Nearly a decade ago, Pedro Ruiz Pérez pointed out that poetry was the most “unexplored territory” in Cervantes’ writing (63), something which remains true today. For the most part, scholarship on Cervantes’ poetry has tended to regard it in stark contrast with his novelistic production, that is, as retrograde, much in line with the author’s own pseudo-appraisals of his poetry in various works as well with as those of his contemporaries (Ruiz Pérez 63–65).¹ Proof of the poetry’s relative worth is found, for instance, in the fact that Cervantes’ verse was not selected by Pedro de Espinosa for the Flores de poetas ilustres de España (1605), a project bent on acclaiming the stylistic innovations of those who wrote “nueva poesía” in Italianate verse; rather, Cervantes’ autochthonous poems were published in the more “backward-looking” Romancero general of 1600 (Ruiz Pérez 65). Building on Ruiz Pérez’s observations, and by closely analyzing one of the poet’s octosyllabic poems, I will argue that such a dichotomy between autochthonous and Italianate, and between backward- and forward-looking, misses the complexity of Cervantes’ poetic endeavors. My object of study is Cervantes’ “Romance de los celos” (c. 1593), which at first glance may seem like an un-innovative poem, in a traditional Castilian meter, didactically expounding on a conventional

¹ Exceptions to this are the many fine studies of the Viaje del Parnaso, and studies of Cervantes’ burlesque verse, such as that of Martín.
theme: a warning to lovers about the dangers of jealousy. However, within
the verses of this ballad—which indeed was published in the Romancero
general of 1600—are contained an intricate set of exchanges between
high and low culture, between art and literature, between allegorical and
literal, and between past and present. Positing this level of complexity
to a seemingly-simple text is warranted in part by the poet’s claim in
the Viaje del Parnaso (1614), that this ballad was among his own favor-
ites: “el de los celos es aquel que estimo / entre otros que los tengo por
malditos” (IV:40–42).2 This article explores the richness of these various
inter-related exchanges which, I argue, relate to Renaissance practices
of imitation, ekphrasis, and archeology. Additionally, by demonstrating
the merits of a close reading of one of Cervantes’ less-studied poems, I hope
to reduce, in a small way, the metaphorical “territory” described by Ruiz
Pérez.

Written as one laisse, this ballad’s structure suggests a subdivision that
is symmetrical, consisting of two long (I, III) and two short parts (II,
IV). Section I (vv. 1–28) contains the description or ekphrasis of a mys-
terious, foreboding cave—la morada de los celos—by the first speaker,
a shepherd who remains unnamed. This is followed by Section II (vv.
29–33) in which a third-person poetic narrator explains the context of
the first utterance. Section III (vv. 34–56) is spoken, like the first, by an-
other speaker, Lauso, who elucidates the meaning of the cave to his un-
named interlocutor. Lauso’s speech is then followed by the third-person
narrative voice’s four-verse conclusion (Section IV):

Yace donde el sol se pone,
entre dos tajadas peñas,
una entrada de un abismo,
quiero decir, una cueva profunda, lóbrega, escura,
aquí mojada, allí seca,

2 Perhaps its editorial popularity influenced his own pride in the poem. First published in
the Flor de varios y nuevos romances (Valencia, 1593), it then appeared in the 1600 and the 1604
editions of the Romancero General.
propio albergue de la noche, 
del horror y las tinieblas. 
Por la boca sale un aire 
que al alma encendida yela, 
y un fuego, de cuando en cuando, 
que el pecho de yelo quema. 
Óyese dentro un ruido 
como crujir de cadenas 
y unos ayes luengos, tristes, 
envueltos en tristes quejas.

Por las funestas paredes, 
por los resquicios y quebras 
il víboras se descubren 
y ponzoñasas culebras. 
A la entrada tiene puesto[s], 
en una amarilla piedra, 
huesos de muerto encajados 
de modo que forman letras, 
las cuales, vistas del fuego 
que arroja de sí la cueva, 
dicen: “Ésta es la morada 
de los celos y sospechas”. 
Y un pastor contaba a Lauso 
esta maravilla cierta 
de la cueva, fuego y yelo, 
aullidos, sierpes y piedra, 
el cual, oyendo, le dijo: 
“Pastor, para que te crea, 
no has menester juramentos 
ni hacer la vista esperiencia. 
Un vivo traslado es ése 
de lo que mi pecho encierra, 
el cual, como en cueva escura, 
no tiene luz, ni la espera. 
Seco le tienen desdenes 
bañado en lágrimas tiernas; 
aire, fuego y los suspiros
le abrasan contino y yelan.
Los lamentables aullidos,
son mis continuas querellas,
víboras mis pensamientos
que en mis entrañas se ceban.
La piedra escrita, amarilla,
es mi sin igual firmeza,
que mis huesos en la muerte
mostrarán que son de piedra.
Los celos son los que habitan
en esta morada estrecha,
que engendraron los descuidos
de mi querida Silena.”
En pronunciado este nombre,
cayó como muerto en tierra,
que de memorias de celos
aquestos fines se esperan.

With its four internal sections, the poem is set up as a series of exchanges or traslados, a term I take from verse 37, where Lauso explains how the elements of the first part of the poem are in dialogue with his own personal experience: “Un vivo traslado es ése.” Apparently, Lauso is glossing what would seem to be an allegory, providing the reader with its literal meaning, as he exchanges the values, one for one. The poem’s cave is dark, and simultaneously wet and dry; it freezes and chills, and from within it, emanate horrible onomatopoeic sounds, like the “crujir” of chains (v. 14), and the “ayes luengos tristes” (v. 15). A thousand poisonous serpents inhabit the cave, and at its entrance, is a marvelous sign made from the bones of the dead on a yellow stone, which labels the location as “the abode of jealousy.” Lauso elucidates most of these elements one by one: the cave’s darkness relates to his heart which, without light, has no hope; the hardness of the bone and stone are his steadfast resoluteness (“firmeza”); the “aullidos,” he says, are his own “continuas querellas.” Lauso, however, does not elaborate on every element: for instance, he

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3 An apt comparison might be to Polyphemos’ cave, in Góngora’s Fábula, about which Dámaso Alonso has written that “nothing could be further from a locus amoenus” (3: 59).
does not explicitly relate the color yellow (v. 22) to “hopelessness” (desesperación), which it typically symbolized in Spanish literature.4

Another exchange is the set up of the poem itself. Creating a transformative imitation, I would argue, of Medinilla’s ballad “Funestos y altos cipreses”—which is a description of an allegorical nighttime scene where a jealous lover is entombed—Cervantes reconfigures that one-speaker poem as a dialogue between two shepherds, a reminiscence perhaps, of Garcilaso’s First Eclogue, “El dulce lamentar de dos pastores,” where, as is well known, the first shepherd, Salicio, expresses the un-Petrarchan emotion of jealousy.5

The next traslado pertains to the substance of the dialogue between the shepherd and Lauso. In it, there is an exchange of codes, from the language typical of popular verse—which one would expect from the eight-syllable ballad—to a series of high-cultural topoi, which are more characteristic of Italianate strophes containing hendecasyllables, such as the lira, the canción and the sonnet. For instance, the first shepherd describes, in verse three, a rather poetic-sounding location, euphemistically

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4 The following sonnet, entitled “Comparación con el significado de los colores,” attributed to Quevedo (incorrectly it would seem), clarifies the symbolic value of “yellow”: “Es lo blanco cañitísima pureza; / amores significa lo morado; / crijea o sujeción es lo encarnado; negro obscuro es dolor, claro es trišteza; / naranjado se entiende que es firmeza; / rojo claro es venganza, y colorado / alegría; y si obscuro es lo leonado, / congoja, claro es señoril alteza; / es lo pardo trabajo; azul es celo; / turquesado es soberbia; y lo amarillo / es desesperación; verde, esperanza. / Y desta suerte, aquél que niega el cielo / licencia en su dolor para decillo, / lo muestra sin hablar por semejanza.” “Comparación con el significado de los colores,” in “Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, LXIX (1953) 490–91.

5 In the ‘Viaje del Parnaso, Cervantes alludes to Medinilla’s “Funestos y altos cipreses” as a precursor poem to his own (II.199–201). Medinilla’s was published in the ‘Romancero General’ of 1600 as number 228, and is also an important precursor text to the allegory of jealousy presented in Cervantes’ play La casa de los celos. Critics of that comedia seem to take for granted that Cervantes was the first to represent an allegorical treatment of jealousy in the romance and then in the comedia. But Medinilla’s is indeed quite similar, both in its images and allusions, as well as in its structure. Jealousy is represented allegorically by four “bultos,” each one representing an element, “temor,” “desconfianza,” “engaño,” and “mudanza,” very much like La casa de los celos. Instead of a cave, Medinilla depicts a “sepulcro,” to which a “muerto vivo... ceñido... de cadenas” is delivered. In both poems, the scene is described as dark, but with some light which illuminates a foreboding sign making explicit that the place is, indeed, the “morada... de los zelos.”
alluding to hell with the verse “una entrada de un abismo” (v. 3) only to self-correct in the fourth verse with the down-to-earth and somewhat jocose phrase, “quiero decir, una cueva” (v. 4). In another example, he describes part of the cave as “mojada” (v. 6), using a low-register lexical selection for the concept of “wetness”; later, in Lauso’s section (in v. 42), the “wetness” is not only glossed semantically, but it is transformed lexically into “bañado,” (“bañado en lágrimas tiernas,” v. 42). This verse once again evokes Garcilaso, from the opening line of Sonnet 32, “Estoy continuo en lágrimas bañado.” Furthermore, the last lines of the third-person narrator—containing the alliterative terms “muerto” and “memorias”—again evoke Garcilaso, now from Sonnet 10, “Oh dulces prendas, por mi mal halladas,” the last verse of which warns alliteratively of the power of painful memories: “verme morir entre memorias tristes” (v. 14). Along with this high-culture vocabulary from the Petrarchan-inspired Garcilasian tradition in hendecasyllables, this popular poem also engages in topoi from Classical antiquity, evocative of Renaissance culture. For instance, the plethora of allusions to the senses of sight (“se descubren”), sound (“Oyese”), and touch (“yela,” “quema”) might evoke parodically the “banquet of the senses.” And to a much greater extent, the classical topos of ekphrasis is used to great effect in the poem.

In its original sense, ekphrasis simply meant “description” in Greek. But since the time of Philostratus the Elder’s Imagines (3rd Century CE) it has come to mean the description of an art object in literature. I apply the term to the cave of jealousy for various reasons, the foremost of which is the lettering of bone which someone or something has created: “Esta es la morada / de los celos y sospechas” (27–28). The sign is a piece of art, which, when described, speaks to the viewer. This fascinating ekphrasis is a traslado in a range of senses. For one, it is a written message which, in the poem, is converted to an aural one, as it is recalled by the shepherd and retold aloud to Lauso. This aural quality was suggested already by the lexicalized metaphor for the cave’s opening: the sign is found, after all, in la boca or “mouth” of the cave (v.9). The sentence is then reiterated and paraphrased by Lauso, just before he dies, when he

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6 This was changed more clearly to serve as a euphemism for Hell in the 1604 edition, as the indefinite article gave way to the definite one, “una entrada del abismo.”
declares that “Los celos son los que habitan / en esta morada estrecha” (vv. 53–54) referring to his own heart or body as a metaphorical morada. From a different perspective, the message is a negotiation between past and present, and between the dead and the living, when we consider that the bones are not just any material used in construction, but human remains. In contrast to the inscription in Medinilla’s ballad (v. 41 and following) where the letters were inscribed in tree bark—recalling perhaps those of Angelica and Medoro in Ariosto’s poem (which would later be the cause of Orlando’s jealousy)—the skeletal message speaks to Lauso, the shepherd and the reader, as more than just artifact from the past. Indeed, the bones are those of dead jealous lovers, whose emotion, like that promised by the poetical voice in Quevedo’s sonnet “Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postera,” survives beyond the grave. While in Quevedo’s poem, the poet speaks of his dead body as “polvo será, mas polvo enamorado” (v.14), in Cervantes’ romance, one might reiterate its gist pithily as “huesos seré yo, mas huesos celosos.”

Jorge Luis Borges identified a classical source for Quevedo’s last verse, one which Cervantes might have been be resurrecting as well: “ut meus oblito pulvis amore jacet,” from Propertius’ elegy (I.19; qtd. in Blecua, 480, fn.) Another classical source with which the poem relates is Book II of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, where the Latin poet allegorically describes the “Cave of Envy.” Minerva visits the cave to command Envy to punish her devotee, Aglauros, who had been moved by greed to help Mercury seduce her sister Herse, another of Minerva’s virginal followers. Cervantes’ cave and Ovid’s are thematically linked, since in classical and early modern writings, envy and jealousy were often conflated, both being conceived as negative passions which had to do with wanting someone who was also desired by another. There are prominent distinctions between the two caves: In Ovid’s, the allegorical figure of Envy appears in person and

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7 “Volgendosi ivi intorno, vide scritti / molti arbuscelli in su l’ombrosa riva. / To‰o che fermi vebbe gli occhi e fitti, / fu certo esser di man de la sua diva” (Orlando Furioso XXIII:102.1–4).
8 Ruiz Pérez has also referred to similarities between Garcilaso’s and Quevedo’s famous sonnets and the second of Lotario’s sonnets from Cervantes’ intercalated “Novela del curioso impertinente” (76).
is described eating serpents, whereas jealousy is not personified in vivo in Cervantes’; furthermore, Cervantes’ poem importantly describes a fire which is related to the burning passion of love and which provides the light by which to perceive the sign, while Ovid’s cave explicitly mentions the cave is fireless, that it is “do perpetua tiniebla se percibe” (II.1283). Nonetheless, Ovid’s allegorical abode shares salient characteristics with the ballad’s: there are, of course, the “serpents” which have been mentioned, and associated with these creatures, there is “venom” in both poems; additionally, the caves are “dark”, “cold” and filled with “gloom” (for Cervantes, “lóbrega ; for Ovid “sombría casa, triste y tenebrosa”). And even more importantly, in the Metamorphoses, once she is touched by the allegorical figure, Aglauros dies of envy—like Lauso, of jealousy—and is transformed into a stone statue (“[M]as pretendiendo [hablar] / hacerlo, fuera en vano, que el camino / se estaba de la voz endureciendo. / El cuello y rostro es piedra, y no la vino / blanco color; mas antes se ennegrece, / como según quien era la convino,” ll. 1395–1400). To those who see her or hear the story, her example alone will speak even as she is dead and voiceless.

While Lauso recognizes that his own bones in death are metonymical of the bones of the dead from the cave, one exchange which he does not identify is how the retelling of the ekphrasis of the cave is itself responsible for his death. As in Garcilaso’s Sonnet 10, a haunting memory returns from the past to act in the present. The bones, which are unearthed by the shepherd, simultaneously excavate an emotional upheaval from Lauso’s memory, one which comes back to kill him. The digging up of the bones then, has a correlative in what I will call the archaeology of emotion.

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10 References to the Metamorphoses in Spanish are from the Sánchez de Viana translation, published in Valladolid in 1589.

11 The proper names mentioned in the poem also seem to evoke Classical mythology: Silena might be aurally reminiscent of Cyllene, the birthplace of Mercury (who is a key character in the myth of Aglauros); Lausus was the young warrior for whom Aeneas felt great pity after killing, in Virgil’s epic (10.814–30). He is called “triste Lauso” in Gregorio Hernández de Velasco’s translation (Toledo, 1555).

12 Another foreboding cave which Cervantes’ poem might evoke is Dante’s, from the Inferno: “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate” (3.9) which relates to the Spanish poem’s symbolism of hopelessness.
In setting up these complex exchanges, Cervantes, who spent time in Rome in the service of Cardinal Acquaviva, may be referencing not only, as Frederick De Armas puts it, “the memories of a past he wishes to resurrect” (ix), but also Renaissance archaeology and other subterranean practices. In his unearthing, in the present, of Classical and Renaissance verses, *topoi* and tropes—which stand out through juxtaposition from the popular elements of the poem—Cervantes may be alluding ekphrastically to wide-ranging practices in sixteenth-century Rome. For one, bones were used decoratively in crypts, most famously by the Capuchin monks, whose order was created as an offshoot of the Franciscans in 1525. In Rome, the Capuchins were building macabre artworks in the first half of the sixteenth century (Figure 1, is of a crypt of the Roman Capuchins, constructed in the early seventeenth-century after the church was rebuilt). Although there is no evidence that these monks spelled out complete osseous words or sentences—as in the poem—they created all manner of decorative patterns using thigh, skull and other bones. For the Capuchins, the skeletons and individual bones were meant to remind the viewer of his or her own mortality. Similar to *vanitas* art,

**Figure 1**
which would become a popular subgenre of still-life in the first half of the Seventeenth Century, and which mimetically depicts symbolic objects such as skeletons and cut flowers (e.g. Figure 2, Valdés Leal’s *In Tētu Oculī*), these crypts are a rare form of *vanitas* sculpture which work metonymically. To invoke Marshall McLuhan *avant-la-lettre*, in a sense more literal than he surely intended, the medium is the message.

Furthermore, the use of bones—the fragmented remains of corpses—recalls the digging up of the classical past rampant in sixteenth-century Italy, and in Rome in particular. As Leonard Barkan writes in ‘Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture’ (1999), in the Renaissance, bones of saints and the pious—which were frequently used in reliquaries—shared with ancient sculpture a similarity due to the fragmented nature of each. On ancient sculptures, he remarks, “There is nothing more obvious or more important about rediscovered sculpture than the fact that it is nearly always broken” (120). Like the bone separated from the human body to which it once belonged, Classical sculptures rediscovered in the Renaissance are almost always fragmentary. The most famous examples of such sculptures include the “Laocoön” and the “Torso Belvedere,” the latter of which is an especially important site for Renaissance considerations of the dialogue with the Classical past. Regarding fragments, as Barkan puts it, in the cases of both saints’ bones and sculptures, “there is an immaterial essence con-

![Figure 2](image-url)
tained in the part, and it becomes a whole through the acts of beholding and contemplation” (122). In Cervantes’ poem, these fragments make a whole in a different way as well, as they come together literally to spell out their message in the foreboding sign concerning the abode of jealousy.

Similar to sculptural remains, the fragments in the poem come from beneath the ground. Many archeological discoveries were celebrated in and outside Rome with great fanfare. Writes Barkan, “hundreds, perhaps thousands of ancient sculptural objects were found, placed in commerce, gazed at, written about, and copied in the course of the Renaissance” (2). “…[T]he unearthing of ancient sculpture was virtually a commonplace event” (17), about which the curious Cervantes most certainly would have had to be acquainted as a visitor to the eternal city of ruins. However, the ossified fragments which make up the mournful sign are not only like sculptures, but to an even greater extent, more like a stone inscription. In sixteenth-century Italy, the classical inscription “[is] the object of greatest priority […] [L]ike statues… they are newly unearthed, more greatly valorized and submitted to changing forms of rigorous study from the fourteenth century onward” (Barkan 26). In the “Romance de los celos,” Cervantes fuses ancient sculpture with the art of inscription. Indeed, the inscription about the morada is not written but sculpted. As Barkan explains, the tremendous Renaissance interest in ancient inscription is due principally to the desire of humanists for a different kind of remains: “Inscriptions stand as a set of reliable antique data much like more extensive forms of literary remains… [playing] a pivotal role among ancient material remains, they are at once a form of text and a form of image” (26–27). Although Barkan mentions no inscriptions fabricated from bone, he describes the activity of humanists who seek to imitate with great precision the lettering that appeared on these lapidary inscriptions, scholars who were “producing pattern books for the making of authentic capital letters all’antica […] so that they [can] be transcribed in a visual approximation of their original lapidary letter-

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13 Barkan relates the story of various inscription collectors, including Andrea Alciati, who would become the most famous of emblem creators, but who began his career “assiduous[ly] collecting” inscriptions (26–27).
This Renaissance Italian interest in excavation and inscription would not go unnoticed by Cervantes.

The idea that the morada de los celos with its clear inscription is in a grotto beneath the ground is found not only in the principal source for Cervantes—the ballad by Medinilla—where the morada is referred to as a “sepulcro,” but also from the first word of Cervantes’ poem, “Yace,” a term which is commonly used in sepulchral inscriptions, as Emily Bergmann has shown out in her commentary on Góngora’s funerary sonnet to El Greco. In that poem, Góngora uses ekphrasis in a similar manner, writing in verse 9, “Yace el griego,” which as Bergmann notes, has the effect of making the reader feel as if she were directly reading the cut inscription on a tombstone (155), able to pass her hand over the carved lettering.

Nevertheless, in Cervantes’ poem this archeological site is not completely dead, unlike the Greek painter in Góngora’s sonnet. Indeed, there is life and movement in the cave! Not only do the serpents slither along the walls and in the fissures, but there is a live fire which peaks out of the cave lighting up the ossified inscription. On one hand, these skeletal remains are dead pieces of a lost past. On the other hand, they are undead, as the bones speak from the mouth of the cave, in what amounts to more than an instance of prosopopeia. In giving the bony remains a voice, the shepherd engages in a kind of necromancy, which is yet one more exchange found in the poem, that between the dead and the living. As Frederick De Armas has pointed out, necromancy is a way of connecting the past not only with the present but with the future. De Armas studies Cervantes’ use of necromancy in La Numancia, alluding to Virgil’s account of Dido, who immolates herself on the pyre and curses Aeneas: “Arise from my dead bones, O my unknown avenger, and harry the race of Dardanus with fire and sword” (Aeneid 4.625–26; qtd. in De Armas 143). The bones in “El romance de los celos” do not readily seem like a curse, but they certainly have the power of one, as their utterance to Lauso lead to and simultaneously prophesy his death. The Renaissance understanding of unearthing ruins and statues—explains Barkan—commonly linked archeology to necromancy, because the most commonly unearthed objects were neither great sculptures nor even the much sought-after inscriptions, but rather, sarcophagi:
The prevalence of stone funerary remains, especially the ubiquitous sarcophagi, become by far the most numerous objects of any substantial kind that stand for Renaissance Italians as the relics of antiquity. ... The bulk of classical art to be seen in the Renaissance is death-related, and the moderns who seek out this art are understood as necromancers. (60-1)

In stark contrast to the crypts of the Capuchin friars which were consecrated grounds decorated with mortal imagery, Cervantes’ cave is unholy. Not only are the dead made to speak, but many of them apparently died while engaging in the sin of “desesperación” (hopelessness), a detail that can be gleaned from the color of the stone (“piedra”) on which the letters are placed in verse 22. As mentioned above, desesperación is traditionally associated with the color yellow in early modern Spain (and it was considered among the worst of sins in the Thomistic tradition, for it points to an irreparable lack of faith, thus making it a well-known code-word for suicide, as in, for instance, Grisóstomo’s story in the Quijote). Additionally, the confluence of fire, bone, curse, prophesy and hopelessness, recall Dido’s suicide on the pyre, whose curse is reborn of the ashes, like the Phoenix.14

Born not out of ashes, but out of the fire that was his burning love, the poem portrays the dead man’s bones as they come alive to speak in what is called “un vivo traslado.” The bones are re-used and re-configured, yet still retain their original value. Indeed, the cave ekphrasis is necromantic and prophetic: In this case, it is Lauso’s death that is foretold. The inscription only seems like a warning to lovers; ultimately, it has the ironic effect of killing the jealous man after announcing, cryptically, Lauso’s own death to him. After he hears the ekphrasis, and gives his speech, Lauso’s own words then continue the necromantic function as they foretell his imminent fate: “que mis huesos en la muerte / mostrarán que son de piedra” (vv. 51-52), after which, he suddenly dies. In a corresponding move depicting the metamorphosis of a living body into stone, the innovative...

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14 De Armas draws attention to the fact that Virgil calls the Phoenician Dido “Phoenisa” which aurally evokes the myth of the Phoenix.
Baroque painter, Annibale Carracci, incorporates the rediscovered, fragmented ancient sculpture of a male nude known as the “Torso Belvedere” in his fresco of “Perseus and Phineas” at the Farnese Gallery in Rome (Figure 3). The fragmentary, Classical sculpture is in a sense completed by the painted limbs and head. In an interesting conceit, Carracci draws on Ovid to thematize this exchange of stone into flesh, by using it to portray Phineas, on his knees, who at this very moment is being turned to stone by the Gorgon’s head, held by Perseus. As art historian Charles Dempsey describes, paraphrasing Bellori, it is “as though the still visible marble trunk were restored to its natural wholeness, and its lost limbs moreover tinged with the faint blush of life…” (32).

In a similar way, the bones in the poem are fragments of the past which are restored to wholeness by speaking and acting in the present.

Furthermore, just as foretold, Lauso’s bones in death become a part of the morada de’los celos, as he metonymically joins his brethren in the cave, exchanging his jealous life for jealousy in death, becoming himself the “vivo traslado” of which he spoke. As Cervantes concretizes in bone...
and stone the love-poetry topos of the muerto vivo, he resurrects Rome’s Classical past in an unlikely form: the autochthonous, popular romance. In so doing, Cervantes Hispanizes a cultural enterprise more readily identifiable with his Italian Renaissance counterparts, complicating simple dichotomies. Given the similarity between this project and the one explicitly stated in the prologue to the Novelas ejemplares—where he engaged in a Hispanization of Italian Renaissance culture—the divide between the genius of prose works and the retrograde poet breaks down. The complex poetic endeavor embodied in the “Romance de los celos,” which certainly went unnoticed by contemporaries, demonstrates the lack of utility of ascribing pejorative notions of “backward-looking” to Cervantes’ poetic production. Like the poetry of the great stylistic innovators, Góngora and Quevedo, and like the prose of Cervantes himself, his poetry looks back to Renaissance Italy and to Classical antiquity in order to create something modern.

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15 “A esto se aplicó mi ingenio, por aquí me lleva mi inclinación, y más que me doy a entender, y es así, que yo soy el primero que he novelado en lengua castellana, que las muchas novelas que en ella andan impresas, todas son traducidas de lenguas extranjeras, y éstas son mías propias, no imitadas ni hurtadas; mi ingenio las engendró, y las parió mi pluma, y van creciendo en los brazos de la estampa” (I: 64-65).


List of Figures

1. Crypt of Santa Maria dell Concezione dei Capuccini, Rome.