately readings which foreground irony seek to resolve what Edward Said, referring to ‘late works’, has called ‘nonserene tensions’—whether the emphasis falls on Cervantes’ claims for literary distinction, his mature reflections on the state of

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12 Carlos M. Gutiérrez is possibly unique in suggesting that there is nothing in the text that suggests we should read it as a ‘reivindicación poética’ though he qualifies this with ‘como lo entendemos hoy’. See Carlos M. Gutiérrez, ‘Ironía, poeticidad y decorum en el *Viaje del Parnaso*’, in *Volver a Cervantes. Actas del IV Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de*
contemporary poetics, or the text’s vindication of, or subtle critique of, Hapsburg imperial politics. The present study is an attempt to grapple with just some of these tensions within a fairly open framework of late-style theorizing, a paradigm originally proposed by Said, with a basis in Theodore Adorno, that sets out to explore the ‘new idiom’ that characterized the late works of what he called ‘great artists’—a ‘contradictory mode’ that operates constructively ‘against the grain’. The concept has come under recent critical scrutiny, even attack; mostly for encouraging an over-sentimentalizing approach to the final works of the artist, and to the over-exposure of comparisons with other major artists when the circumstances which promote and impede creativity are very different in each case. The latter is much to the fore in the reservations of Michael and Linda Hutcheon who find the transhistorical deployment of ‘late style’ theoretically unsound. There is, of course, a risk, in over-extending any concept, and the wholesale imposition of the paradigm as a set of universalizing principles is certainly problematic. But there is a lot to be gained from an individually nuanced application in the case of Cervantes’ Viaje del Parnaso, an approach that might fully realize the implications of rather diverse readings which situate the text within a uniquely Cervantine ‘ciclo de senectute’, whether implicitly as in the case of Gaos, Rivers, Márquez Villanueva, Chiong Rivero and others, or explicitly, as is the case with Ruiz Pérez.

16 Russ McDonald, for instance, is wary of claiming more from ‘lateness’ than a ‘useful chronological pointer’, though the title of his book inevitably evokes Said, and by extension Adorno. See Russ McDonald, Shakespeare’s Late Style (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2006).
18 See Gaos, ‘Introducción’, in Cervantes, Viaje del Parnaso, ed. Gaos, 7–37 (pp. 25 and 28), (comparison with other late works is the only viable comparison); Rivers, ‘Cervantes’s Journey to Parnassus’, 243–44 (burlesque is an essential element of the mature Cervantes); Márquez Villanueva, ‘El retorno del Parnaso’, 693 and 695 (irony and ambiguity as trait of a mature reflection on the nature and function of poetry); Chiong Rivero, ‘Between Scylla and Charybdis’, 58, notes 3 and 9 (stress on irony in the work of the mature Cervantes); and Ruiz Pérez, La distinción cervantina, 65–67 (addresses Cervantes’s ciclo de senectute).


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A key tenet of late theorizing is that it treats multiplicity and contradiction as substantive and, most relevantly for the argument I wish to make here, recognizes the positive dimensions of unresolved self-making. It is a framework, therefore, that, notwithstanding critical scrutiny, both accommodates the polyfaceted nature of the text, and can be adapted to acknowledge the complex intersection of the individual voice (subjectively embodied) and the epochal (the collectively contingent, socio-political body politic). For the coincidences and fissures that hold, but yet fragment, individual and collective impulses in ‘unreconciled’ tension throughout the *Viaje*, can be illuminated in the terms Adorno uses to articulate the non-synthesized, but inter-connected axes of the subjective and objective in the late compositions of Beethoven; such as the *Missa Solemnis*, in whose disharmonies and disjunctions the philosopher identifies the composer’s refusal of bourgeois order:

*Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which—alone—it glows into life. He does not bring about their harmonious synthesis. As the power of dissociation, he tears them apart in time, in order perhaps, to preserve them for the eternal. In the history of art, late works are the catastrophes.*

The ‘fractured landscape’ envisaged by Adorno serves Said as a convenient metaphor against which to map his own preferred allegories. Prominent among these is the notion of the late work as ‘a form of exile’ (legible only in terms of the context out of which it emerges), and riven with the consciousness of a ‘lost totality’; a conditioning that clarifies for Said the catastrophic nature that Adorno ascribes to lateness. Said’s appreciation of Adorno’s defining characteristic seems to reach back into the etymological origins of ‘catastrophe’ (from the Greek *katastrophē*, ‘an overturning’), with resonance in Classical drama (in the unravelling of a fatal turning point), while still retaining something of our modern cataclysmic sense of the word. But lateness also admits the fruitful constructiveness of the disaster that initiates the *dénouement*; for while it is simultaneously ‘full of memory’, and ‘very aware of the present’, the late work of art can also host the new, and

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21 Said, *On Late Style*, intro. Wood, 14. It should be noted that at this point in the argument Said is reading Adorno (as aging artist) as much as he is reading Adorno’s concept of lateness; a parallel track that characterizes much of the opening chapter of his book, and which can obfuscate the coherence of the argument in places. This may, of course, be due to the fact that Said never finished the book in his own lifetime, that it is rather the result of the cutting and splicing of various sets of materials by his friend, Michael Wood (See Wood, ‘Introduction’, in Said, *On Late Style*, xi–xix).
in its rejection of reconciliation and easy closure, presage the future. As Stathis Gourgouris puts it: ‘Late style is precisely the form that defies the infirmities of the present, as well as the palliatives of the past, in order to seek out this future’, and it gestures towards it often in deflected mode, through the creatively cathartic dynamic that is released through irony—a charged combination of intellect and affect. And irony, as the vehicle that communicates emotional knowledge of the embodied images of the text, is accorded supremacy in Cervantes’ Viaje del Parnaso.

In keeping with the ‘refracted’ conditioning of late works, Cervantine irony animates an interactive, deconstructive, hermeneutics. The synchronic doublings of irony, blended with the diachronic, allegorical shape of the narrative, produce a curious collision of temporal and spatial tensions. As a rhetorical tool that prompts perceptual dissonance, irony depends upon a contrast of appearance and reality; and as a slippery, yet ‘weighted’, discursive strategy, (one that involves ‘the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude’), it has paradoxical implications for contemporary socio-cultural and political ideologies. Consequently, as the analysis that follows will demonstrate, what is really at stake in the Viaje’s frustration of synthesis is the construction of a cultural subject and the leveraging of a peculiar political ontology whose dynamism stems from the dominance of dis-unifying counter-tendencies.

23 Said, On Late Style, intro. Wood: ‘Late style is in, but oddly apart from the present [...] late style does not admit the definitive cadences of death; instead, death appears in a refracted mode, as irony’ (24).
24 Robert Phiddian draws attention to the natural affinities between deconstruction and parody: ‘Deconstruction is routinely used against the texts it studies, but you get a very different critical practice if you use it with another sort of textuality, with texts that consent to the movements of deconstruction, foresee them and play within them—if you use it with parodic texts’ (see Robert Phiddian, ‘Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?’, New Literary History, 28:4 [1997], 673–96 [p. 677]). Lindsay Kerr engages beautifully with Phiddian in her recent appraisal of the parodic late works of Lope de Vega and Luis de Góngora. See Lindsay G. Kerr, Luis de Góngora and Lope de Vega: Masters of Parody (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2017).
26 Making the case for taking account of political ontology in substantive terms, Colin Hay notes: ‘whether we choose to conduct our analysis in terms of identities, individuals, social collectivities, states, regimes, systems, or some combination of the above, reflects a prior set of ontological choices and assumptions—most obviously about the character, nature, and, indeed, “reality” of each as ontological entities and (potential) dramatis personae on the political stage’. For Hay, political ontology can be summed up as follows: ‘Ontology relates to being, to what is, to what exists, to the constituent units of reality; political ontology, by extension, relates to political being, to what is politically, to what exists politically, and to the units that comprise political reality’. See Colin Hay, ‘Political Ontology’, in The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Science, ed. Robert E. Goodin & Charles Tilly (Oxford/New York: Oxford U. P., 2006), 78–96 (pp.79 & 82; emphasis in the original).
agenda’ for considering any political ontology begins with ‘[t]he relationship between structure and agency, context, and conduct’ and ends ‘most fundamentally’ with ‘the extent (if any) of the separation of appearance and reality—the extent to which the social and political world presents itself to us as really it is such that what is real is observable’. 27 Informed by Hay’s arguments, and drawing from, though also taking some creative liberties with Said’s thesis, I will argue through a blending of aesthetic analysis and ideologically-inflected inquiry, that this politico-cultural construction in the Viaje del Parnaso is most intensely felt in the ‘un-making’ of authorial selfhood that is doubly ‘made up’ in the ‘catastrophic’ commentary of the narrator-persona and in the stripped-back references to the aging body of the protagonist.

Poet Come Lately

Mas no se espere que yo aqui la escriba,  
sino en la parte quinta, en quien espero  
cantar con voz tan entonada y viva,  
que piensen que soy cisne y que me muero.  
(Viaje del Parnaso, IV, ll. 563–65; emphasis added.)

At exactly the mid-point of Cervantes’ Viaje del Parnaso, and just before the narrator/protagonist invokes the Muses for the first time, he aspires to a peculiar, paradoxical, performance—the enactment of a prelude to demise so beautifully connected to the corporeal that the listener will perceive the swan-song simulation as ‘real’. Identification with the eschatological, though apocryphal allegory of the white-plumaged bird of Apollo, 28 is ostensibly justifiable, but actually absurd. The narrator’s swan self-fashioning harnesses a symbolic heritage, the swan as emblematic paragon of light and beauty (silent except for this exceptional moment of prescience transmitted so movingly in song) that stretches back to ancient Greece, to its first appearance in Aeschylus and to Socrates’ almost ecstatic entry into ‘that dark night’. 29 For centuries, then, it had been exploited both as a means to a

27 Hay, ‘Political Ontology’, 82. In a subsequent article Hay develops a distinct political ontology of the state in which he argues that the state is neither real nor fictitious, but ‘as if real’, a conceptual abstraction without any agency per se, but rather serves to define a series of contexts within which agency is authorized (or not) and enacted. See Colin S. Hay, ‘Neither Real Nor Fictitious But “As If” Real: A Political Ontology of the State’, British Journal of Sociology, 65:3 (2014), 459–80.

28 Pliny the Elder refuted the notion as early as 77 AD in his Natural History (Bk 10, Ch. xxiii). None the less, the legend has persisted in the imagination of poets.

29 See Aeschylus, Agamemnon (1444–46) where Clytemnestra refers to the wild swan song of Cassandra; and Plato’s Phaedo, 84e–85a where Socrates likens himself to swans who sing most beautifully when they realize they must die. The swan-song, according to Socrates, is a song of joy, for through it the bird anticipates re-joining the god, Apollo. Humans fear death and so misinterpret the swan’s song as a sorrowful lament.
poetic understanding of the self and as a shaping of literary reception. So, at this critical moment in the narrative, the narrator/protagonist makes a claim for the timeless Apollonian harmony of his song that is both entirely in keeping with the objectives of his Parnassian enterprise, and appropriate to his alignment with the forces that fight for the god under the swan insignia:  

_Era la insinia un cisne hermoso y cano, / tan al vivo pintado, que dijeras / la voz despide, alegre, al aire vano’ (VII, ll. 40–43; emphasis added)._ But the ironies run deep here—and in several directions. The protagonist’s desperate burlesque leap into the subjunctive not only subsumes the contradictions of the bird’s Venusian identity (and Venus is pitted against Apollo on Cervantes’ re-imagined Parnassus), but carries the ironizing weight of an earlier utterance which reconfigures and unmasks it—a dark, hoarse, voice that shadows and shapes the light:  

[que yo soy un poeta desta hechura]  
cisne en las canas, y en la voz un ronco  
y negro cuervo, sin que el tiempo pueda  
desbastar de mi ingenio el duro tronco;  

(Viaje del Parnaso, I, ll. 101–04)  

In the collective cultural psyche the crow, as harbinger of death and portent of the occult, is a compelling counter-image to the swan; its reputation for sophisticated cognitive faculties less dominant than darkness in the symbolic order. But the chromatic symbolism that generates poetic selfhood in these verses is not a blunt differentiation of black against white. Rather the black surfaces sonorously on the white visual plane—connoting a purity that exists to be tinted and tainted, and recalling its mythical origins as the once-white crow that deceived Apollo and was condemned to be cast out of paradise and coloured eternally black.  

30 The aging narrator/protagonist’s swan semblance and Apollonian credentials are not, therefore, entirely contradicted when he assumes the voice of the cawing crow; it is, after all, an intimate enemy and ambivalently positioned against Parnassus, much as Lucifer, the once revered angel, is ambiguously operative in the construction of Christian redemption. But it does constitute a challenging transport of the self into a counter-canonizing, collective, ‘other’. For the enunciating subject’s hoarseness will be subsequently embodied and released in the raucous cries of the heretical poets who cluster pre-battle under the banner of the crow (‘El _ronco son_ de más de una  

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30 Ovid provides one version of the legend in _Metamorphoses_ II. The account begins:  
nam fuit haec quondam niveis argentea pennis / ales, ut aequaret totas sine labe columbas, / nec servaturis vigili Capitolia voce / cederet anseribus nec amanti flumina cycno./ lingua fuit damno: lingua faciente loquaci / qui color albus erat, nunc est contrarius albo’ (ll. 536–41). (‘For long ago crows were not black, their plumage then was white as that of any dove, snow-white as the geese that guard the Capitol with vigilant cries: as white as swans who love the streams. His speech was his downfall; because offence was given by his chattering tongue, he who was once white, now is white’s opposite’ [my translation]).
Thus selfhood unfurls in instances of textual signage that form part of a larger, dispersed, design of rhetorical strategies; a complex, collaborative process that calls disparate concepts into ironic relation, and powerfully portends a form of subjectivity that is ‘unregimented’ and generative of contradictory modes of being. If this inaugural figure for poetic voice is starkly isolationist, appropriately fashioned in response to recurring reconfigurations of Cervantes as an impoverished and socially-marginalized poet, its retrospective recovery within the masses of the rebels is a provocative act of integration that sets one strand of the connotative system against another — against the strand that points obsessively towards allegiance to orthodoxy. The ‘would-be’ chosen-one of the Olympian deities is symbolically recast in the vocal aggression of ‘would-be’ Titans, whose arrogant claims would, in fact, be subject to parodic deflation—reduced to the status of a feline felony (‘gateaba una tropa poetica’ [VII, ll. 151–52]), having already merited metamorphosis into pumpkins and gourds (at the climax of Chapter 5). As we shall see, these individual instances of ironic self-fashioning merge like precarious fault-lines that implicate readers in the breaching of the porous boundaries of aesthetic, biographical, spatio-temporal and socio-political domains; an experiential and ‘modifiable’ mapping that connects rhizomatically to the deeper fundamental irony that permeates the poem—the unsettling irony that connects the poem’s ‘light’

31 The relevant verses read: ‘El ronco son de más de una bocina / instrumento de caza y de la guerra, / de Febo a los oydos se avezina. / Tiembla debajo de los pies la tierra / de infinitos poetas oprimida, / que dan asalto a la sagrada sierra. / El fiero general de la atrevida gente, / que trae un cuervo en su estandarte, / es Arbolanchez, muso por la vida’ (VII, ll. 85–93; emphasis added).

32 Said refers to figures of lateness that can operate as a ‘platform for alternative and unregimented modes of subjectivity’ (On Late Style, intro. Wood, 114).

33 The text is saturated in these references. See the following as representative: I, l. 115, reference to his ‘humilde choza mía’; I, ll. 206–07, where he explains his poor attire to Mercury; IV, l. 89, ‘no tengo capa’, when Apollo tells him to sit on his cloak in the absence of a seat; VIII, l. 455, his home is a ‘lobrega posada’.

34 The relevant verses read: ‘Por la falda del monte gateaba / una tropa poetica, aspirando / a la cumbre, que bien guardada estava.’ (VII, ll. 151–53). Lope de Vega would exploit the parodic potential of feline deflation on a much more extensive scale in his own late mock epic La Gatomaquia, where cats are re-cast in a contemporary performance of the Trojan war. I have addressed this elsewhere; see Isabel Torres, ‘Lope de Vega’s La Gatomaquia and Positive Parody’, Caliope. Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry, 14:1 (2008), 5–22.

35 I have drawn (rather freely) here on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome which they summarize as follows: ‘[…] unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states […] Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight’ (Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. & foreword by Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987], 21).
to its ‘fractured landscape’, that is, the protagonist’s (Cervantes’) subjective claim on canonical status with his charged appeals for objective validation.

The collision of these interlocking, mutually exclusive, perspectives, is enacted throughout the poem in the narrator/protagonist’s pursuit of a self-contradictory and, therefore, unrealizable goal—the construction of a sovereign selfhood through the administration of external agency. The protagonist fixates obsessively on a series of power figures that exist outside the self, that break through from myth (Mercury, Apollo, the heroes of epic), from history (Don Juan at the triumph of Lepanto) and emerge from shards of biography (the Conde de Lemos, the Argensola brothers, Lope de Vega). Their ‘unreconciled’ presence constitutes the ‘lost totality’ that manifests itself from the outset of the poem in the cultivation of an estranged, sardonic, sensibility—an exilic conditioning that is ambiguously redefined.

Exile is a powerful performative paradigm that draws on the physical, spatial and temporal separation from one’s native land in order to figure the trauma of divided selfhood. Cervantes makes explicit the exilic conditioning of the protagonist’s self-fashioning when he bids farewell to his country and to himself in chapter one (‘Hoy de mi patria y de mi mismo salgo’ [I, l. 132]) and again, at the opening of Chapter 4 when, in anger at his unexpected treatment on Parnassus (he is the only poet left standing), he identifies with Ovid, the archetypal ‘poeta relegatus’ (‘De mí yo no sé más, sino que prompto / me hallé para decir en tercia rima, / lo que no dijo el desterrado a Ponto’ [IV, ll. 4–6]). But there is colossal irony in this presumptuous self-identification that exposes Parnassus both as the fantasy of a lost home to which he has been drawn in a nexus of misplaced nostalgia, and as a mirror of Madrid, the actual homeland, where his negotiation of the power operations of culture are equally precarious. There are traces of the autobiographical underlying the constituted exilic persona and these have been excavated excessively by critics in search of a rationale for the poem’s composition. Cervantes’ exclusion from the contemporary literary field (as

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37 The bibliography documenting the animosity between Cervantes and Lope de Vega is immense. With reference to allusions to Lope in the Viaje, see the following as representative: Lokos, ‘El lenguaje emblemático en el Viaje del Parnaso’, 65–69, who offers a detailed reading of Lope’s conspicuous descent from a cloud as an attack on his theatrical practice, and Patrizia Campana, ‘Encomio y sátira en el Viaje del Parnaso’, Anales Cervantinos, 35 (1999), 75–84, who argues that the second reference to ‘Rimas’ in the battle of the books constitutes a further insult to Lope (79–83).

38 Working out from the work of Philippe Lejeune (Le Pacte autobiographique [Paris: Seuil, 1975]), and acknowledging groundwork laid by Rivers (Sima Cervantina) and Gaos (Viaje del Parnaso, ed. Gaos), Jean Canavaggio offers the first, albeit quite short, sustained focus on the autobiographical aspects of the poem (Jean Canavaggio, ‘La dimensión
evidenced by his reputation as a poor poet and his absence from Espinosa’s *Flores de ilustres poetas de España* of 1605); the lack of prestige accorded to the novel (the genre he ‘fathered’ and dominated); the rise of anti-intellectual, mass-audience, market forces with which he seemed to be constantly at cross-purposes (as reflected in his fraught relationship with the *comedia nueva* and with its champion, Lope de Vega);39 and his frustrated ambitions for patronage that crystallized in his exclusion from the entourage that would accompany the Conde de Lemos to Naples in 1608,40 leaving him languishing on the margins of the capital’s literary academies (a locus of contemporary aesthetic degeneration that he would pitilessly parody in the preliminary poems of the *Quijote*).41 At the more extreme end of critical response the poem has been viewed as a strategic exercise in image-projection in the service of propaganda;42 an approach that risks inventing what is lived on the basis of what is poeticized, and seems to miss the point of poetry and the primacy that it gives to the event of language.43 To adapt Adorno, we must be careful not ‘to relegate the *Viaje* to the outer reaches of art’ by misreading Cervantes’ autobiographical interventions.44 For art ‘does not abdicate its rights in favour of reality’ in the *Viaje*, any more than it does in Cervantes’ other works of fiction.45 He had played ambivalently with the fictive nature of the poetic persona in his early pastoral work, *La Galatea* (1585),46 while intensely ironized self-portraits in the prologues of the *Novelas ejemplares, Don Quijote* and the *Persiles*, establish a pact with readers, and reflect what Adrienne Rich, in another context, has termed the poet’s ‘drive to connect’, or his/her ‘dream of a common language’.47

41 Márquez Villanueva, ‘El retorno del Parnaso’, 697–98, 701, who notes that a prominent academy in Madrid was named *El Parnaso*, at which ‘letters’ from Apollo were often recited. See also Adrienne Laskier Martín, *Cervantes and the Burlesque Sonnet* (Berkeley/Oxford: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 126–35 on the Argamasilla academies and Cervantes’ mocking of contemporary literary practices. A key premise of Martin’s study is the participatory nature of Cervantine parody, a point worth bearing in mind for the *Viaje del Parnaso*, and which helps to explain the narrator/protagonist’s persistent distancing of his work from ‘sátira’.
46 A very recent article by Felipe Valencia takes this as its starting point (see ‘‘No se puede reducir a continuado término’: Cervantes and the Poetic Persona’, *Caliope. Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry*, 21:1 [2016], 89–106).
47 In her poem ‘Origins and History of Consciousness’, Adrienne Rich writes of ‘the true nature of poetry. The drive to connect. The dream of a common language’ (ll. 11–12).
Cervantes’ depiction of the human body, as the inaugural image of the *novelas* is, for Alicia Zeuse, a reminder that we need not ‘disavow corporeality’ in our ‘imaginative interaction with the textual world’. But the specific valorizing of the maimed, crippled and/or aging body does more than this. Addressing representations of bodily aging, Donna Haraway has distinguished usefully between corporeality and embodiment; between the aging body as ‘social actant’, its materiality relatively unmediated, and the aging body as a ‘vehicle of social agency’, the materiality of the body ‘enacting’ a crucial role in the co-construction of personal and social identity. For Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, Haraway’s emphasis on the contingency of embodiment, the enactment of age in different ways, at different times, and in different settings, suggests a similarity between ‘performances’ of age and aging and Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus*. According to this model, the embodiment of age, performed by the protagonist of the *Viaje*, is not ‘freeze-framed’, but rather constructed from a blending of his personal past with a collectively-fashioned history; a temporal materialization and organization of experience that is both subjectively and socio-culturally salient. But the early modern body also matters within a shared matrix of human experience. As a reminder of the exigencies of time that bind us collectively within the corporeal world, the aging body profoundly patterns the constraints of the individual’s experience in the world, bringing other shades into our experiences of self. It also brings into play more broadly-based imperatives that probe the human condition. Thus, under the surface of the staged farce that is Cervantes’ journey to Parnassus, an ironic voyage that brings the exile back to ‘being’ on the periphery, lurks the darker design of ‘vanitas’.

Late style may not admit the ‘definitive cadences of death’, but death is caught up in the poem’s fashioning of the world allegorically as an aggregation of signs, and in its structuring of personal desire as an apprehension of that passing out of physical being that goes beyond the individual. Thus the first step on Cervantes’ journey is a mis-step, an ‘error’ associated with the desires and delusions of grandeur:

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52 These observations are drawn from Bainard Cowan’s analysis of Benjamin’s theory of allegory. See Bainard Cowan, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory’, *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 109–22 (p. 110).
Mas como de un error otro se empieza,  
creyendo a mi deseo, di al camino  
los pies, porque di al viento la cabeza.  
(I, ll. 55–57; emphasis added)

The textual coupling of ‘deseo’ and ‘viento’ introduced here will later spawn the inflated dream vision of Vainglory:

Esta que hasta los cielos se encarama  
preñada, sin saber cómo, del viento,  
es hija del Deseo y de la Fama. (VI, ll. 175–77; emphasis added)

and will reach its climax in the deflation, and ‘grounding’, of the winged-horse Pegasus.53 Yet ‘Cervantes’ (protagonist) sets off self-consciously none the less, freely embracing this ‘falling out’ of place and time as an opportunity for creative self-liberation; expecting ascension to the summit to confirm the poetic sensibilities which, despite his best efforts, Heaven’s grace has denied him:

Yo, que siempre trabajo y me desvelo  
por parecer que tengo de poeta  
la gracia que no quiso darme el cielo. (I, ll. 25–27)54

His circular journey is rhetorically modulated as a willing self-removal, predicated upon a ‘desire’ to transcend temporality through participation in the archetypal rituals of poetic glory—to drink from Parnassian streams and to wear the laurel crown of the grandiose poet. It is also, as his farewell speech to the ‘patria’ (Madrid) makes clear, driven by the need to take himself out of a community whose group identity has become alien to him:

‘Adiós, dije a la humilde choza mía,  
Adiós Madrid, adiós tu Prado y fuentes,  
que manan nectar, llueven ambrosia.  
Adiós, conversaciones suficientes

53 Correa discusses the symbolism of Pegasus and the Viaje’s subtle evocation of the broader context of the myth of Bellerophon; noting that Cervantes’ insatiable hunger and thirst for poetic glory, and ultimate frustration, is more akin to the punishment of Tantalus. See Gustavo Correa, ‘La dimension mitológica del Viaje del Parnaso de Cervantes’, Comparative Literature, 12:2 (1960), 113–24 (pp. 122–24).

54 In 1981 Andrés Amorós welcomed modern criticism’s tentative re-evaluation of Cervantes’ engagement with poetry, pointing to the interventions of Rivers and Blecula, among others, as indicative of a new attitude that recognized Cervantine irony in the writer’s assessment of his own poetic performance, and referred to this oft-cited tercet of the Viaje del Parnaso. Over thirty-five years later, however, the question of ‘Cervantes, poeta’ continues to confound us. Despite another more recent surge of activity and excellent interventions, the many (and varied) attempts to ‘realize’ Cervantes as ‘poeta’ have failed to coalesce and to effect the revisionist agenda which scholars had predicted. See Andrés Amorós, ‘Los poemas de El Quijote’, in Cervantes, su obra y su mundo. Actas del I congreso Internacional sobre Cervantes, Madrid, 1978, dir. Manuel Criado de Val (Madrid: EDI-6, 1981), 707–15.
a entretenir un pecho cuidadoso,
y a dos mil desvalidos pretendientes.
  Adiós, sitio agradable y mentiroso,
do fueron dos gigantes abrasados
con el rayo de Júpiter fogoso.
  Adiós, teatros publicos, honrados
por la ignorancia, que ensalza veo
en cien mil disparates recitados.
  Adiós, de San Felipe el gran paseo,
donde si baja o sube el turco galgo,
como en gaceta de Venecia leo.
  Adiós, hambre sotil de algún hidalgo,
que, por no verme ante tus puertas muerto,
hoy de mi patria y de mi mismo salgo.' (I, ll. 115–32)

This ironic ‘adiós garcilasiano’ would reach its zenith of melancholic consciousness in the prologue to the posthumously published Persiles, in an attempt by the author to actualize the infinite: ‘Adiós, gracias; adiós donaires; adiós regocijados amigos, que yo me voy muriendo y deseando veros presto contentos en la otra vida’. But here embodiment as a ‘departing’ ironic subject is anchored in the concrete, in the substance of life in the capital, out of which emerges a desire for distance from a form of existence that has been encouraged by the warped values of contemporary society. Through irony Cervantes becomes negatively related to these objective social realities, to their demands and obligations, and moves to negate them in the process. This is, therefore, an historically situated dynamic of desire which we might usefully consider in terms of the extended Hegelian conceptualization which Anthony Cascardi exploits for Don Quijote: desire shaped not so much as an individually-limited phenomenon ‘felt or intuited’, but ‘as a deciphered (inter)dependence that becomes visible as a form of intertextuality’. Mobilized in this way, desire does more than ‘trouble our procedures of reading’. It also exposes the tensions of identity formation within an unstable socio-historical field. For Cascardi, the shift from a highly stratified ‘heroic order of society dominated by values of caste’ and the


56 In thinking about Cervantes as an ‘ironic subject’ I have adapted some aspects of Abraham Kahn’s reflections on Kierkegaard, especially how Socrates is the ‘paradigmatic figure’ in the shaping of Kierkegaard’s conception of irony. See Abraham Kahn, ‘Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard’, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 17:1–2 (1985), 67–85 (pp. 68–69).
formulations of desire that underpin it, to a ‘relatively less static order controlled by values of social class’ has the effect of creating a ‘series of culturally ambiguous, displaced, or marginalized groups [...] whose identity exist in a sort of nowhere space and cannot be fixed in terms of the social order that has been eclipsed’, or the new order that is emerging. But whereas Cascardi views Don Quijote as a ‘successful correction of the heroic model’, insofar as Cervantes is inclined to transform his failures into ‘sources of authentic self-creation’. ‘Cervantes’, as embodied in the narrator/protagonist of the Viaje, is more ambiguously positioned, less like Don Quijote and more like the ‘others’ with whom Don Quijote interacts—a spectrum of extremes that includes both the displaced and those who participate actively in society’s evolving network of horizontally differentiated relationships; a system increasingly determined by the circulation of capital. In this context desires are structured according to promises of patronage and the upward mobility that is inherent in a more fluid scheme of economic exchange and practices of power. And so, in a contradictory gesture of self-assertion, the aging poet ‘abandons communication with the social order’ in order to articulate his persistent relevance to it.

External validation first comes in the guise of Mercury. As the god of eloquence, often juxtaposed with Apollo in Renaissance art (e.g. Andrea Mantegna’s Parnassus [1497]), Mercury tempers and mediates the inspiration of the Muses, emblematizing the importance of conscious craftsmanship and learned control of form in artistic production. As such, his speech to Cervantes is a perfectly crafted re-iteration of the protagonist’s previous self-fashioning as ideal, albeit disenfranchized, soldier-poet, a trajectory that runs from Lepanto to Lemos:

¡O Adán de los poetas, o Cervantes!
¿qué alforjas y que traje es este, amigo,
que así muestra discursos ignorantes?

Yo, respondiendo a su demanda, digo:
‘señor, voy al Parnaso, y, como pobre,
con este aliño mi jornada sigo.’

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60 See Said, On Late Style, intro. Wood: Beethoven’s late period (or third period) represents a moment in modern culture where the artist ‘who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order […] and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it’ (8).
Y el a mí dijo: ¡o sobrehumano y sobre
espíritu cilenio levantado!
¡toda abundancia y todo honor te sobre!
Que, en fin, has respondido a ser soldado
antiguo y valeroso, cual lo muestra
la mano de que estás estripeado.
Bien sé que en la Naval dura palestra
perdiste el movimiento de la mano
izquierda, para gloria de la diestra.
Y sé que aquel instinto sobrehumano,
que de raro inventor tu pecho encierra,
no te le ha dado el padre Apolo en vano.
Tus obras los rincones de la tierra,
levándol[a[s] en grupo Rocinante,
descubren, y a la envidia mueven guerra.
Pasa, raro inventor, pasa adelante
con tu sotil disinio, y presta ayuda
a Apolo, que la tuya es importante. [...]'
(I, ll. 202–25; emphasis added.)

Playing persuasively on the 'I' 's entrapment in this narrative of power, class
and the contingencies of historical circumstances, Mercury holds out a
promise of self-fulfilment that involves undertaking the role of paranymph
at Mercury's design—'to be' realized ironically as advocate for another. The
eulogistic dimension of the speech also functions as a significant distal
referent that confirms the ironic stratagem of Cervantes' por parecer que
tiene de poeta—the self-fashioning tercets referred to above that have so
troubled interpretations of Cervantes' relationship with poetry. The
'trabajo' (conscious effort) that characterizes Cervantes' work is transvalued
by Mercury as 'inventio', a crafting of reformulations which in the case of the
Viaje takes the form of a defamiliarized ars combinatoria—a dislocation of
expectation shot through with what Said might call, 'contrapuntal
textures'. Thus the poem can often teeter on the brink of sacrificing
coherent sense (in the battle scenes for instance), while simultaneously
communicating profound melancholy (the pathos that punctuates the

61 For a succinct and useful summary of Cervantes' relationship with poetry, see
Eugenio Florit, 'Algunos comentarios sobre la poesía de Cervantes', Revista Hispánica
Moderna, 34:1 (1968), 262–75. The tercets in question here are addressed by almost all
commentators of the poem. Worth noting as a distinct intervention is José Manuel Trabado's
view that Cervantes' self-fashioning as a failed poet forms part of a broader discourse of
madness which connects the Viaje (and its protagonist) to the Quixote. See José Manuel
Trabado Cabado, 'De viento, locura, y otros desatinos en el Viaje del Parnaso', in Actas del
congreso internacional sobre humanismo y renacimiento, coord. Maurilio Pérez González, 2
vols (León: Univ. de León, 1998), II, 661–74.
fashioning of the disillusioned persona). Moreover, Mercury contributes to
the duplicity at the core of the exilic story the persona tells of himself, by
recognizing its heroic alienation, though creatively reconfiguring it, in
Adanic terms: ‘O Adán de los poetas! O Cervantes!’ As part of the apparatus
of exaggerated references to the protagonist’s age (e.g. ‘yo, poétón ya viejo’
[VIII, l. 409]), the allusion to Cervantes as the founding father of the human
race, points humorously to the body as ‘a symbol of anachronistic material’.63
But it also opens up beyond the individual in interesting ways. For instance,
it embraces a broader reformulation of existing models of heroism that will
shadow subsequent allusions to the primary epics of Homer and Virgil,
redirecting textual stimuli towards a questioning of epic’s ideological position
and exposing the readers’ historico-empirical actuality to sceptical scrutiny.
Identification with Adam also makes of the narrator a metaphor for a
‘material body principle’, that moves through the narrative, connecting and
compelling us to read through the chapter breaks, to follow the links that
persistently counter closure. Accordingly, the final verse of Chapter one
introduces a list that is suspended until Chapter two (‘yo dije de esta suerte’
[I, l. 343]), the voyage in motion culminates in Chapter two and carries us
across into three (‘remos al agua dio [Mercurio], velas al viento’ [II, l. 439]),
Cervantes cuts short his speech to Apollo at the end of Chapter three to direct
us to four (‘pues la tercera es acabada / la cuarta parte desta impresa justa’
[III, ll. 477–78]), and then repeats these delaying tactics in the prelude to
Chapter five (‘Mas no se espere que yo aqui la escriba [la fiesta], / sino en la
parte quinta’ [IV, ll. 562–63]), at the end of Chapter five he postpones the
telling of the dream until Chapter six (V, ll. 331–34), and at the end of
Chapters six and seven the reader is carried forward into battle, and victory,
respectively on a resounding wave of ‘arma’ (VI, ll. 304–07) and ‘victoria’ (ll.
358–61). The latter operates as a burlesque transferral of the emblematic
‘call and echo’ of lyric poetry; an untimely transvaluation of ‘letras’ into
‘arma’ (Apollo is fashioned as an imperial commander who delivers an ironic
arenga in Spanish), that points paradoxically to the degradation of
contemporary poetics. At the end of the final chapter, at Agamben’s ‘point
of identity crisis’,64 the poem withdraws radically from completion by
signposting the intrinsic ambiguities of its trajectory, as well as its
existential performativity (the ‘last’ word is ‘jornada’: ‘que cansa, cuando es
larga, una jornada’ [VIII, l. 457]), before collapsing into prose. And it is in the

63 The phrase is from Shiels. See Barry Shiels, ‘Poetry in the Modern State: The
Example of W. B. Yeats’s “Late Style” and “New Fanaticism”’, New Literary History, 45:3
64 Commenting on devices such as the use of the envoi, or tornada that announce the
end of the poem, Agamben notes: ‘as if the end needed these institutions, as if for poetry the
end implied a catastrophe and loss of identity so irreparable as to demand the deployment of
very special metrical and semantic means [...] What is essential is that the poets seem
conscious of the fact that here lies something like a decisive crisis for the poem, a general crise
de vers in which the poem’s very identity is at stake’ (The End of the Poem, 112 & 113).
prose *adjunta* that the symbolic cycle of death and renewal that begins with Adam’s ambivalent act of disobedience (for the notion of redemption is implicit in the Fall) is transmuted in a parodic dislocation of referents—re-emerging in the threat of a new cohort of ‘bad poets’ generated from the blood of the vanquished. 65 If Cervantes’ poetic persona is Adam, then we are all made complicit in the consequence of his ‘infected’ actions, in the ‘felix culpa’ that celebrates linguistic corruption. But this is not the reader responsiveness that Stanley Fish identifies in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where (he suggests) linguistic opacity and indeterminacy is manipulated to educate readers into an awareness of their own fallen position and distance from original Edenic innocence. 66 Cervantes’ ‘retraining’ is far from Milton’s corrected perspective. Rather we are only fit for Cervantes’ purpose if we can appreciate those features of language most imaginatively at play in poetry—ambiguity and, often, as here, irony. So when Mercury calls Cervantes forward to lend ‘timely aid’ to Apollo because his assistance is important to him (I, ll. 223–25), we are to understand that this will most certainly not be the case.

‘Un-making’ on Parnassus

Cervantes does ‘stand out’ on Parnassus, but not quite as he imagined. In what Rivers has called a ‘paranoid nightmare’ he is the only poet who seems to suffer from hunger and the only one who is denied a seat in the domain of the divinity. 67 In protest he launches a verbal assault that takes the form of a biographical list of publications, glossed with subjective critical appraisal, and once again with ‘desire’ as its catalyst:

> Yo corté con mi ingenio aquel vestido,  
> con que al mundo la hermosa Galatea  
> salió para librarse del olvido.  
> Soy por quien La Confusa, nada fea,  
> pareció en los teatros admirable,  
> si esto a su fama es justo se le crea.  
> Yo, con estilo en parte razonable,  
> he compuesto Comedias que, en su tiempo,  
> Tuvieron de lo grave y de lo afable.

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65 Pancracio relates to Cervantes that Apollo and the Muses have been forced to plough and sow Parnassus with salt to prevent the ‘malos poetas’ from propagating their bad seed (*Adjunta al Parnaso*, ed. Gaos, 184–85). Chiong Rivero suggests that the sowing of salt may be a subtle allusion to the destruction of Carthage under the political campaign of Cato the Elder, ‘invoking the imperialistic spectre of Cato the Elder’s notoriously relentless propaganda: *Carthago delenda est*’ (*Between Scylla and Charybdis*, 81).


Yo he dado en Don Quixote pasatiempo
al pecho melancólico y mohino,
en cualquiera sazón, en todo tiempo.
   Yo he abierto en mis Novelas un camino,
por do la lengua castellana puede
mostrar con propiedad un desatino.
   Yo soy aquel que en la invención excede
a muchos, y, al que falta en esta parte,
es fuerza que su fama falta quede.
   Desde mis tiernos años amé el arte
dulce de la agradable poesía,
y en ella procuré siempre agradarte.

(...)  
Por esto me congojo, y me lastimo
de verme solo en pie, sin que se aplique
árbol que me conceda algún arrimo.

(IV, ll. 13–45; emphasis added)

The sense of alienation experienced in the *locus amoenus* is mirrored in the dialectic of self that is foregrounded in this speech, but which remains unresolved. The poet observes himself both as subject and as object. The duality, the ‘split’ even, is essential, so that the authorial subject might be separated from the humiliated object. The irony in representing the subject in this context as the ‘hijo de sus obras’ is obvious (the fragility of self-worth that is determined by the value placed on literary production), but what fundamentally undermines the ‘truth’ of the self-assertion enacted here is the conflict between the writer as persona (‘ego’) and writing as an activity. As Walter H. Sokel has observed in relation to Kafka, writing as narrative process, rather than as thematic representation, can ‘unmake’ selfhood not only in the story, but in the activity that makes the story.68 Thus ironic refutation of the self is ‘not purely a thematic concern’, but ‘is enacted in and through’ the writing.69 This is seen in the *Viaje* in the subject’s paradoxical acquiescence to the authority of Apollo (‘cúbreme con tu mano y con tu sombra. / O ponme una señal por do se entienda / que soy hechura tuya y de tu casa!’ [IV, ll. 552–54]), a god who endorses eating the dry dung of Pegasus to treat cerebral weakness in poets who are prone to fainting (VIII, ll. 175–77), and who, after the battle, descends into a post-traumatic delirium, a condition that leaves ‘el padre y el inventor de la poesía’ with a serious, contagious, case of ‘Horatian’ writer’s block.70 But Cervantes’ ‘un-making’ of

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70 The passage which occurs at the opening of Apollo’s letter to Cervantes reads: ‘No se si del ruido de la batalla o del vapor que arrojé de si la tierra empapada en la sangre de los
poetic selfhood is perhaps more provocatively observed in his failure to identify 'True Poetry' when represented in the radiant allegorical guise of 'la santa hermosissima doncella' (IV, ll. 43–44), an irony that is accentuated by Cervantes' subsequent exploitation of the same image in the second part of *Don Quijote*, when the knight offers the following eulogy: ‘La poesía [...] a mi parecer, es como una doncella tierna y de poca edad, y en todo estremo hermosa’ (Chapter XVI). However, within the *Viaje*, the self-deluding fiction of desire unravels most significantly in the revelatory dream sequence of Chapter six.\(^{71}\) As Anne Cruz has reminded us, the dynamics of desire are pervasive in Cervantes’ fiction, often moving through the treacherous terrain of ‘fragmented and fractured selves’, where they infuse the representation of characters whose desire for what they cannot have (or for what they cannot express), becomes evident in behaviour that requires the reader to delve beneath the surface narrative ‘to fill in the gaps’. Cruz also draws our attention to how psychoanalytical approaches to Cervantine desire encourage the text ‘to speak more than it knows’, sometimes with the disadvantage of ‘falling back’ into the murky waters of authorial intentionality.\(^{72}\) But in the *Viaje*, where author and character identification deliberately pushes the reader towards a constructed fallacy of intent, the risk lies in an autobiographical reductionism that misses out on other potential meanings among the textual ‘excess’ of parody.\(^{73}\)

The most excessive figuration in the *Viaje* emerges when the surface structure dissipates to expose the dream vision of ‘Vanagloria’, an inordinately inflated, distortion of the form of True Poetry, possibly also a ‘doncella’ (VI, ll. 94–96), whose beauty, gigantically proportioned, is better observed ‘desde lejos’ (VI, l. 89). The doubling at play here suggests a bifurcation at the core of the poetic act that the writing ‘actions’ of the poetic voice (*cisne y cuervo*), manifest at this point in the ambivalent articulation of a very sceptical subconscious, persistently undermine. The dream projects
the dark, unyielding, substratum of a desire that spirals beyond the controlling force of its origins (forged in disillusionment in Madrid), and indeed, of its destination (distended to the point of dropsy in an unrecognizable Parnassus). Cervantes-protagonist fails to recognize his own self-deceptions so hyperbolically embodied in this female-other (‘Ella misma a si misma se promete / triunfos y gustos’ [VI, ll. 205–06]), and ultimately is left unsettled by the elusive experience, yet none the wiser for it (‘dio a mi sueño fin dulce y molesto’ [VI, l. 234]. Liberated from the ‘shadows’ of the subconscious, the object of the male subject’s unfulfilled desire, masquerades as a monstrous ‘doncella’ that mimics the beauty of the similarly intangible, ‘santa’ foil. The ironic similarities between the environs of True Poetry and Vainglory and the more intimate, deviant, mirroring that projects the self’s antinomies onto an overwhelmingly seductive external image, push Parnassus even further away from both the character Cervantes’ and the reader’s reach. What had seemed to be a logical fallacy, the mythical outer world that hosts the inner dreamscape, is now represented as an equally evanescent aspect of the same enigma; but one that ‘glows into’ more powerfully delusional ‘life’. When the mythical summit of aesthetic authority becomes the site of a descent into a burlesque oneiric katabasis, the deep paradoxes of the protagonist Cervantes’ accommodation with the established order, as well as the ‘unresolved contradictions’ that constitute his ‘late’ self-fashioning, are incongruously exposed.

More lucidly and persistently realized is the danger that lurks when desire for poetic glory triumphs truth as the ultimate raison d’être of the poet and the poetic act. This is the poisonous ‘anguis in herbis’ that creeps out from under the veil of the dream narrative, slipping through the mytho-pastoral intertexts of the interlocutor’s simile, to provide the sententious

74 The dream vision of the gigantic frame of vainglory becomes more grotesque despite the narrator’s protestation to the contrary when the figure swells in response to the ‘dulce murmurar’ (VI, l. 115) of her sibling attendants ‘Adulación’ and ‘Mentira’: ‘Los brazos de tal modo dilataba, / que de do nace a donde muere el día / los opuestos extremos alcanzaba. / La enfermedad llamada hidropesía / así le hincha el vientre, que parece / que todo el mar caber en él podia’ (VI, ll. 124–29).

75 Cruz suggests that desire in Cervantes’ fiction ‘contains the capacity to impersonate […] whatever eludes the subject’s grasp, and that this ‘shadowy other’ that is ‘constructed by and against a masculinized subjectivity’, often assumes a feminine shape or ‘embodies the female element’ (Psyche and Gender in Cervantes’, 197).

76 Cervantes succumbs initially to the majestic beauty of the image mounted on a throne wrought with gold and ivory, just as Vainglory surrenders to the honeyed words of her fawning attendants; both Cervantes and Vainglory are conditioned by ambition and both are driven by ‘deseo’ (VI, l. 226).

77 Lucifer’s invasion of Eden in the form of a snake in Genesis is the model for subsequent Christian allegorical writings. The pastoral loci classici are in Virgil, in Eclogue III, 93, and in Georgic IV when the premonition is tragically realized in the death of Eurydice. The motif is pervasive in Renaissance poetry (e.g. Ariosto uses it three times in his Orlando furioso; I. 11, 5–8; 23. 123, 6–8; and 39. 32, 3–8). Cervantes combines it with allusion to the crystal goblet used by Psyche to gather the water of the River Styx, one of four tasks imposed
sting that renders the whole fantasy relevant to the situation of the bemused listener:

Y ella, cual ciega del mejor sentido,
no ve que entre las flores de aquel gusto
el áspid, ponzoñoso está escondido.
Y así, arrojada con deseo injusto,
en cristalino vaso prueba y bebe
el veneno mortal, sin ningún susto.

Quien más presume de advertido, pr[ue]be
a dejarse adular, verá cuán presto
pasa su gloria como el viento leve.

Esto escuché, y en escuchando aquesto,
dio un estampido tal la Gloria vana,
que dio a mi sueño fin dulce y molesto.

(VI, ll. 223–34; emphasis added).

The wind that first carried the poet-protagonist’s footsteps forward towards Parnassus is indeed fitful and fickle, appropriately shifting signs according to no particular pattern. In the passage above, it is figured as a vehicle of vainglory. When next it appears it is a ‘vago viento’ materializing from within the voice of Cervantes-narrator, just in advance of the battle, and summoned to lift the banners of the opposing squadrons (VII, l. 21). In the tradition of epic, but also in keeping with the feminized shaping of elusive desires throughout the poem, this is a voice that has moved outside the frame of the narrative to seek inspiration, and authority, from the ‘belígera Musa’ (VII, l. 1), but which also invokes Cervantes’ own ‘mano rota y largo de mercedes’ (VII, l. 7). The apostrophic invocation thus harks back ironically to an archaic context when poetry and political rhetoric were interchangeable forms of power, and to a more recent heroic age that the maimed, and aged, Cervantes is no longer a part of. His attempt to reconstitute relevance at this point in the poem through an extreme parodic ventriliquizing of the Muse suggests that the self-reflexivity of the mode is not confined to

upon her by the envious goddess Venus. Ultimately Psyche’s reward was marriage to Cupid and immortal life among the gods. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is embedded as the centrepiece (Books 4–6) of Apuleius’ work the *Metamorphosis* (also known as *The Golden Ass*). Góngora uses the same combination of images to conceptualize noxious jealousy in his sonnet ‘¡oh niebla del estado más sereno [...]!’ I have analysed the interconnected motifs of this poem elsewhere: Isabel Torres, *Love Poetry in the Spanish Golden Age: Eros, Eris and Empire* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013), 145–51.

78 For an alternative view see Trabado who finds in selective references to ‘viento’ in the poem a link to the windmill passage in *Don Quijote* to establish a ‘viento/locura’ pattern in the *Viaje*. See Trabado Cabado, ‘De viento, locura y otros desatinos’, 662.

79 In Homeric epic, for instance, gods and heroes differ from ordinary men, not just in the special radiance of their countenances, but also in the authority of their voices (e.g. *Odyssey*, 8. 158–74).
postmodernism.\textsuperscript{80} In fact invocations to the Muses have always had a unique metapoetical status, as Andrew Laird points out, eliciting a ‘theatrical and thaumaturgical’ effect on epic narrative that operates most tellingly on the level of reception, not simply by drawing attention to the relationship between the text and the reader/audience, but by raising questions about the symbolic function of the Muses as ‘guardians of ontological certainty’.\textsuperscript{81} As much a construction of interpretation as composition, invocations are no more neutrally received than other parts of the text, and so the authority conferred is no more ‘certain’ than the mediated ideological responses of the text’s readers. Ideology in this context can be understood as the variety of ways in which all kinds of discourses in circulation (dominant, residual, emergent), including notions of ‘truth’, are competitively charged and connected with non-literary structures and relations of power.\textsuperscript{82} The Muses may seem to ‘emblematize truth’ in ancient epic, for instance, functioning for Laird like Bakhtin’s ‘super-addresssee’ whose metaphysical or temporal distance allows for a sort of absolute understanding,\textsuperscript{83} but their presence often contributed to a larger network of divine machinery that endowed Imperial armed conquest with a distinct, divinely ordained, purpose. However, conjured up in the \textit{Viaje} through a slippery ‘amalgam of subjectivity and convention’, the Muses serve to complicate reader interaction throughout the poem,\textsuperscript{84} most notably in the final chapter when their post-conflict dance serves as a prelude to a rhetorical admission of narratorial unreliability:

Las reinas de la humana hermosura
salieron de donde estaban retiradas
mientras duraba la contienda dura;
[...]
Melpómene, Tersícure y Talía

\textsuperscript{80} According to Linda Hutcheon, new ways of parodying (some distance from the etymological roots in ‘counter song’) emerged through postmodernism. A dominant strain of postmodern parody is characterized by reflexivity, or ‘inter-art discourse’. See Linda Hutcheon, \textit{A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms} (New York: Methuen, 1985), 2.


\textsuperscript{82} In this approach I have benefited from Barbara Simerka’s lucid revisioning of dominant models of reader response and reception theory (Iser, Jauss, Fish) via a materialist, historicizing of the respondents of counter-epic that significantly expands the parameters of reception. See Barbara Simerka, \textit{Discourses of Empire: Counter-Epic Literature in Early Modern Spain} (University Park: The Pennsylvania U. P., 2003), esp. pp. 4–14.

\textsuperscript{83} See Laird, ‘The Muses in Epic Reception’, 132–33. Notably when Hesiod gives the Muses a voice they acknowledge a more flexible attitude to veracity: ‘We know how to tell numerous lies which seem to be truthful / but whenever we wish we know how to utter the full truth’ (Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 22–28).

Polimnia, Urania, Erato, Euterpe y Clío, y Calíope, hermosa en demasía, muestran ufanas su destreza y brío, tejiendo una entrincada y nueva danza al dulce son de un instrumento mío.

*Mío, no dije bien; mentí a la (a)usanza de aquel que dice propios los ajenos versos que son más dignos de alabanza.*

(VIII, ll. 49–64; emphasis added)

Circumstantial unreliability, mitigated by an appeal to a more generalized practice among poets (that is here rejected), can be decoded on a deeper ethical level of intentionality when set against the earlier invocation which sought to report only ‘la verdad clara’, and ‘con purísimo y nuevo sentimiento’ (VII, l. 18; l. 17). Once Cervantes-narrator becomes dispositionally unreliable to the reader, instances of bonding quickly dissolve into the poem’s deeper undercurrents of ironic estrangement.

Cervantes’ Muses also participate, like their ancient ancestors, in a larger schema; but unlike the divine machinery of the ancients, the series of misfiring epic stimuli to which they contribute, is entirely purposeless. What is at play is a kind of parodic prolepasis, or to redeploy Said’s terms, a ‘deliberately unproductive productiveness’ or ‘going against’, whereby what is subsequently recounted by the narrator (as ‘authorized’ vehicle of the Muse in the final battle scenes), sings against anything that might have been predicted on the basis of prior aesthetic and/or ideological investment in epic (the pumpkinification of the poetasters, for instance, is a radical invention), thus exposing the vulnerability of the sub-textual terrain as well as the cracks in the edifice that is built upon it.85 Epic impulses in the *Viaje* are stimulating markers of dissociative movement. It is never a question of searching for lost origins, or of ‘suturing together’ the contradictions of Cervantes’ contemporary world, in as much as these revolve around the nexus of race and religion, and ‘the conflicting value systems of class and caste’, but rather of tearing all of this emotively asunder.86 And although considerable scholarly attention has been paid to the satirical reimagining of the voyage and the battle scenes, as the key structuring devices that lean on

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86 Cascardi rightly notes that ‘[w]hat is ‘ideological’ about the historical role of literature in the Spanish Golden Age is that it is not merely shaped by [...] tensions, but articulates a strongly inflected response to them’; but against his emphasis on how Golden-Age texts ‘serve to suture together’ the contradictions of their contemporary world (Anthony J. Cascardi, *Ideologies of History in the Spanish Golden Age* [University Park: The Pennsylvania State U. P., 1997], pp. 15 & 2 respectively). I would posit Adorno’s dialectic of objective and subjective impulses (cited above) as a more appropriate paradigm for appreciating Cervantes’ *Viaje del Parnaso* (as discussed by Said, *On Late Style*, intro. Woods, 12).
the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* respectively,\(^87\) and to Virgilian intertextuality in the vulgarization of the gods, especially the licentious nature of Venus’ intervention in the battle,\(^88\) the episode of Lofraso, an overlooked Virgilian vignette of unresolved rupture, is at least equally pertinent.\(^89\) In the third chapter of the poem, as the recruited Apollonian forces cross the dangerous strait of Scylla and Charybdis, Mercury suggests that ‘algún poeta desdichado’ (III, l. 245) be thrown overboard, before having a change of heart and granting the victim, Lofraso, a last-minute reprieve (III, ll. 255–59). The model for the ‘unum pro multis [...] caput’ motif is the Virgilian helmsman Palinurus whose death at the end of *Aeneid* Book V, is fundamental to the realization of Aeneas’ imperial destiny: symbolic both of a flawed (Trojan) way of life that has to cede to a new (Roman) order, and of a regressive aspect of Aeneas’ character that must be discarded before he can realize his destiny and achieve glory as the founder of Rome.\(^90\) Palinurus’ story is told in two parts in the *Aeneid*. In an epilogue episode, Aeneas meets Palinurus’ ghost in the Underworld in Book VI, where he recounts the circumstances of his demise, how he was prevented from reaching safety on shore by savage natives, who murdered him and left him unburied. Deprived of burial rites, he now roams Hades as a restless shade. He implores Aeneas either to bury him or to take him across the Styx, but is rebuked by the Sibyl for his arrogance and given only aetiological comfort—the perpetuation of his name in the *Capo di Palinuro*. The fate of the tragic helmsman in Virgil is a poignant instance of the epic’s open-ended contradictions; the conflict between Virgil’s public and private voice, that irresolute balancing of optimism in Rome’s imperial future against sympathy for the price to be paid in individual suffering. The epic turns on this tension, conveyed from its beginning in Laocoon, to its end in Turnus, on a pattern of sacrifice and substitution, passing intratextually through the victimization of Dido with

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87 See, as representative, Ruiz Pérez, *La distinción cervantina*, 71–73.


89 Chiong Rivero points out in a footnote that the Virgilian intertextuality in the episode has gone undetected, but does not contextualize the reference in terms of any broader functionality within the poem (‘Cervantes’s Carnivalesque Ship of Fools’, 511, n. 29).

resonances of Orpheus and Eurydice. In Palinurus, Virgil finds, therefore, only a temporary surrogate victim through whose ‘beneficially’ violent sacrifice, to adapt Girard, a more impure disorder would rage uncontrolled. But if Palinurus’s sacrifice in the Aeneid is less than entirely compelling, a crisis that retains the power to repeat itself infinitely in new eruptions of brutal aggression, the very fact of its happening does compel us to confront the more ‘momentous matters’ that are at issue. Lofraso’s scapegoat sacrifice, on the contrary, divinely bestowed and then taken away, is an act of double diminution—appearing to reduce the proposed sacrifice (and its symbolic signification), as well as the god’s gesture of clemency, to the domain of trivial detail. When the ship sails on, without sacrifice, and safely (III, ll. 271–72), we might acknowledge some greater import, the anachronisms of an old primitive world view supplanted by a whole new redemptive vision. But Lofrasso’s work is not yet done. True to his Virgilian roots, Cervantes gives him a curtain call. In Chapter seven he is singled out as one of the ‘católico bando’ who betrays the cause and joins the rebel poets (VII, l. 130). The treachery is framed, in accordance with epic convention, as a ‘mal agüero’ (VII, l. 104). In this way the fallacy of cosmic meaning and coherence for human actions, clinging to the coat-tails of a mytho-heroic past, can persist in the parody of the present.

From this ludic deconstruction of epic we should not expect a ‘positive doctrine’ to follow, nor any straightforward aspiration towards a discourse of truth. Indeed by meshing parodic practice with allegory, a fictional mode of ‘other-discourse’, Cervantes’ poem enters into a self-consciously complex relationship with truth. As Cowan has observed, the ‘existence-in-absence’ of truth is a condition of allegory; an absence that has been articulated in various origin myths of fall, rupture, or exile, but can only fully be apprehended in the way in which it exists in representation; or, citing

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92 See René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1977), 37. Girard sets out a controversial theory of acquisitive mimesis and rivalry, from which originates all violence, and the idea of the surrogate sacrificial victim, from which originates ritual as the ameliorative factor for violence in primitive societies. Mostly developed through interpretation of Greek tragedy and, as Hardie points out, ‘open to serious doubt’ as a ‘historical account of cultural origins’ (The Epic Successors of Virgil, 19–21, & n. 5), Girard’s model can be a useful tool for analysis of ancient epic, with caveats firmly in place.


94 Phiddian reminds us that ‘deconstruction is political in the sense that it provides a powerful mode for questioning authority and the ideological and structural forms on which it depends. Positive doctrines do not follow, however, except as supplements, the arbitrary quanta that simultaneously fulfil and displace the original method’ and that parody, like deconstruction ‘does not aspire in a straightforward way to a discourse of truth’ (Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly The Same Thing?, 676).

Benjamin, ‘truth is bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas’. What is ‘represented’ in Cervantes’ ‘late’ arrival on Parnassus, a much-excavated site, is then (among other things) an allegory of the individual artistic predicament. But in Cervantes’ inventive reimagining, the battle-lines on Parnassus are drawn on the basis of broader irreconcilable opposites: a struggle of poetics that stretches back to Apollo and Dionysus (the forces of the ‘luminous sense giver’ against the squadrons that rally round the patron of chaos) and a struggle of politics grounded in contemporary tensions of race and religion. Throughout the burlesque battle of the books, the Apollonian forces are represented as imperially conditioned, orthodox, Spanish Catholics under attack on the ‘sagrada sierra’ (VII, l. 90) from barbarous heretics (‘la bárbara canalla’ [VII, l. 260) who wield Moorish ballads:

Cada cual como moro ataviado,
con más letras y cifras que una carta
de príncipe enemigo y recatado.
De romances moriscos una sarta,
cual sí fuera de balas enramadas,
llega con furia y con malicia harta.
[…]
Quiso Apolo, indignado, echar el resto
de su poder y de su fuerza sola,
y dar al enemigo fin molesto.
Y una sacra canción, donde acrisola
su ingenio, gala, estilo y bizarría
Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola,
cual sí fuera un petarte, Apolo envía
adonde el tesón más apretado,
más dura y más furiosa la porfía. (VII, ll. 269–85)

But the stage is no more fixed on Parnassus than it was in Madrid, and the lines blur and collapse into each other: the ‘pure’ poets wash more than their feet in the Hippocrene stream (III, ll. 367–72); twenty desert the cause at the first opportunity (VII, ll. 94–99); and six clerical poets are too ashamed of

97 This is encapsulated in the heat of the battle itself: ‘Tan mezclados están, que no hay quien pueda / discernir cuál es malo o cual es bueno, / cual es garsilasista o timoneda’ (VII, ll. 292–94). Even the symmetry is ironically skewed, with bad poetry apparently aligned with Garcilaso (despite the fact that a few verses earlier Apollo reserves pride of place for Garcilaso’s sonnet that opens ‘Cuando me paro a contemplar mi estado’ [VII, ll. 286–88]). Schmidt finds in this reference a clear statement from Cervantes that the antidote to current aesthetic ills is the clarity that is best evidenced in the poetry of Garcilaso (Maps, Figures and Canons in the Viaje del Parnaso’, 34). There is no doubting that Garcilaso positively side-shadows the literary trajectory of Cervantes, but if clarity is what Cervantes advocates in the Viaje, we have to question why and how he writes himself away from that ideal.
their allegiance to art to disclose their identity (IV, ll. 46-49). Cervantes may present the subject voice in alignment with ethical poetry and imperial politics, but like the grotesquely realistic bodies that transgress their point of contact with his Parnassian ‘other’-world, his own writing practice self-consciously violates these boundaries, ‘unmaking’ the construction of legitimizing selfhood through the activity of parodic representation, and thus cloaking its catastrophe in a carnivalesque ‘dance of ideas’. Cervantes’ Viaje, however, ultimately denies us the palliative of a return to a ‘right way up’, or the promise of a redeemed individual or collective state of being. Apollo re-enters through the appendix like the ‘deus ex machina’, but bequeaths only bureaucracy. This final interpenetration of lyric fantasy with the prosaic realities of an unchanged ‘patria’, carries this late parody through to its extreme consequence—Cervantes’ plan to bombard Parnassus again, but this time with letters from Apollo’s ‘aficionados’ in Madrid. If, ultimately, the objective ‘fractured landscape’ of Cervantes’ Viaje del Parnaso, illuminated by the individual crisis of embodied aging, was too close for the comfort of contemporary readers, or a ‘senda demasiado dificil’, then perhaps, like the beauty of the monstrous Vainglory, its unresolved ironies are best appreciated from a distance.*

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98 Five of these are named and one is an unidentified ‘otro clérigo’. Jaime Asensio makes the case that the allusion is to Tirso de Molina. See Jaime Asensio, ‘¿Es Tirso “el otro” de el Viaje de Parnaso de Cervantes?’, in Homenaje a Tirso de Molina, Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos, 10:2 (1986), 155–72.

99 The passage from Don Quijote reads: ‘Don Quijote soy, y mi profesión la de andante caballería. Son mis leyes, el deshacer entuertos, prodigar el bien y evitar el mal. Huyo de la vida regalada, de la ambición y la hipocresía, y busco para mi propia gloria la senda más angosta y difícil. ¿Es eso, de tonto y mentecato?’ (Don Quijote, II, 32).

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