

Between Scylla and Charybdis: The Paradoxical Poetics of Empire and the Empire of Poetics in Cervantes' *Viaje del Parnaso*

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CERVANTES' *VIAJE DEL PARNASO* (1614) towers as an elaborately conceived work that serves as a compelling and fascinating mirror of the literature, society, and politics of his time. A veritable hybrid in which numerous literary models and genres are interwoven into the textual fabric of satire, the *Viaje* presents an inexhaustible source of seemingly endless interpretations.¹ While Cervantes never wrote a formal poetics or a conventional epic, he did write a mock epic in which he disperses literary reflections on the poetry of his day, particularly on what may have seemed to him to be the monopoly of degraded poetry in the elitist circles of the Spanish academies, or poets' societies.² Yet

1 For a comprehensive study of Cervantes' amalgamation of models and genres in his *Viaje*, see Lokos (5–58). The *Viaje* inscribes itself within the tradition of the "Voyage to Parnassus" genre, which flourished in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain and Italy (Lokos 12). While the most cited model for Cervantes has been Cesare Caporali's *Viaggio in Parnaso* (1582), particularly its appended *Avvisi di Parnaso*, Lokos documents more reliable models: Traiano Boccalino's *I ragguagli di Parnaso* (1612–13) as well as Juan de la Cueva's *Viaje de Sannio* (1585) and his *Coro febeo de romances historiales* (1587) (12).

2 For Cervantes' satire of the poetry of the academies, in which he temporarily participated (notably the one called "El Parnaso"), see Márquez Villanueva (*Trabajos* y

beyond the myriad appraisals on the state of Spanish poetry, Cervantes incorporates into his *Viaje* subtle observations on the Hapsburg imperialist politics, which serves as an innovative response to the socio-political and cultural establishment in the Spain of his time. Through the highly entertaining literature of paradoxical folly, which embraces and celebrates the liberating power of laughter, satirical parody, ironic wit, and a propensity for the burlesque and carnivalesque, Cervantes offers in his *Viaje a sui generis* mock epic fiction that questions and challenges both the poetics of empire and the empire of poetics in seventeenth-century Spain.

The Cervantine mock epic no doubt offers a challenge to any reader who must discern the embedded meanings and veiled humorous references in its paradoxical praise of both contemporary poetry and poets, along with its whimsical flights of fancy that gesture toward its underlying satire at every step of the journey.³ In the *Viaje's* vast *mare magnum* of paradoxical poetics, the reader must navigate between the craggy contours of a virtual Scylla and Charybdis, one whose treacherous strait entices with the reward of witty satire, ironic ambiguities, and burlesque paradoxical folly.⁴ In the mock epic's conglomeration of seemingly disjointed episodes, Cervantes interweaves diverse narrative strands into

días, 195–214).

3 Rivers notes the enigma in the appraisal of the *Viaje* as a funny fiction unnoticed by critics ("Genres," 207). Gaos, in his edition of the *Viaje*, accentuates the poem's humor and irony (36). For the *Viaje's* nuanced irony, see Lokos (73). Márquez Villanueva suggests that the *Viaje* is based on the ludic terrain of paradoxical folly, offering "un denso entramado de paradojas" in which Cervantes displays an ambiguous irony (*Trabajos y días*, 192).

4 Close appropriately refers to the poem's "atmosphere of burlesque whimsy" (55). Gaos categorizes it as a burlesque epic that is much in line with other Cervantine satirical works (31). Due to its burlesque composition, the *Viaje* has been labeled, quite unfortunately, as a second tier poem, hardly the kind of work through which Cervantes would have wanted to immortalize his poetic invention, such as Gutiérrez believes (1045). Rey Hazas and Sevilla Arroyo, in their edition, erroneously conclude that the *Viaje*, due to its satirical qualities, represents "una rareza" among Cervantes' works (xxiv). However, as Rivers demonstrates, the burlesque element in the poem is consonant with the work of a mature Cervantes at the height of his literary prowess ("Cervantes' Journey," 243–44).

a vast web of cohesive episodes that contain an array of tangential anecdotes, burlesque vignettes, and wondrous dream-visions.⁵ While the *fabula* may be the soul of poetry, according to the neo-Aristotelian precept, Cervantes iconoclastically shatters such poetic conventions by creating a labyrinthine poetic artifice composed of truly fabulous *fabulae* with ornate trappings, each distinctly juxtaposed in stark and startling fashion, yet intricately connected by the narrative plan of their inventor, Cervantes himself.⁶ The satirical poem seems to contain a series of multifaceted *fabulae* that may be seen as mini-mock-epics, all of which are subordinated by Cervantes' fictional self-fashioning and artistic self-advertising in a series of ostensibly autobiographical self-portraits or poetic *personae*.⁷

5 Rivers notes the confluence of the "dream-journey" and "dream-vision" within the allegorical context of the *Viaje* ("Cervantes' Journey," 245). Lokos observes that this fusion of motifs makes for a highly complex satire (86). Such an amalgamation of chronotopes is common in the heterogenous framework of journey narratives, as Hutchinson suggests (201). Schevill and Bonilla, in their edition of the *Viaje*, launched a negative appraisal of its heterogenous structure that resonated for decades (v-xii). Such critical misinterpretations are still not entirely uncommon, as illustrated by Sansone's qualification of Cervantes as a bad poet and of the *Viaje's* lack of narrative direction (64).

6 Romo Feito points to the challenge of singling out a single *fabula* that gives cohesion to the entire poem (142). According to Alonso López Pinciano's *Philosophía Antigua Poética* (1596), the neo-Aristotelian concept of *fabula* allows for both simple and composite fables: "Simple se dice la que no tiene agniciones ni peripecias; y compuesta la que, o tiene agniciones, o peripecias, o todo junto" (V, 181). Even a "simple fábula," however, is multifaceted: "[...] este animal-fábula será tanto más deleitoso, cuanto más variedad de pinturas y colores en él se vieren" (V, 196). For Pinciano, the "episodios" that constitute the larger narrative "fabula" may stand independently: "[...] cuando episodio, entiendo las añadiduras de la fábula, que se pueden poner y quitar sin que la acción esté sobrada o manca" (V, 176). Romo Feito notes that the seemingly disconnected episodes in the *Viaje* infuse it with a novelistic fluidity (142).

7 Rivers observes Cervantes' fictional creation of poetic *personae* in order to project his "own public reputation as a poet and critic" ("Cervantes' Journey," 245). Jean Canavaggio studies the narrative fragmentation of the autobiographical space (37). For Cervantes' autobiographical reflections in the *Viaje*, also see Márquez Villanueva (*Trabajos y días*, 207); Rivers ("Genres and Voices," 216); Romo Feito (144-49); Rey Hazas and Sevilla Arroyo (xxi-xxii); and Riley (492-93).

Framing the *Viaje* within the enduring Erasmian tradition of the mock *encomium*, Cervantes teases together the well-spun threads of the burlesque and carnivalesque, forging a satirical portrait of the Spanish literary and cultural production of his time.⁸ The often cited passage on Cervantes' rejection of satire—"Nunca voló la humilde musa mía / por la región satírica" (IV, 34–35)—ought to be reassessed in the context of the *Viaje*, which paradoxically, by its very satirical framework and devices, in fact proves the contrary of this reputedly veridical assertion.⁹ In pointing to his own resolute abstention from satire, Cervantes underscores the very satire of his poem, which may be considered an amusing meta-satire.¹⁰ Cervantes' pen flies over the *Viaje's* pages with breathtaking mastery, covering with astonishing dexterity the vast realm of that "región satírica," so deeply infused with the satirical vein that spans from Horace's classical maxim of "*ridentum dicere verum*" to the Erasmian concept of paradoxical folly.¹¹ In fact, the *Viaje* may well be termed the most artistically complex satire in Spanish literature, finding its generic niche within the vast and spacious world of paradoxical folly exemplified by

8 Lokos analyzes the rhetorical devices of satire (71–72). For the paradoxical encomia in the *Viaje*, see Gitlitz (191–94) and Márquez Villanueva (*Trabajos y días*, 192).

9 Basing his argument on these verses, Ruiz Peña fails to consider Cervantes as satirist (366). Stagg compares Cervantes' supposed avoidance of satire to Luis Alfonso de Carballo's poetics, his *Cisne de Apolo* (1602), arguing that both authors possess a strong ethical perspective of Poetry by which they reject pure invective, adopting a "persistent moral tone" (37). While Cervantes does not engage in vitriolic and moralizing satire, the *Viaje's* burlesque irony elevates it to a more complex level than Carballo's poetics.

10 In light of the fictional play in which Cervantes engages the reader through satire and irony, Riley warns against the fallacy of interpreting the poem in a literal vein (499).

11 Cervantes' admiration of Horace's satirical mode, as he admits in *Don Quijote* (II, 16), is implicit in the *Viaje*. Romo Feito notes this Horatian mode of satire in the *Viaje* (146). Cervantes would seem to be inclined toward the comic-satirical mode, one of two categories of satire according to Pinciano: "[...] hay grande diferencia entre el puro cómico y satírico puro, que éste reprehende con severidad y acerbidad [...]; mas el cómico reprehende del todo escarneciendo y burlando; y, finalmente, es una reprehensión la cómica llena de pasatiempo y risa [...]" (XII, 500).

Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*.¹² In this sense, Cervantes' fantastic journey to Parnassus constitutes a veritable countervoyage, one that simultaneously reveals the forging of a counter-genre, the satirical Voyage to Parnassus.¹³

Quintessential of an epic journey, Cervantes inaugurates his countervoyage to Parnassus with the departure from the port city of Cartagena, that Nova Carthago that evokes the classical Carthage immortalized by Virgil's *Aeneid*, a city forever associated with Dido and Aeneas, that other epic sailor who rivals the classical mariner par excellence, Ulysses: "llegué al puerto/ a quien los de Cartago dieron nombre,/ ... Arrojóse mi vista a la campaña/ rasa del mar, que trujo a mi memoria/ del heroico Don Juan la heroica hazaña" (I, 133–41). Yet the vision of the Mediterranean stretching before his eyes inspires in Cervantes not an epic journey harkening back to the remote classical past, but an all too real and palpable enterprise that for both Spain and the man was not any less monumental and epic in its significance, the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571, indeed a decisive victory of epic proportions.¹⁴ In Cervantes' invocation of the glorious victory at Lepanto, he lays the politically charged framework for the apposite contrast between Spain's apogee of imperial hegemony in the late sixteenth century, on the one hand, and its deplorable state of political and cultural decline in the early seventeenth century, on the other. Thus the *Viaje's* dynamic dichotomy between the empire of poetics and the poetics of empire begins to gain momentum from the poem's inception.

Beyond the autobiographical reflections on past military glory, the crux of Cervantes' mock epic constitutes a paradoxical exercise in contemporary metapoetics. Cervantes, as narrator-protagonist and

12 Lokos notes the Erasmian subtext: "Cervantes's *Viaje* could well have been called *In Praise of the Folly of the Poets of our Time*" (79). For the Erasmian intertextuality in the *Viaje*, see Márquez Villanueva ("Eufemismos," 686).

13 Chesney defines the "countervoyage" as a "perfectly paradoxical art form" (15). Márquez Villanueva also terms the *Viaje* a "countervoyage" (*Trabajos y días*, 221).

14 Cervantes' sense of pride for having fought at Lepanto is manifest: "Donde con alta de soldados gloria,/ y con propio valor y airado pecho/ tuve, aunque humilde, parte en la vitoria" (I, 142–44). The encomiastic genre exalted a poet's distinction in both arms and letters, as Gitlitz notes (198). Romo Feito similarly sees Cervantes' dual protagonism as hero in both arms and letters (149).

as a poetic go-between of sorts, or “paraninfo” (I, 326) to Apollo, has been charged by Mercury with the task of selecting from a catalogue of Spanish poets those who will be honored with the privilege of embarking on a ship of verses (I, 202–339). Once aboard this (di)versified ship, in what may be yet another propitious remembrance of the heroic naval battle at Lepanto, Mercury tells Cervantes—as “Adán de los poetas” (I, 202) and crippled ex-soldier—to arm himself with verses: “Ármate de tus versos” (I, 232).¹⁵ Fully armed with his ersatz poetic armor, Cervantes portrays his new role as censor of bad poetry, especially bad satire, and therefore urges Mercury to prevent certain poets from boarding the ship. Despite all efforts to exclude poetic riff-raff from embarking, a motley array of poets rain down from the clouds onto the ship of verses (II, 326–41), which becomes inundated from stern to bow with foolish poetasters—“¡Cuerpo de mí con tanta poetambre!” (II, 396)—and is then decked out for the carnivalesque sea voyage to Parnassus.¹⁶ Yet this ship of verses must first pass between Scylla and Charybdis (III, 229–31), where one of Cervantes’ poetasters, Lofraso, barely escapes being thrown overboard to the “fieras gargantas” (III, 246) of these classical monsters. In this most perilous portion of the journey, any unsuspecting poet may find himself on the brink of being sacrificed to the “fieras gargantas” of Scylla and Charybdis, so emblematic of the dire straits of poetry

15 In his self-effacing depiction as the “Adam of poets,” i.e., as the self-proclaimed “poetón ya viejo” (VIII, 409), Cervantes partakes in the self-deprecation quite in line with bouffonesque literature. Gaos notes how Cervantes at times directs the sharpest barbs at himself (32). For Pinciano, deprecation is laughable: “Y en la deprecación hay también de lo risueño [...]” (IX, 407).

16 Juan de la Cueva’s *Coro febeo* (1587) contains a ballad entitled “Como los Poetas conquistaron el Parnaso,” in which Apollo banishes the inferior poets, calling them “Poetridas,” “Poetontos,” and “Poetraistros,” clearly a model for Cervantes’ neologism of “poetambre,” as Lokos notes (54). Márquez Villanueva sees the Charybdis-like vortex of vulgar words and neologisms, a “desquiciado torbellino de vocablos,” which ties the *Viaje* to the literature of folly and to carnivalesque language (“Eufemismos,” 686). Sansone points to the negative portrayal of these poets, whom he calls “personajillos insoportables” (63). Among the adoxographic portrayals of poets who make it to Parnassus, some merit attention for their satirical punch: “hambrienta mesnada,” “tanta poetambre,” “falsos y malditos trovadores,” “poetas de atrevida hipocresía,” and quite appropriate for the poetics of paradoxical folly, poets who are of “cerebro flaco.”

in Cervantes' time, hence the underlying motive of these chosen poets' mission to save Parnassus: "[...] que está puesto en duro estrecho" (I, 315). Only Mercury's arbitrary decision not to throw Lofraso overboard may make the difference between safe passage and the tragic sacrifice of an unsuspecting poet to the abysmal depths (III, 271–72).¹⁷ Skillfully navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, the Cervantine ship of verses narrowly averts shipwreck, a much different fate from the one dealt to another shipload of foolishly ambitious poetasters who attempt to reach Parnassus.

In what may be considered the most emblematic moment in a series of fantastic adventures witnessed by Cervantes-protagonist, chapter V dramatically exemplifies the mock-epic naval battle against the degraded poetry of the day. Upon Neptune's wrathful sinking of a boatload of poetasters who attempted to reach the sacred mount, Cervantes dramatizes their marvelous pumpkinification, or *apokolokyntosis*.¹⁸ In one decisive stroke of divine providence, the sea is brimming with pumpkinized poetasters, the result of Venus' clever ruse—"¡Oh raro caso y por jamás oído/ ni visto!" (V, 184–85)—to prevent Neptune's trident from sinking the gourds to the dreadful abyss (V, 187–95). With satirical and poignant wit, Cervantes merges the sublime with the most pedestrian, juxtaposing Olympian deities with base poetasters who are turned into vile gourds, therefore fusing into a distinct hybrid the seemingly antithetical concepts

17 The "perezosa tiranía" (III, 199) of the Argensola brothers, who had broken their promises to take Cervantes to Naples as part of the poetic contingent at the viceregal court, is mentioned just a few verses before the ship heads into the strait between Scylla and Charybdis, which may imply Cervantes' ironic contemplation of throwing not Lofraso, but rather these false friends into the "fierce throats" of the strait. Cervantes' reference to the "fierce throats" alludes to Scylla in Homer's *Odyssey* (XII, 80–100) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (XIV, 59), in addition to Andrea Alciati's emblem 68, "Impudentia," in his *Emblematum liber*. Quite applicable to Charybdis' frightening vortex, Hutchinsonson notes the presence of "world-like vortices" in Cervantine narrative (160).

18 The literary genre for this episode seems to be the Menippean satire, in line with Seneca's satirical apotheosis of the emperor Claudius, his Apokolokyntosis, and Lucian's fantastic voyages, as Rivers notes ("Cómo leer," 114). Lokos demonstrates how the *Viaje* may be inserted within the "satirical-parodical" vein initiated by Lucian's voyages, widely imitated in the Renaissance (16–17).

of high and low burlesque styles.¹⁹ In this pumpkinification, Venus intercedes again by asking Boreas to blow the gourds westward across the Mediterranean until they come upon the shores of Spain, where these metamorphosed poetasters are swarming and better known as “zarabandos,” given to composing couplets for the sensual zarabanda dance: “Los contrapuestos vientos se comiden [...] / llevando a la piara gruñidora / en calabazas y odres convertida, / a los reinos contrarios del Aurora. / Desta dulce semilla referida, / España, verdad cierta, tanto abunda, / que es por ella estimada y conocida” (V, 214–22).²⁰ In this carnivalesque spirit, Cervantes playfully transforms poetasters into pumpkins as the most emblematic form of revealing their foolishly vacuous endeavors.²¹ Yet the burlesque comparison of poetasters to the hollow gourds not only points to their inherent foolishness, but also contains a satirical punch at the degraded and fatuous poetry produced by the academies in seventeenth-century Spain.²²

Far from representing a latter-day *translatio studii*, by which the cul-

19 As Lokos states, the *Viaje* constitutes a hybrid genre that fuses high with low burlesque: “High burlesque treats a trivial subject in an elevated manner, while low burlesque treats an elevated subject in a trivial manner. In low burlesque, the parodist is a vulgarian, using low words and ignoble images” (83).

20 These poets are the “zarabandos” who compose for the licentious zarabanda dance. Pinciano specifies that the “zarabanda,” etymologically associated with “dithiramba,” or the ancient dance in honor of Bacchus, constitutes music and dance dedicated to Venus (X, 423). Rodríguez Marín, in his edition of the *Viaje*, noted that these “zarabando” poets allude to “afeminados,” or “almidonados” (318), as Cervantes implies in the *Viaje* (V, 208–10).

21 Cervantes confesses that since he witnessed the pumpkinification, he sees a poet in every gourd he comes across in Spain (V, 226–42). In Cervantes’ emblematic language, the visual references to pumpkins allow him to make ironic connections between the emptiness that characterizes the allegory of Vainglory and the poetasters’ vacuous poetry (Lokos 149). For the pumpkin as an emblem of folly, see Márquez Villanueva (*Trabajos y días*, 42) and Lokos (149).

22 Márquez Villanueva specifies how poetasters in the Spain of Cervantes’ time figuratively dragged poetry through the mud: “Una muchedumbre de romancistas, copleiros, repentistas y desdichados comediógrafos hormigüea por la obra, igual que por las calles de la corte, arrastrando a la poesía por los muladares de su ignorancia” (“Eufemismos,” 687). For the comparison of the vulgar hordes of poetasters to the less than talented throng of poetic academicians in Madrid, see Lokos (101–29).

tural legacy from the classical Golden Age would be transferred ostensibly intact from Parnassus to the shores of Spain, the pumpkinification of Spanish poetasters exemplifies Cervantes' burlesque satire of what he perceived to be the deplorable state of poetry in the Iberian Peninsula.²³ Metaphorically compared to a grunting herd of swine ("la piara gruñidora"), Boreas' winds blow the pumpkin-poetasters to the shores of Spain, reputedly so inviolably glorious in both arms and letters: "Que aunque en armas y en letras es fecunda/ ... su gusto en parte en tal semilla funda" (V, 223–25).²⁴ These pumpkinized-piggish-poetasters represent the same sort of bad seed that Mercury explicitly forbade from reaching Parnassus when he prevented the Valencian poets from embarking on the ship of verses on the out-bound voyage, for fear that they should found a new *imperium*, etymologically both dominion and mandate, on the sacred mount: "Y fue, porque temió que no se alzasen,/ siendo tantos y tales, con Parnaso,/ y nuevo imperio y mando en él fundasen" (III, 73–75).²⁵ In this burlesque epic, Spain figures not as the safe haven for the highest of poetic standards, nor does it stand as a bastion of the classical poetic legacy, but rather as the fertile field where herds of swine may found and fertilize the seeds of their poetic empire, where they find ample opportunity to thrive in the form of numerous poetic academies.²⁶ This is not

23 Schmidt suggests that Cervantes maps a cultural *translatio studii* in which Spain figures as the "protector of the West," the final repository of good poetry in a trajectory that stretches from West to East (33). However, it must be noted that with the arrival of the pumpkin-poetasters in Spain, the traditional trajectory of *translatio studii* is maintained, though degraded by the burlesque *periplus*, or circuitous maritime voyage.

24 Cervantes alludes to the pumpkin-poetasters as a herd of swine: "[...] la manada,/ que con la de los Cerdas simboliza" (V, 206–07). Rodríguez Marín pointed out Cervantes' allusion to the noble name of "los Cerdas" in order to evoke pigs (317).

25 The description of the Valencian poets who wished to board the ship of verses could not be more degrading: "un tropel de gallardos valencianos,/ ...codiciosos de hallarse en la vitoria ... / de las heces del mundo y de la escoria" (III, 62–69). The throng of poetasters whom Mercury refuses to pick up at Valencia may be an allusion to the famous "Academia de los Nocturnos" (1591–94) in that city, which as Márquez Villanueva notes, was later renamed "Los montañeses del Parnaso" in 1616 (*Trabajos y días* 214 n. 139).

26 For the pumpkinification episode as Cervantes' reflection upon the Span-

at all a glorious *translatio studii*, as it has been posited (Schmidt 33), but rather a *contaminatio studii* of sorts, culminating in the sheer degradation of literary genres, and more precisely, in the deplorable debasement of poetry, so indiscriminately diluted by the empty calories of the artificial nectar that both mass popular culture and the reputedly elitist Spanish academies crave. It becomes readily apparent that the poetic cartography of the *Viaje*, rather than constituting a *translatio studii* in reverse, that is, from West to East, becomes riddled with the poetics of paradoxical folly, whereby the satirical thrust of the mock epic infuses with a liberating sense of irony and parody all that is sacred to the Western poetic canon. Cervantes, through the pumpkinification of the poetasters and their ensuing inundation of Spain, which can be traced in a circuitous trajectory, demonstrates that the classical notion of *translatio imperii*, or for that matter, of a cultural *translatio studii*, is not inverted as much as it has been grotesquely degraded and parodied.²⁷ In the vicious cycle of the empire of poetics, Cervantes may imply, the perilous voyage for some of these poetasters starts and ends on the shores of Spain, which figures as the repository of aesthetically degraded cultural production.

In the post-pumpkinification invasion of Spain by poetasters, there is a similarly contaminated counterpart to the cultural *translatio studii*: the politically pertinent *topos* of *translatio imperii*. Far from representing the notoriously epic naval battle at Lepanto, so emblematic of Spain's

ish poets of his day, see Rivers ("Genres and Voices," 218) and Márquez Villanueva (*Trabajos y días*, 231). From Cervantes' perspective, Naples had also succumbed to the tyranny of poetic academies, since it was there where the Conde de Lemos had placed the Argensola brothers in charge of establishing the academy of Spanish poets. Corroborating Cervantes' dejection for not having been chosen by the Argensolas to partake in the Neapolitan academy, Mercury points to their "perezosa tiranía" (III, 199) in Naples. Under the poetic *imperium* of the Argensolas, Naples had become yet another reflection of Madrid's academies. Thus, the empire of poetics in the *Viaje* is configured by the triangle of Madrid-Naples-Parnassus.

27 Schmidt sees Spain as the bastion of "good" literature: "The 'good' literature of his time follows the canon of classical antiquity, relocated from Greece and Italy to Spain via the *translatio studii et imperii*" (45). For Schmidt, the return of the poetasters to Spain merely represents a victory for Spanish cultural and religio-political hegemony (33). Cervantes' fine sense of irony, however, suggests the contrary: the Spain of his time is far from being considered the bastion of the Western poetic canon.

perceived heroic defense of Western and Christian Europe against the menacing power of the Islamic Turkish empire, the invasion on Iberian soil by the Spanish pumpkin-poetasters stands as a burlesque counter-voyage in which Spaniards embark on an epic journey only to come full circle, returning home to roost without the corresponding spoils of the cultural legacy from the classical past. It is not at all serendipitous that the *Viaje's* culminating point should come in the form of a burlesque battle on the sacred slopes of Parnassus itself, which serves not as the center of classical literary standards and political dominion, but rather as a much-degraded, decentered, and dystopic background for the fictionalized and dramatic clash between two diametrically opposed poetic ideals.²⁸ Cervantes couches the politically charged though ambivalent rhetoric of imperialistic propaganda within the satirical framework of a mock battle between different poetic tastes, thus dramatizing the complex dialectic that seems to permeate the entire *Viaje*: the poetics of empire and the empire of poetics.²⁹

In a delayed and parodic invocation of the Muses, Cervantes now asks Calliope, the "beligera musa" of heroic poetry, to inspire him to sing, ostensibly with dispassionate sentiment and veridical integrity, the defiant feats of the opposing sides in what amounts to a low burlesque epic battle (VII, 1–20). At the pivotal point of his mock epic, Cervantes presents the poetasters' last rebellion against the "poetisimos varones," the Apollonian poets who must defend Parnassus against the approach-

28 Vélez-Sainz contends that Spanish poets of the academies in Madrid wrote of Parnassus as a motif imbued with political and imperialist propaganda (219). Profeti notes the importance of Parnassus as a *speculum mundi*, symbolic of literary and political power (1052).

29 Vélez-Sainz illustrates the link between the discourse on arms in the *Viaje* and the imperialist propaganda of Cervantes' time, suggesting that the entire poem is based on the duality between arms and letters (209). While Cervantes pays much attention to this duality, it does not necessarily constitute the primordial thrust of his poem, which has as its base his own fictionalized portrayals as poet and writer, and consequently, his reflections on the status of Spanish poets and poetry. Stagg suggests that Cervantes, in creating his own poetic *persona*, offers "subliminal advertising" of his own poetics, a concept that may be extended to his reflections on the imperialist propaganda of his day (30).

ing squadrons of those who are impelled by “la soberbia y maldad, el atrevido/ intento de una gente malmirada” (VII, 10–11), and who presume to scale the slopes of the sacred mount, which constitutes a low burlesque parody of the classical *Gigantomachia*.³⁰ In Apollo’s epic call to arms against the “hipócrita gentalla,” the hordes of insolent and pretentious poetasters are satirically portrayed as grotesquely diabolical as well as hopelessly parasitical and marginalized: “Esta canalla, digo, que se endiaba [...] / ¿habéis de consentir que esta embaidora, / hipócrita gentalla se me atreva, / de tantas necedades inventora?” (VI, 268–76). In Apollo’s exhortation to defend Parnassus against the imminent attack, there is a clear reference to the muddled war cries or “confusos alaridos” (VI, 294) coming from the masses of invading poetasters, and Cervantes explicitly portrays the opposing side in pathetically burlesque and barbarian terms: “pareció el escuadrón casi infinito / de la bárbara, ciega y pobre gente” (VI, 302–03).³¹ In a hyperbolically satirical condemnation, Cervantes-narrator lashes out against the insolent poetasters who attempt to climb the slopes of Parnassus like cats:

Poetas de atrevida hipocresía, / esperad, que de vuestro acabamiento / ya se ha llegado el temeroso día. / De las confusas voces el conceto / confuso por el aire resonaba [...] / Por la falda del monte gateaba / una tropa poética, aspirando / a la cumbre, que bien guardada estaba. (VII, 145–53)

In this satirical cat fight, it is literature itself that is at stake, since it faces

30 In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the Giants’ ambitions instilled in them the desire to make the arduous climb to the heavens by stacking mountains that could reach the stars (I, 151–53). Gitlitz studies how in Cervantes’ “Canto de Calíope,” in *La Galatea* (1585), many poets are portrayed in a constant state of ascent (204). In this context, the poetasters’ ambitious desire to climb Parnassus becomes even more ironic.

31 The figure of false Poetry is characterized by her unintelligible language: “Tómanla por momentos parasismos; / no acierta a pronunciar, y, si pronuncia, / absurdos hace y forma solecismos” (IV, 175–77). This false version of Poetry, in her clumsy diction, “falsa, ansiosa, torpe y vieja” (IV, 169), may be compared to the “confusos alaridos” produced by the invading poetasters on Parnassus. Schmidt sees in false Poetry’s raucous sound an association with the carnivalesque (40).

the threat of degenerating into those unintelligible sounds, or “confusas voces,” yet it is also literature that occupies a central role, since both sides use verses and books as ammunition: “[...] iban libros enteros disparando” (VII, 156).³² In this burlesque mock epic, not even Mercury is safe from the harmful punch of a flying satire: “Dióle a Mercurio en la derecha mano/ una sátira antigua licenciada,/ de estilo agudo, pero no muy sano” (VII, 187–89).³³ In the battle of the books, presumably between good and bad poets, contemporary Spanish poets and mythological gods alike are indiscriminately mixed, a witty interplay between high and low burlesque styles that further underscores Cervantes’ staged mock battle between the competing forces in the poem, the recurrent duality of poetry and empire.³⁴

In low burlesque style, Cervantes satirizes his own poetics of empire by portraying the mock epic battle on Parnassus in rhetorical terms that infuse with racial and ethnic overtones the seemingly perennial epic battle between radically opposed aesthetic ideals (the deceptively simple and well-delineated dichotomy between bad and good poets), which may

32 As Lokos details, the battle of the books on Cervantes’ Parnassus echoes Juan de la Cueva’s *Coro febeo* (1587) and Caporali’s *Avvisi di Parnaso* (1582), in which Apollo wages war against the ignorant poets (10 and 54). Finello compares the battle of the books on Parnassus with that other quixotic episode in *Don Quijote II*, 70, in which devils throw books like balls (“libros... llenos de viento y de borra”) (403).

33 In close proximity to this licentious satire that hits Mercury, which Rodríguez Marín believed to be the *Coplas del Provincial* (357), there are two mentions of Rimas launched against the Apollonian troops: “Unas Rimas llegaron que pudieran/ desbaratar el escuadrón cristiano [...]” (VII, 184–85) and “[...] otro libro llegó de Rimas solas, / [...] algunas Rimas sueltas españolas” (VII, 194–98). This persistent mention of *Rimas* may allude to Lope de Vega’s *Rimas* (1604), whose expanded editions (1611, 1612, and 1613) contained not only his satirical “Arte nuevo,” but also sonnets on his conflicted relationship with Elena Osorio. The veiled allusion to Lope during the mock epic battle on Parnassus is opportune, since *el Fénix* figures at the center of the polemic between two different conceptual ideals of poetry. As Romo Feito notes, the Cervantine idea subordinates life to literature, while Lope places life experience above literary art (154). For Lope de Vega as the central emblematic image in the *Viaje*, see Lokos (146–49).

34 Rivers notes the Homeric parody of such an intermingling of the human and the divine (“Cervantes’ Journey,” 247).

well be compared to the not any less contentious and mortiferous battle between religions (Christianity and Islam) and civilizations (Europe and the Muslim world, embodied by the Ottoman empire). In the poetics of empire, Cervantes portrays the mock battle between the Apollonian poets and the barbarous squadrons of poetasters in terms that already point to a nascent Orientalism, since the “*bárbara canalla*” becomes exoticized in both dress and demeanor:

Descuadernó, desencajó, deshizo
del opuesto escuadrón catorce hileras,
dos criollos mató, hirió un mestizo.
[...] Daba ya indicios de cansado y lacio
el brío de la bárbara canalla,
[...] Mas renovóso la fatal batalla
mezclándose los unos con los otros [...] *Cinco melifluos sobre cinco potros*
llegaron, y embistieron por un lado,
y lleváronse cinco de nosotros.
Cada cual como moro ataviado,
[...] De romances moriscos una sarta,
cual si fuera de balas enramadas,
llega con furia y con malicia harta. (VII, 253–73)

In this paradoxical poetics of empire, the Moorish or orientalized poetasters are painted in anti-heroic and lavishly ornate terms, portrayed as a confusing and undifferentiated mass given to composing a string of melifluous “romances moriscos.”³⁵ Not coincidentally, though perhaps quite ambiguously, in the midst of this maurophobic onslaught between those of the “*crisiano bando*” and those dressed in the Moorish style (“*como moro ataviado*”), it is none other than Góngora himself, the “*magno cordobés*,” who deals a powerful blow to the opposing side of poetasters, ap-

³⁵ Lokos notes that the satire against the “balladmongers” reflects the infestation of Spain by academician poetasters (93). The apparently vehement condemnation of romances moriscos is mitigated by Cervantes’ praise of his own “romances infinitos,” as he states in his inventory of works (IV, 40).

propriately, through the *serio-ludere* nature of his *burlas* and *veras*: “De sus sabrosas burlas y sus veras/ el magno cordobés un cartapacio/ diſparó, y aterró cuatro banderas” (VII, 256–58).³⁶ Yet it is the very serio-comic portrayal of both Apollonian poets and their apparent opponents, the dubiously barbarous and Moorishly garbed poetasters, which relegates any *encomium* or censure of poetic abilities to the realm of ambiguity and paradox.³⁷ On Parnassus, the confluence of poetic ideals that are coded in political terms evoke Spain’s precarious imperial agency, all of which cannot but render the apparent dichotomy between the empire of poet-ics and the poetics of empire as an ambivalent fusion or hybrid.

The once definitive lines between the two opposing squadrons, like the ostensible difference between blame and praise, become progressively blurred as the battle wears on, resulting in a patently burlesque paradox in which Christian and pagan qualifiers become arbitrarily

36 Góngora’s burlesque sonnet “Ensíllenme el asno rucio” is a parody of Lope’s romance morisco “Ensíllenme el potro rucio,” which makes “el magno cordobés” and his blow against the maurophile poetasters in the *Viaje* doubly ironic. Despite the apparent praise of Góngora (II, 49–60), Cervantes mentions the “estancias polifemas,” a satirical allusion to Góngora’s notoriously obscure culterano verses (VII, 323). The dubiously laudatory qualifier “magno” in reference to Góngora, appropriate for his known epithet as “el gran Apolo cordobés,” is not much different from the same ambiguous accolade given to Lope’s poetic stature, “el gran Lope de Vega,” who occupies a central part in Cervantes’ encomiastic catalogue of Spanish poets (II, 388). According to Gitlitz, such accolades form part of the encomiastic tradition, since Juan de la Cueva, in his *Viaje de Sannio*, had called Lope “Apolo de los poetas,” and Góngora, “Píndaro nuevo” (196). Cervantes sustains the mock *encomium* of Lope as the great Spanish comedian (“cómico mejor de nuestra Hesperia”) in the mock epic battle on Parnassus, where he plays, the *comedias* “limpias y atildadas,” appealing as they are in Spanish popular culture, play a minor role on Parnassus: “Y, a pesar de las limpias y atildadas/ del cómico mejor de nuestra Hesperia,/ [...] no ganaron mucho en esta feria [...]” (VII, 316–19). There is yet another jab at Lope in the *Viaje* that echoes Cervantes’ prologue to his own dramatic work, in which he complains about *el Fénix* as the “monstruo de naturaleza,” whose comic tyranny reigns in Spain: “La Envidia, monstruo de naturaleza [...]” (VIII, 94).

37 For the Erasmian adoxography, or paradoxical praise, in the *Viaje*’s encomiastic catalogue of poets, see Lokos (33–34). As Gitlitz notes, in encomiastic literature, the most common epithets for poets are “grande, ilustre y famoso,” which saturate the texts until all praise becomes meaningless (195).

mixed in the intermingling of diverse poetic diction, since the “Catholic” or “Christian” Apollonian troops are often confused with the maurophile poetasters.³⁸ In this mock epic battle between such ambiguously aligned Christian and maurophile versifiers, respectively portrayed as swans and crows, the duality between the poetics of empire and the empire of poetics becomes decidedly fused into one paradoxical hybrid, emblemized by none other than the “raro inventor” (I, 223) and the most *rara ave* of Spanish poets, Cervantes himself: “[Y]o soy un poeta desta hechura:/ cisne en las canas, y en la voz un ronco/ y negro cuervo” (I, 102–04).³⁹ In this exoticized battle between literary tastes (Italianate vs. Castilian versifiers, epic poets vs. ballad-makers) as well as between imperial civilizations closely tied to a religious oligarchy (Christianity vs. Islam), the opposing sides are merged into the same amorphous mass: “Tan mezclados están, que no hay quien pueda/ discernir cuál es malo o cuál es

38 While Rodríguez Marín noted that “católico” refers to the best portion, “excelente y superior” (345), the religious significance cannot be ignored. Vélez-Sainz correctly points to the political reflection in the mention of the “católico bando” (VII, 22) and the “escuadrón cristiano” (VII, 185), which evokes the Spanish victories over Protestantism in Flanders and the suppression of the *moriscos*’ rebellion in the Alpujarras (221). However, in the context of a post-1609 Spain, it is entirely conceivable that Cervantes, as he does in the 1615 *Quixote*, may also allude to Catholic Spain’s tragic expulsion of the *moriscos*. In the context of the *Viaje*, even those of “Old Christian” blood were excluded from the “católico bando” of Apollonian poets, since one of the poets who flaunted his gothic dress (“vistiéndose a lo godo”), in a clear allusion to his “Old Christian” stock, was eliminated from the list of poets headed to Parnassus (II, 103–05). The negative portrayal of “romances moriscos” along with everything maurophile becomes fraught with irony once it is juxtaposed with the negative portrayal of such a quintessential Old Christian reference.

39 Apollo’s troops carry the insignia on which figures a white swan (VII, 40). The opposing side, led by the dubiously virile poetaster (“muso por la vida”) with the Moorish-sounding name, Arbolanchez, carries a standard with a crow (VII, 91–93). As Lokos illustrates, in the poetics of the time, the swan was associated with the figure of the poet, and moreover, “good poets were swans and mere versifiers were crows” (166). In his self-identification with the white swan, Cervantes parallels Carballo’s statement on the swan’s sweet song near death: “Y en su vejez, y quanto mas cercano a la muerte, canta con mas dulçura” (I, 63–64). On the brink of narrating Neptune’s burlesque naval battle against the poetasters, Cervantes promises to sing “con voz tan entonada y viva,/ que piensen que soy cisne y que me muero” (IV, 564–65).

bueno,/ cuál es garcilasiŝta o timoneda" (VII, 292–94). For Cervantes, all poets, whether given to epic or to ballad creations, to the singing of war or of love, pass the time day-dreaming, and all ultimately seem to be made from the same mass: "Llorando guerras, o cantando amores,/ la vida como en sueño se les pasa... / Son hechos los poetas de una masa/ dulce, suave, correosa y tierna" (I, 88–92). The defection of about twenty Apollonian poets, who decided to commit the poetic treason of joining the ranks of poetasters, further illustrates not only the volatile state of poetic genres and styles, but also the nebulous categories of race and religion in the Spain of Cervantes' time: "una al parecer discreta gente/ del católico bando al enemigo/ se pasó" (VII, 97–99). In his epiphany upon the defection of his presumably good poets, the god of light and Poetry admits to being duped by his blind faith in those who claimed to be his loyal followers: "Yo fui, respondió Apolo, el engañado;/ que de su ingenio la primera vista/ indicios descubrió que serían buenos/ para facilitar esta conquista" (VII, 117–20).⁴⁰ Cervantes' response to Apollo could not be more poignantly satirical: "Señor, repliqué yo, creí que ajenos/ eran de las deidades los engaños" (VII, 121–22). Providence and prudence on pagan Parnassus, as Cervantes-protagonist ironically hints, are not only sorely lacking, but also become the butt of his paradoxical poetics. In the wake of the expulsion of the *moriscos* in post-1609 Spain, the fictional defection of "Catholic" and Apollonian poets over to the Moorish side only points to Cervantes' subversive critique of the ill-counseled and ill-conceived drive to preserve Spanish imperial hegemony under Philip III.⁴¹

While the mock epic battle on Parnassus is saturated with imperialistic rhetoric smacking of blatant chauvinism, it actually figures as a brilliant satire of Spain's glorious and ostentatious ambitions, both in arms and in letters, at the height of its early seventeenth century enterprise to

40 For the low burlesque portrayal of the gods in the *Viaje*, see Lokos (83). García points out how Cervantes uses the demythifying portrayal of the gods in order to show his indignation at how adulation affords mediocre poets their fame (81).

41 For Spain's tumultuous politics and decadence in imperial and cultural glory in the reign of Philip III, especially with regard to the *arbitristas'* infamous reform policies and the expulsion of the *moriscos*, see Elliott's now classic study (chapter 8).

maintain its political and cultural hegemony.⁴² The latent irony and parody in the *Viaje*, therefore, clearly do not allow for the interpretation of the mock poem as a serious defense of Spanish arms and letters, since the burlesque portrayal of the battle on Parnassus may indeed reveal strands of dispersed and craftily embedded reflections that amount to what may be termed Cervantes' literary and satirically subtle anti-imperialistic stance. In this light, it becomes untenable to suggest that Cervantes' poem constitutes a *translatio studii* in reverse, and much less so a *translatio imperii*.⁴³ To this end, two points become readily apparent: 1.) Spain's dreams of imperial expansion and conquest by the early seventeenth century were not headed eastward toward Greece, but rather westward, across the Atlantic, and beyond, across the Pacific; and 2.) the mock epic battle on Parnassus, by its very satirico-burlesque nature, is anything but a decisive victory for Poetry, or for that matter, for the Western literary canon. The imperial glory garnered by Emperor Charles V's vast territories, both in Europe and in the Americas, had long been tarnished by the publication date of the *Viaje*, and from Cervantes' perception, so had Poetry.⁴⁴ In this sense, Cervantes offers in the *Viaje* a new and ironic

42 Schmidt comments on the "national pride" implicit in the *Viaje* (34). As Vélez-Sainz points out, Cervantes discredits the ostentation of both arms and letters in the Spain of his time through what he terms the "poética de la socarronería" (225).

43 Schmidt misconstrues the battle on Parnassus as a *translatio studii* in reverse, in which Spanish poets are the defenders of Poetry: "In an ironic reversal of the trajectory of *translatio studii*, Spain pushes Western culture eastward back toward the countries from which it originated through its imperial expansion. The mission to rescue Mount Parnassus is clearly described: 'Y nuevo imperio y mando en él fundasen' (III: v, 75)" (4). Schmidt, citing out of context, fails to see that Mercury clearly states that he does not wish to take the Valencian poets to Parnassus, lest they found a new empire (III, 73–75). As Márquez Villanueva notes, Cervantes echoes Horace's maxim of poets' founding republics, which in the context of the *Viaje* points to a satirical condemnation of a country in which the most deserving poets are marginalized (*Trabajos y días* 240). López Pinciano notes, in the prologue "Al lector," that every citizen's responsibility is to preserve the republic (11). As Lokos observes, Cervantes' satire of the Madrid academies implies a censure of the "small republic of letters" (101), which may well be termed the empire of poetics.

44 Rivers suggests that Cervantes yearned not only for the days of Emperor Charles V, but also for a nostalgic Golden Age of Erasmian humanism ("Cervantes'

reading of the contemporary state of Spanish arms and letters, which in his eyes differs markedly from the once emblematic significance behind Nebrija's optimistic exhortation that "la lengua es compañera del imperio." The question arises as to whether the consequential progression in this *translatio imperii*, if not *translatio studii*, is that a hopelessly degenerate form of Poetry ensues from a waning of political power. If Cervantes in fact meditated on the ever elusive concept of *translatio imperii*, with its equally important *translatio studii* as its twin, it does not seem to point in the direction of unbridled imperial expansion and cultural hegemony, but rather its sobering opposite: the reductionist map that implies the narrow enclosure of the political and cultural sphere that already points to a post-colonial Spain, with its inevitable diminishing and reigning in of its geo-political bounds and limits.⁴⁵ Pinching the bubble of imperialistic and aesthetic ideals in the Spain of his day, Cervantes innovatively uses humor, irony, and satire to ridicule and subvert utopian concepts such as the classical *translatio studii* or *imperii*, which by the seventeenth century were surely seen with the same nostalgia as Don Quixote's folly to live the fantasy of books of chivalry. Like the knight errant's constant attempt to keep the mischievous enchanters at bay, Mercury's mandate to prevent the poetasters' bad seed from founding a poetic empire and dominion on Parnassus—"Y nuevo imperio y mando en él fundasen" (III, 75)—may appear to have prevailed, and the arrogant ambitions of these latter-day giants seem to be temporarily quenched and dissolved.

The mock epic necessarily ends with the satirical parody of the Voyage to Parnassus genre, resulting in the presumptuous poetasters' defeat by the unrelenting artillery of literature itself, thus paving the way for the Apollonian "conquista" (VII, 20), the much-desired conquest of the terrain of Poetry. The final disbanding of the poetasters on Parnassus evokes

Journey" 247).

45 This reigning in of bounds is evoked by the medieval war cry in the poem, which is used in reference to Mercury's desire to call the Argensola brothers to fight on behalf of Apollo's squadrons on Parnassus: "que a venir les persuadiese/ al duro y fiero asalto, al cierra, cierra" (III, 167–68). Mercury's convocation of the Argensolas to do battle on Parnassus is imbued with irony, since he will soon thereafter refer to their "perezosa tiranía" (III, 199).

an astounding Ovidian metamorphosis: “Cayó su presunción soberbia y fiero, / derrumbándose del monte abajo cuantos / presumieron subir por la ladera. / La voz prolija de sus roncancantos / el mal suceso con rigor la vuelve / en interrotos y funestos llantos. / Tal hubo, que cayendo ... / y en llanto, a lo de Ovidio, se disuelve” (VII, 331–39).⁴⁶ The poetasters’ sudden dissolution into the Parnassian soil already adumbrates their pestilential regeneration well after the battle’s end. In this mock epic, however, any proclaimed victory is but a carefully crafted and ironic pretense that invites the reader to decipher its coded and emblematic language, which is intricately inlaid within the Janus-like framework of all complex satire. With all of the poetasters having been apparently defeated, Apollo offers the highest *encomium* to the victorious poets, purportedly those “poetísimos varones,” whose heroic efforts are now rewarded with the coveted prize of splendid pearls and the sweet fragrance of a rose: “Quedando alegre cada cual y ufano / con un puño de perlas y una rosa” (VIII, 124–25). Yet everything is not coming up roses on Parnassus, since in the context of Cervantes’ satirical parody of a Parnassian apotheosis, the reader questions whether the crowned poets may be not so much the “poetísimos varones,” but rather poetasters in subtle disguise. In this sense, Parnassus may be a dystopic and burlesque counter-space, a carnivalesque and inverted rendition of Madrid’s chaotic culture of degraded literary production, founded on the empire of poetics whose fertile fields sprout forth the poetry of the academies alongside that of the popular masses.⁴⁷ To this end, it is not surprising at all that Cervantes under-

46 While Gaos states that Cervantes alludes to Biblis (159), whose incessant crying converted her into a fountain, the defeat of the poetasters after attempting to scale the sacred mount must be taken in the context of Ovid’s account of the *Gigantomachia*, in which the Giants’ streaming blood mixed with the heat of Mother Earth, gave forth a new generation of violent people (*Metamorphoses* I, 154–62). Apollo’s letter to Cervantes contains an allusion to the *Gigantomachia*: “acabar los poetas que iban naciendo de la sangre de los malos que aquí murieron” (*Adjunta*, 186).

47 Lokos points to Parnassus as a degraded utopia that reflects Cervantes’ Madrid (84). Schmidt also suggests that Parnassus functions as a “counter-utopia” that reflects Madrid (30), and underscores that on the sacred mount, both good and bad poetry, personified by the allegorical figures of Poetry and Vainglory, can be ambivalently configured (43).

scores the ridiculously absurd though quite natural event in which the same “poetísimos varones,” upon their arrival at Parnassus, desperately and indecorously drink from the Castalian font, some with great thirst, while others indignantly wash unspeakable things in its sacred waters: “Unos no solamente se hartaron,/ sino que pies y manos y otras cosas/ algo más indecentes se lavaron” (III, 370–72).⁴⁸ Cervantes playfully inverts the expected portrayal of these poets as self-respecting disciples of Apollo by emphasizing the indecent exposure of their *partes pudendae*, wittily transforming their poetic *personae* from a public into a public image.⁴⁹ Halfway between the poetic sublime and the obscene, the *Viaje*'s satirical humor forges new paths in the terrain of carnivalesque comedy by dramatizing the topsy-turvy world in which the vile underbelly of an artificially imposed cultural and political hegemony is exposed and promoted as the prominently elite circle of poets who sit on their laurels on Parnassus.

In Cervantes' dysfunctional Parnassus, the formerly omnipotent center now becomes the marginalized periphery, the liminal space where all transgressions and degradations are allowed, and furthermore, where both “poetísimos varones” and barbarous poetasters show that they are made from the same poetic mass. Even after the victorious battle against the poetasters, Cervantes' mock epic cannot sustain the elysian ambiance for very long, for within a few steps of the ceremonious apotheosis of the “poetísimos varones,” the *locus amoenus* is transformed into a satirical *locus facetus*, and the crowned poets are now honored by having the unparalleled privilege of picking up Pegasus' droppings: “¡Nueva felicidad de los poetas!” (VIII, 160).⁵⁰ Much in line with the *Viaje*'s satirical vein,

48 This vulgar scene of the poets' uncouth drinking from the Castalian font (III, 373–78) is a parody of the Voyage to Parnassus genre, in which there is a symbolic drinking at the Hippocrene fountain, as Lokos notes (22).

49 This Parnassus is anything but a privileged country club for poets, as Close suggests: “Indeed, honorable reception on this seedy Parnassus, where...sublimity and vulgarity are grotesquely intertwined, is hardly an enviable accolade” (61). Riley notes the inclusion of transgressive topics or “tabúes” in the *Viaje* (499).

50 Lokos underscores the satire of the scatological images on Cervantes' Parnassus (69). Rivers comments on the “gratuitous grotesque play” of such scatological imagery (“Genres and Voices” 216).

Mercury explains that the sacred equine “excrementos” are a medicinal cure for foolish poets with weak brains and fainting spells: “Esto que se recoge es el tabaco, / que a los váguidos sirve de cabeza/ de algún poeta de cerebro flaco” (VIII, 166–68).⁵¹ Wrinkling his brow, Cervantes expresses his utmost disgust at such a scatological remedy, “ascos haciendo del remedio extraño” (VIII, 173), yet Apollo dispels any misunderstanding by revealing that the pampered Pegasus eats only amber and musk, and drinks only the morning dew, instrumental in keeping his digestive tract regular (VIII, 176–86).⁵² Cervantes, perplexed by this unusual Parnassian convention, wittily singles himself out as a poet who does not need such medicinal enhancements, as he defiantly tells Apollo: “tieso estoy de cerebro por ahora, / váguido alguno no me causa pena” (VIII, 188–89).⁵³ With a firm and lucid mind, Cervantes satirically mocks the weak-brained vacuousness of certain poets who, in the process of smoking Pegasus’ prized excrement, ironically become the much-feared and abhorred poetasters.

In the brief yet highly pertinent prose epilogue to the mock poem, the *Adjunta al Parnaso*, Cervantes-protagonist receives a letter from Apollo, sent to him by way of his dapper twenty-four-year-old with the pretentiously protruding promontory of a name, Pancracio de Roncesvalles, who acts as Phoebus’ latest “paraninfo” or poetic go-between, much as Cervantes had served in the same role at the *Viaje*’s beginning. In this

51 Márquez Villanueva notes Cervantes’ portrayal of Parnassus as a haven for foolish poets, “un espléndido universo de locos,” which is bolstered by the persistent mention of “váguidos” (*Trabajos y días* 223). Cervantes offers a burlesque parody of the classical poetic furor or *enthousiasmos* induced by the invocation of the Muses, since the foolish poets “váguidos” point to a version of poetic dementia. For the Platonic *enthousiasmos* as a prerequisite for the figure of the poet on Parnassus, see Vélez-Sainz 213.

52 Márquez Villanueva observes that in Pegasus’ Parnassian diet, “almidón” functions as a laxative and “algarrobas” as an astringent, which not only makes for a rather scatological discourse in the *Viaje*, but also offers a euphemistic reflection of the putrefaction of the court (“Eufemismos” 690–92).

53 Cervantes distinguishes himself from the weak poets by emphasizing that he does not have such “váguidos,” hence he has no need for Pegasus’ medicinal excrement (*Lokos* 22). Rivers sees an implicit connection between Pegasus’ digestive tract and the state of poets in seventeenth-century Spain (“Genres and Voices,” 218).

sense, the mock epic battle of the books on Parnassus' sacred slopes, which resulted in the apparent defeat of the poetasters, is flanked at both the beginning and end of the *Viaje* by the enigmatic figure of the go-between, which provocatively equates the transfer of Poetry from Parnassus to Madrid in terms that are markedly subversive on account of the licentious overtones implicit in the lexical choice of "paraninfo." In such a circuitous and mediated transfer of the poetic legacy between Parnassus and Madrid, Poetry seems to suffer an inevitable disintegration and debasement, so much so that in his epistle, Apollo reveals that after the epic battle against the poetasters, he has been left in a dizzy spell, leaving the god of Poetry in the unenviable quandary of writer's block:

No sé si del ruido de la batalla o del vapor que arrojó de sí la tierra empapada en la sangre de los contrarios, me han dado unos váguidos de cabeza que verdaderamente me tienen como tonto, y no acierto a escribir cosa que sea de gusto ni de provecho; así, si vuesa merced viere por allá que algunos poetas, aunque sean de los más famosos, escriben y componen impertinencias y cosas de poco fruto, no los culpe ni los tenga en menos...; que pues yo, que soy el padre y el inventor de la poesía, deliro y parezco mentecato, no es mucho que lo parezcan ellos. (*Adjunta* 186–87)⁵⁴

If only the god of poetry had resorted either to smoking or sniffing

54 Apollo's letter stems from the tradition of the familiar epistle, in which the latest news and gossip from court figured prominently, such as Fray Antonio de Guevara's *Epístolas familiares* (1539), in which he details his writer's block (II, 24). Cervantes inserts Apollo's letter within this epistolary tradition of "nuevas de corte," a source of continual delight for the god of Poetry: "En suma, estos fueron los privilegios, advertencias y ordenanzas que Apolo me envió y el señor Pancracio de Roncesvalles me trujo, con quien quedé en mucha amistad, y los dos quedamos de concierto de despachar un propio con la respuesta al señor Apolo, con las nuevas desta corte" (*Adjunta* 190–91). In the most familiar tone, typical of such epistles, Apollo promises to send more news to Cervantes: "De mano en mano, si se ofreciere ocasión de mensajero, iré enviando más privilegios y avisando de lo que en este monte pasare" (*Adjunta* 187). For a study of Pancracio as Cervantes' alter-ego, see Profeti (1059).

Pegasus' miraculous fecal remedy.⁵⁵ If Apollo himself has writer's block, being "el padre y el inventor de la poesía," what hope is there for any aspiring poet, who may lack access to such a panacea? Given the abundance of such poetic fertilizer on Parnassus' green pastures, the question may arise as to Apollo's true predicament, since his persistent vertigo may point either to the inefficacy of the fecal remedy or, more precisely, to the bogus nature of his ability to infuse poetic inspiration among mortal folk, even if they are the most famous poets, who must be excused for writing impertinent rubbish. With this pungent and piercing satire, Cervantes seems to debunk Western civilization's sacred cult to the god of Poetry, implying that the vacuous "váguidos" of foolish and weak-brained poets on Parnassus, with Apollo at the head, may not be any different from those equally empty-headed poetasters turned into pumpkins and whose seeds continue to sprout and spread in Spain.

From Parnassus to Madrid, poetasters continue to germinate, founding their vast and vacuous empire of poetics. By the *Viaje's* end, Spain has not been able to rid itself of the degenerate poetasters, for it remains fertile ground for those gourds that spring from the soil. Similarly, the blood spilled from the poetasters killed on Parnassus spontaneously regenerates into newly virulent ones, a miraculous metamorphosis through which Cervantes may well imply that culturally degraded Poetry is at best curtailed, but never wholly contained:

le hallamos [Apollo] muy ocupado a él y a las señoras Piérides, arando y sembrando de sal todo aquel término del campo donde se dio la batalla. Preguntéle para qué se hacía aquello, y respondióme que... de la sangre podrida de los malos poetas que en aquel sitio habían sido muertos comenzaban a nacer del tamaño de ratones otros poetillas rateros, que llevaban camino de henchir toda la tierra de aquella mala simiente; y que por esto se araba aquel lugar y se sembraba de

55 Rivers comments on Apollo's demythified stature: "this Apollo is a ridiculous figure belonging to a debunked Parnassian mythology" ("Genres and Voices" 211). For the demythified characterization of the gods in the poem, see Gustavo Correa (116); Gaos (32); Lokos (83); Romo Feito (152); and Rey Hazas and Sevilla Arroyo (xxiii).

sal, como si fuera casa de traidores. (*Adjunta* 184–85)⁵⁶

While Apollo and the Muses have been forced to plow and sow Parnassus with salt in order to prevent such verminous poetasters (“poetillas rateros”) from propagating their bad seed (“mala simiente”), one may ask if Cervantes, in his sophisticated satire, may ironically imply that Spain, with its culturally degraded poetic terrain, ought to be sown with salt in order to purge it of its piggishly fatuous poetasters: *Hispania delenda est?* If so, the salting of the poetic pork meat in Spain represents not the reinforcement but rather the undermining of the Spanish imperial hegemony in the Western Mediterranean. Within the fictional framework of a satirical countervoyage, it is not inadvertent that Cervantes may subtly allude to the tragic demise of Carthage both at the beginning of the poem (I, 134) and in its prose epilogue (*Adjunta* 184–85), invoking the imperialistic spectre of Cato the Elder’s notoriously relentless propaganda: *Carthago delenda est*. If at the *Viaje*’s opening Cervantes departs from the port at Cartagena, that Nova Carthago so evocative of the ancient city’s destruction by the legendary sowing of salt under Cato the Elder’s political campaign, by the poem’s end Cervantes returns to Spain, this time transported to its very center, Madrid, where he may contemplate a similar purging of the city’s myriad poetasters.⁵⁷ Yet for Cervantes, salt represents not the destructive wrath of a vengeful Roman general or the desperate measure of a dizzy-brained Greek god, but rather the very spice and wit of his humorous and burlesque satire, which as he states in the *Viaje*’s sonnet-prologue, is all that he can hope for in making the mock epic poem both salty in satire and salable in the market, a veritable bestseller: “Y dadme vos que este *Viaje* tenga/ de sal un panecillo por lo

56 In the burlesque “privilegios” that Apollo sends Cervantes, poets are compared to verminous creatures such as “sabandijas,” much like the “poetillas rateros” that regenerate on Parnassus: “el que tiene providencia de sustentar las sabandijas de la tierra y los gusarapos del agua, la tendrá de alimentar a un poeta, por sabandija que sea” (*Adjunta*, 190).

57 Rodríguez Marín noted that the destruction of a city by sowing salt not only has biblical precedents (Judges IX, 45), but also numerous references in sixteenth-century works, in which it is evoked as a punishment for treason (424).

menos,/ que yo os le marco por vendible, y basta.”⁵⁸ With his spicy and salty wit, Cervantes sows the fructiferous seeds of his refined and polished satire in the fertile terrain of paradoxical folly.

The *Viaje*, along with its appended prose piece, the *Adjunta al Parnaso*, may be seen as Cervantes’ fictional and inventive treatise on poetics, which he never formally wrote, nor did he ever express an interest in doing so.⁵⁹ Apollo’s familiar epistle in the *Adjunta* contains Cervantes’ highly fictionalized reflections on poetics, one which offers seemingly didactic “privilegios, ordenanzas y advertencias” that are not exempt from a liberating dose of fine satire (*Adjunta* 187).⁶⁰ The Delphic letter, which contains idiosyncratic poetic precepts against such things as nail-biting or the adulation of princes, also figures as a burlesque “carta de aprobación” of sorts, sent at the height of summer by none other than his brilliant and luminous lordship, “Apolo Lúcido” himself.⁶¹ Cervantes inserts

58 Romo Feito points to Cervantes’ allusion to salt as a call to comic entertainment (140). As Lokos notes, Cervantes displays the marvelous gift of the “salty idiom” of satire (68).

59 The *Adjunta* has been compared to Horace’s *Ars poetica*, especially with respect to its mild satire on the figure of the poet, as Finello notes (400). Close sees numerous similarities between Horace’s mild form of satire and Cervantes’ *Adjunta* (33).

60 Egido points out that letters from Apollo himself constituted a commonplace poetic exercise in the literary academies of Cervantes’ time (22). As Lokos details, the academies in Spain often included burlesque and fictional “prematías” that mocked literary convention (119). Cervantes’ “privilegios” in the *Adjunta* not only echo Quevedo’s “Premática del desengaño contra los poetas güeros, chirles y hebenes,” inserted in his *Buscón*, but also the “Ordenanzas mendicativas” in Part I of Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*, as Lokos notes (119–20). Critics usually cite Quevedo’s “Premáticas” in the *Buscón*: see Rivers (1993 114); Rey Hazas and Sevilla Arroyo (x); and Close, who points out that Cervantes’ “good-humoured” satire stands in stark contrast to Quevedo’s “sardonic hilarity” (35). Examples of ironic “privilegios” may be found in Fray Antonio de Guevara’s *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea* along with his *Arte de marear* (1539).

61 Apollo warns Cervantes against the searing heat of the dog-days of summer, the “caniculares,” making a burlesque reference to the time of year when he puts his spurs on to ride the canícula: “Del Parnaso a 22 de julio, el día que me calzo las espuelas para subirme sobre la Canícula, 1614” (*Adjunta*, 188). Not only does Apollo allude to the picaresque world of brothels, but he also shows off his brilliance of light as much as his literary talent, for his signature of “Apolo Lúcido” may just as well read “Apolo Lu-

Apollo's letter not in the preliminary matter of the *Viaje*, but rather as a seemingly secondary prose epilogue, at first sight a mere *Adjunta*, which proves to be precisely the opposite of a careless afterthought in order to remedy what certain critics have perceived as Cervantes' loosely fragmented and rushed narrative conclusion to the *Viaje*.⁶² Far from representing a formal and theoretically informed poetics, Cervantes' *Adjunta*, along with the more than three thousand verses that comprise the *Viaje*, challenge the vacuousness of the vast empire of poetics, poetry, and poets in seventeenth-century Spain.⁶³

Cervantes' *Viaje* constitutes much more than a gallery of stylized self-portraits, comprised of pseudo-autobiographical masks and reflections on his own literary production, a poetic testament of sorts, to which it has often been compared.⁶⁴ In his voyage to Parnassus, Cervantes creates a radically unconventional poetics of entertainment, infused with a satirical vein that gestures to its own self-reflexive and meta-literary dimension as an insightful appraisal of the literary trends and currents of his time. Rather than resorting to the precepts of a traditional treatise on poetics, perhaps comparable to a poetic manifesto *avant la lettre*, Cervantes incorporates into his *Viaje* a deeply personal study on his elaborately conceived poetic fiction, which stands in perfect consonance with his narrative and novelistic prose.⁶⁵ In this sense, it is not at all surprising to note in Cervantes' inventive poetics various reflections on his

cido." Cervantes' portrayal of Apollo's ruffianesque language is consonant with similar language used by Mercury.

62 Rey Hazas and Sevilla Arroyo do not concede that the *Viaje* has a solid conclusion, hence Cervantes' inclusion of the *Adjunta* (x). Riley believes that the mock poem lacks a solid narrative ending because Cervantes got tired of his work (504). Gitlitz characterizes the *Adjunta* as superfluous (218).

63 Finello points out that Cervantes does not theorize in the *Adjunta*, but rather reflects on his poetics and his own poetic career (407–09).

64 Rivers refers to Cervantes' catalogue of works in chapter IV of the *Viaje* as his "curriculum vitae" ("Genres and Voices," 212). Gaos concludes that it is nothing more than the "testamento poético de Cervantes" (37).

65 As Rivers suggests, while Cervantes reflected on the theoretical poetics of his day, his was an art that transcended such generic models ("Cervantes' Journey," 248). While Cervantes was well-versed in what Riley calls "los principios teórico-críticos" (496), the inventor of the modern novel transcends such theoretical restrictions.

prose fiction.⁶⁶ In the literary diptych that comprises the *Viaje* with its prose *Adjunta*, Cervantes fuses together the elements of versification with prosification, a dialectic that points to the creation of a hybrid fiction. The *Viaje*'s ludic mock epic cannot be devoid of a certain degree of sound verisimilitude properly mixed with witty satire and follies, those deliberately Cervantine "desatinos" with which it is riddled: "¿Cómo pueda agradar un desatino/ si no es que de propósito se hace,/ mostrándole el donaire su camino?/ Que entonces la mentira satisface/ cuando verdad parece" (VI, 58–61).⁶⁷ The artistic blend of the marvelous and the awe-inspiring together with the pedestrian makes the Cervantine art of entertainment a veritable hybrid that exemplifies the concept of *serio-ludere*, that imaginative and morosophic fusion of the serious with the playful.

Cervantes delights in creating a highly fantastic and protean mock epic that is founded on paradoxical folly, a modern concept in which irony, parody, and a good dose of burlesque and carnivalesque humor carries with it, paradoxically, the serious weight of transcendental reflections: Spain's vain and all-consuming desire for political power and imperialistic hegemony; the elusive and illusive temporality of poetic glory; and the absurdity of a world in which well-deserving fiction goes unnoticed while less inventive ones win accolades. The *Viaje* does not cease to entrance, enchant, and fascinate the reader, whose sad and melancholy penchant, "pecho melancólico y mohíno" (IV, 23), may be soothed by this

66 While it might not be accurate to qualify the *Viaje* as "la única novela picaresca de Cervantes," Rivers correctly highlights its novelistic discourse ("Cómo leer," 114–15). Romo Feito compares the narrative interventions by the narrator-protagonist in the *Viaje* to those made by the most enigmatic of Cervantine narrators, Cide Hamete Benengeli (147). Gao calls Cervantes' mock epic "un pequeño *Quijote* en verso" (32). Riley underscores the *Viaje*'s novelistic narrative structure (500).

67 Cervantes ponders his predilection for his own version of verisimilitude: "a las cosas que tienen de imposibles/ siempre mi pluma se ha mostrado esquiva. / Las que tienen vislumbre de posibles,/ de dulces, de suaves y de ciertas,/ explican mis borrones apacibles" (VI, 50–54). Riley comments on Cervantes' penchant to make things ring true (503). Cervantes fictionalizes what Pinciano theorizes in his poetics: "[...] quiero poner el fundamento a esta fábrica de la verisimilitud y digo que es tan necesaria, que adonde falta ella falta el ánima verisímil [...]" (V, 201).

strange inventor's art of suspense, marvel, and humor, as Mercury providentially beckons Cervantes at the beginning of his poetic voyage: "Pasa, raro inventor, pasa adelante/ con tu sutil disinio" (I, 223–24).⁶⁸ Cervantes indeed is the "raro inventor" whose fictional inventions, crafted with "sotil disinio," far surpass others, which makes one of his self-portraits in the *Viaje* ring quite true to the letter: "Yo soy aquel que en la invención excede/ a muchos" (IV, 228–29). Bravely and resolutely facing the adversarial currents of both the literary and socio-political establishments of his day, Cervantes' seemingly solitary voice of dissent resonates through the ages, especially because his iconoclastically inventive fiction forges new and previously uncharted paths in literary modernity.⁶⁹ Transcending the perilous strait between the Scylla and Charybdis of seventeenth-century culture and politics, so emblematic of the vertiginous vortex comprised of an infinite number of theoretical poetics, political treatises, and degraded poetry from the literary academies, Cervantes ingeniously avoids a literary shipwreck by creating his own hybrid fiction on the poetics of empire and the empire of poetics.

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68 Stagg notes that Cervantes' self-praise as an inventor echoes Carballo's poetic precept of "la invención," which is the first prerequisite for poetry (36).

69 Cervantes uses satire in order to express his sense of alienation within the literary climate of seventeenth-century Spain, as Lokos states: "His dissenting intellectual attitude was quite unorthodox and too modern for the period. His views left him stranded, a marginal, alienated figure in the literary atmosphere of the early seventeenth century. . . . Cervantes was a reticent dissident, speaking under the cover of satire" (90). García also notes how Cervantes uses humor and irony to voice his criticism of contemporary society while at the same time revealing his sense of marginalization (81).

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