

Inverting the Paradigm: Preciosa's Problematic Exemplarity

In the 1611 edition of the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, Sebastián de Covarrubias begins his extensive definition of *gitano* with an unabashed cultural and social denouncement: "Esta es una gente perdida y vagamunda, inquieta, engañadora, embustidora" (642). This negative sentiment is likewise documented in the numerous *pragmáticas* issued against the gypsy race, the first of which can be traced to the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella, whose *pragmática* of 1499 issued in Medina del Campo and Granada mandated an "expulsión de todos los egipcianos que andan vagando" (Sánchez 84).

As rulers of a country that sought to redefine itself through cultural unity and assimilation, Ferdinand and Isabella were clearly anxious to remove the threat of the gypsies' troublesome presence, which was characterized by a vagrant lifestyle and an indifference to social and cultural systems of authority. Their initial *pragmática* assigned the gypsies "un plazo de 60 días" to either conform to a regulated standard of living or clear out, and went so far as to offer them relocation fees (Sánchez 31).¹ Those who wished to remain on the Peninsula were ordered to secure respectable employment; "oficios conocidos o señores a quienes sirvan," and those found in violation of the *pragmática* were promised a whipping of "100 azotes" before they were eternally exiled (Sánchez 85). The *pragmática* of 1525 re-issued by the Holy Roman

Emperor Carlos V (a document which would be subsequently reiterated in 1528 and 1534), introduced additional penalties: those apprehended would be sentenced to the galleys, or declared the legal slaves of whoever caught them: "... los reincidentes en la vagancia podían ser enviados a galeras, o declarados esclavos de quienes los apresaren" (Domínguez-Ortiz 320). In an effort to curtail the widespread effects of their nomadic enterprise, Phillip II's *pragmática* of 1586 prohibited the conduct of any business transaction without a notary document verifying permanent residence and specifying the nature of business in which the individual specialized. Not unlike their Moorish and Jewish compatriots, the gypsies constituted a persecuted minority, whose mere presence inspired "una desconfianza innata en el resto del pueblo español" (Sánchez 31). The lengthy trail of *pragmáticas* indicate that legislative efforts to control the gypsies were ineffective, and despite the threat of increasingly severe penalties, they persisted as "un pueblo inasimilable, incómodo, cuya vida era un perpetuo desafío a todas las leyes y todas las convenciones" (Domínguez-Ortiz 319).

Given these considerations, Cervantes's pronouncement on the gypsies which opens the tale of "La Gitanilla" undoubtedly reflects the prejudicial spirit of the seventeenth century dominant class. His behavioral observations of the gypsy lifestyle depict a biological predisposition to thievery which he characterizes as incurable:

Parece que los gitanos y gitanas solamente nacieron para ser ladrones: nacen de padres ladrones, críanse con ladrones, estudian para ladrones, y finalmente, salen con ser ladrones corrientes y molientes a todo ruedo, y la ganancia del hurtar y el hurtar son en ellos

como accidentes inseparables, que no se quitan sino con la muerte. (73)

From this ignoble social and historical context Cervantes introduces Preciosa, the first of his exemplary heroines in the *Novelas ejemplares*. As the inaugural heroine of the collection, Preciosa's character functions in an instructive capacity beyond the exemplary context to which Cervantes alludes in his prologue. In addition to presenting an *exemplum* from which the reader may extract or interpret a lesson, Preciosa also orients the reader in the experience of reading socially marginalized characters—the outsiders and outcasts—who are depicted in the subsequent tales.

Preciosa's ability to reclaim her rightful social and cultural status encodes the text with specific criteria regarding what constitutes heroic or exemplary behavior. Cervantes constructs a thematic framework wherein he depicts the protagonist as a cultural or societal outsider, a process which begins with Preciosa and recurs in all of the *Novelas ejemplares*. This essay will examine the manner in which Cervantes negotiates the conveyance of the *exemplum* in his representation of Preciosa, whose character manages to both invert and embody selective aspects of the paradigm of seventeenth century female exemplarity. Cervantes manipulates the model to accommodate his exploration of notions of identity, freedom, and conformity, then orchestrates a conclusion which cancels out those notions by imposing a retrospective sense of unreality. Ultimately, Cervantes reaffirms the beliefs regarding Preciosa's inborn excellence which he manifests at the outset of the tale and in doing so, offers the reader a traditional *exemplum* which is predicated upon the improbable aspects of the gypsy maiden's behav-

ior.

Preciosa's character is a study in unlikely contradictions: an honest gypsy, bold and chaste, witty and discreet, a virtuous street dancer whose behavior is both uninhibited and above reproach. Evidently, for every negative gypsy-like trait which Preciosa possesses, a counter balance is struck with an opposing attribute that not only belies her problematic background, but renders her "... la más hermosa y discreta que pudiera hallarse, no entre los gitanos, sino entre cuantas hermosas y discretas pudiera pregonar la fama" (74). Even her brazen sense of what the narrator describes as *desenvoltura*, which as Weber has shown, comprises a variable though decidedly unladylike semantic range of interpretation, is carefully countered with a disclaimer: "... era algo desenvuelta; pero no de modo que descubriese algún género de deshonestidad; antes, conser aguda, era tan honesta, que en su presencia no osaba alguna gitana, vieja o moza, cantar cantares lascivos ni decir palabras no buenas" (74).²

Preciosa's *desenvoltura* is, in essence, a synonym for her "gypsiness," and although Cervantes may painstakingly distance her from the distasteful attributes of her fellow *gitanos*, it is through the representational scheme of the infamous gypsy identity and lifestyle that Preciosa is given the license to freely express and assert herself in the first half of the narrative. A code word for her gypsy identity, Preciosa's *desenvoltura* allows her to do what no self-respecting noble woman would do (such as public displays of street-dancing, or negotiating the terms of her financial transactions), while still upholding the ideal qualities of character found in a woman of superior station.

Nevertheless, Preciosa is a member of what history—and Cervantes—defines as an incorrigible minority, and since ultimately a

gypsy woman, regardless of her redemptive qualities, can be nothing less than an outsider, Cervantes is careful to allude to the possibility that she could be something more: “. . . y lo que es más, que la crianza tosca en que se criaba no descubría en ella sino ser nacida de mayores prendas que de gitana, porque era en extremo cortés y bien razonada” (74). These hints of her social superiority, which Preciosa herself describes as “un cierto espiritillo fantástico acá dentro, que a grandes cosas me lleva” (99), will later authenticate the resolution to a plot that would otherwise prove historically and socially implausible.

Ruth El Saffar describes the contrary assumptions upon which the plot is based as “two absurd dreams—that a nobleman should marry a gypsy, and that a gypsy should be more noble than the thieving band with which she was brought up” (96). Amezúa y Mayo, however, offers an opposing view based on documented evidence: “en aquellos tiempos tales casos no eran raros,” he submits, and further concludes that “el caso de don Juan de Cárcamo no hubo de ser el único” (20). Nevertheless, in order for this concept to make the leap from chaotic inversion (which these events, credible or otherwise, will generate) to a resolution worthy of exemplary literature, two things must happen: Preciosa’s intuition regarding her superiority must be proven, and in turn her ignoble gypsy heritage must be disproven, before she may re-assume her once and future station as a civilized member of society. Yet it is only in the masquerade of an outsider—a gypsy—that the exuberant, active heroine has a voice and an autonomous identity.

Cervantes appropriates the representational device of the gypsies as outsiders not for the purpose of depicting or criticizing the various strata of seventeenth century Spanish society, as he does, for instance, in the guise of the loquacious canines of “El coloquio de los perros,” but

rather as a means of privileging his heroine through her fictive status as a member of the societal fringe, allowing her *carte blanche* in terms of self-expression and definition.³ This device of depicting societal outsiders whose identity eventually disintegrates so that they may reintegrate themselves appears in various incarnations throughout the exemplary novels.

Another exemplary character who undergoes a transformational trajectory similar to that of Preciosa is Tomás Rodaja of "El licenciado vidriera." Both characters experience an uninhibited autonomy which is not only provisional, but mediated by unforeseen circumstance. Preciosa's abduction by her gypsy grandmother is a capricious twist of fate that alters the status of her character, just as Tomás's innocent consumption of the poisoned quince alters his status by rendering him delusional. Preciosa descends from the ranks of nobility to those of a persecuted minority, and Tomás plummets from celebrated Salamancan scholar to a pitiable wretch who fancies himself made of glass. The emphasis lies not in the unfortunate circumstances of abduction or poisoning, however, but in the liberating consequence that this alterity will effect upon their respective characters. It follows, then, that Preciosa's temporary gypsy identity is to her precisely what Tomás Rodaja's temporary madness is to him. The gypsy girl's *desenvoltura* is the licentiate's *locura*, since her "gypsy-ness" endows her with the same freedom that Tomás Rodaja's madness allows him. This freedom, however, is problematic and therefore must also be ephemeral. It represents both conflict and imbalance in the social order, and despite the topically amusing manner in which it is depicted, it nevertheless communicates on an almost subliminal level a presentiment of threat.

Preciosa's *desenvoltura*, regardless of her concomitant attributes of

virtue, challenges the sixteenth-century paradigm of ideal femininity, where silence was evidently a cherished characteristic, and active participation in the outside world was severely frowned upon. Documented examples espousing this viewpoint abound, particularly in the prescriptive literature for women. Juan Luis Vives's humanist-based *De Institutione feminae christianae*, translated in 1528 as *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana*, encourages women to speak as little as possible, regardless of their audience: "Habladora o parlera, no es bien que sea la doncella ni se precie en serlo, ni aun entre otras mujeres, cuanto más en serlo entre los hombres" (97). Intercalating both classical and biblical examples that are carefully chosen to highlight his moral directives, Vives admonishes his readers to honor their silence:

Así que vosotras, vírgenes y mujeres, imitad a esta gloriosa Virgen, que es de pocas palabras y de grande saber . . . Sófocles decía que la urdimbre de castidad y prudencia se trama muy bien con el discante de reposo y silencio. Cata, hija, que tú no eres abogada ni procuradora, ni andas en pleitos por ti ni por otros . . . y de esta manera defenderás muy mejor la causa y pleito de tu honestidad, la cual, delante de los buenos jueces, callando tendrá más justicia que favor hablando.
(100)

Fray Luis de León adopts a similar tone in his instructional treatise *La perfecta casada* (1583), wherein he repeatedly denounces the talkative woman as insupportable, so much so that it cancels out whatever other positive attributes she may possess: "Porque una mujer necia y parlera,

como los son de continuo las necias, por más bienes otros que tenga, es intolerable negocio" (122). The most pleasing and necessary feminine virtue, Fray Luis continues, is silence, even if, like Preciosa, a woman has a knowledgeable viewpoint to offer:

... es justo que se precien de callar todas, así aquellas a quien les conviene encubrir su poco saber, como aquellas que pueden sin verguenza descubrir lo que saben; porque en todas es, no sólo condición agradable, sino virtud debida, el silencio y el hablar poco. (123)

Preciosa's free-wheeling activity poses an additional danger because, like her unencumbered speech, it constitutes a literary inversion of the patriarchal order. Her street dancing, her double entendre-ridden palm reading, and her scurrying to windows of gambling houses when beckoned by gentlemen, represents a topsy-turvy vision of *el mundo al revés*, in that Cervantes coalesces this imagery with an insistent depiction of Preciosa's virtue, discretion, and the probability of her superior heritage.

Fray Luis, however, takes an altogether different view of women who wander freely about, stating "... es de lo propio de la mala mujer el vagar por las calles" (131), and asking the rhetorical question: "¿Qué ha de hacer fuera de su casa la que no tiene partes ningunas de las que piden las cosas que fuera dellas se tratan?" (130). Clearly, Fray Luis regards female interaction with the outside world as not only a corrosive influence, but a perilous intrusion upon a male-dominated realm in which a virtuous woman has no place. He exhorts his readers to devote their energies exclusively to sequestered domesticity, since

"las que en sus casas cerradas y ocupadas las mejoraran, andando fuera dellas las destruyen" (130). Vives likewise advises women to remain indoors. In a statement that directly opposes the favorable depiction of Preciosa's fame, he cautions against the danger of becoming the object of public familiarity and notoriety: "Debe la doncella estar retraída y no curarse mucho de salir a vistas, y sepa que es harto mala seña de su honra ser ella conocida de muchos y su nombre cantado por la ciudad . . ." (92). Yet this is precisely what happens to Preciosa. When she dances for the crowds in the streets of Madrid, she becomes an instant celebrity. The narrator recounts her debut with enthusiasm: "Allí sí que cobró aliento la fama de la gitana" (76), and adds that she became the topic of conversation so quickly that "a corrillos se hablaba de ella en toda la Corte" (78).

Based on these descriptions, Preciosa's behavior constitutes the antithesis of a virtuous woman. Her abundant discourse, her unencumbered freedom of movement, and her familiarity with the outside world both challenges and defies the standards of ideal feminine behavior set forth by the learned, patriarchal figures of Cervantes's time. Weber proposes that the aim of this inversion is a parodic response to the discourse of such humanist-authored texts, but parody alone does not fully account for the manner in which Cervantes negotiates a critical aspect of Preciosa's behavior, wherein he clearly manifests that Preciosa upholds, rather than challenges, the very principle which parody would target most effectively. This modification not only alters the established paradigm of Preciosa's inverted behavior, but renders it inconsistent, thus diminishing the impact of a fully-realized parodic response.

Preciosa upsets the paradigm yet again because she does conform,

and resolutely so, to the one crucial requisite of the “virtuous noblewoman” model that cannot be recovered if transgressed: the preservation of her virginity. Mindful of Preciosa’s representation within the context of exemplarity, Cervantes utilizes her unconventional expressiveness to clarify her very conventional adherence to this condition. While her other carefree attributes can tolerate a certain amount of transgression in that they are capable of being altered or amended, Preciosa’s “salvation” is, first and foremost, reliant upon her steadfast conformity to this principle. She demonstrates her awareness of the value of her virginity as an indispensable precondition for marriage in her often-quoted statement: “Una sola joya tengo, que la estimo en más que a la vida, que es la de mi entereza y virginidad” (99). Preciosa is equally heedful of the tragic consequences that await a woman who suffers the loss of her virtue. She equates the physical integrity of virginity with that of a rose in bloom that will wither and perish altogether if carelessly exposed to coarse man-handling: “Cortada la rosa del rosal, ¡con qué brevedad y facilidad se marchita! Éste la toca, aquél la huele, el otro la deshoja, y finalmente, entre las manos rústicas se deshace” (100).

This particular—and emphatic—aspect of Preciosa’s conformity to the principle that equates female virginity with purity and socio-economic worth is clearly an attribute which Cervantes viewed as imperative for the honorable outcome of both protagonists. In this singular yet indispensable exception, Preciosa’s beliefs coincide with those which belong to the prevalent authority system. Preciosa cannot, and must not express her *desenvoltura* through sexual promiscuity, and her compliance to this principle is an affirmation of her noble identity. Just as Preciosa’s immunity to the harsh effects of the weather alludes

to a superiority that is mysteriously innate, her devotion to the preservation of her chastity demonstrates that she is similarly immune to the corrupt influence of her surroundings.

Her gypsy identity, then is not entirely unrestrained; neither is she, as Weber describes her, truly "unbound" in the sense that she is "free from class, from family, and from fetishized notions of chastity" (73). These are, in fact, the missing pieces of the puzzle which distinguish Preciosa from her gypsy brethren, and she cannot be free from them and correspondingly uphold a positive standard of exemplarity. As she manifests in her monologue on the preservation of her virginity (99-100), Preciosa does not conceive of herself as free from the notions of chastity, and the narrator's explicit references to the mysterious essence of her superiority (that which renders her immune from the effect of her surroundings) is ultimately decoded as the intrinsic evidence of her noble heritage—her class and her family. The focus of the first half of the *novela*, however, highlights the depiction of Preciosa as an autonomous individual, whose only authority figure is her less-than-holy *abuela*.

Preciosa's relationship with her grandmother is problematized from several standpoints, perhaps the most salient being the very idea that Preciosa is not controlled by any one specific paternal symbol. There is a double threat inherent in the representation of a nubile heroine whose only parental influence is that of a "taimada abuela" who demonstrates overtly her willingness to exploit "los pocos años y la mucha hermosura de su nieta" (75). Additionally, there is a sense of obscurity surrounding the questionable authenticity of Preciosa's kinship to her grandmother, reinforced by the manner in which Preciosa addresses her. Clearly, Preciosa does not exhibit a very maidenly

posture of deferment to her *abuela's* authority. While negotiating the terms of her betrothal to Juan de Cárcamo, Preciosa disregards her grandmother's interjections, issuing such blunt admonitions as "Calle abuela" (102), and likewise "Por vida suya abuela, no digas más" (104). Preciosa openly defies not only the maternal figure which loosely governs her behavior, but the reigning ideology of the gypsy patriarchy as well. She denounces the tradition of female submission and the prevalent attitude of her gypsy culture which views women as marketable objects of exchange. Her soul is free, she asserts, and the law of her own volition is the only absolute she recognizes (120-21).

Chaos and conflict will inevitably ensue from such a reversal of order, and the confusion it creates is exemplified with the introduction of Juan de Cárcamo, a noble gentleman whose love for Preciosa is so great that he is willing to disregard her social status altogether and seek her hand in marriage. While Juan's humble proposal is wholly inconsistent with his social station, Preciosa's proud response is perhaps even more incongruous. She not only rejects his initial offer, thereby rejecting as well a serendipitous opportunity to ascend socially, but she also negotiates the provisional terms upon which she would eventually agree to marry him:

Si quisieredes ser mi esposo, yo lo seré vuestra; pero han de preceder muchas condiciones y averiguaciones primero. Primero tengo que saber si sois el que decís; luego, hallando esta verdad, habéis de dejar la casa de vuestros padres y la habeis de trocar con nuestros ranchos, y tomando el traje de gitano, habeis de cursar dos años en nuestras escuelas, en el cual tiempo me

satisfaré yo de vuestra condición, y vos de la mía. (100)

This scheme of inversion, operating on social as well as gender levels, is further emphasized when Preciosa's active negotiation is met with Juan's passive resignation, and he accepts the conditions of her counter proposal. Preciosa therefore, an example herself of a nearly complete reversal of the patriarchal order, will likewise inflict her sense of imbalance upon Juan, whose character embodies the very order which Preciosa defies. She initiates her noble suitor's descent into the underworld of the gypsies. As instructed, Juan abandons his former identity, assumes the gypsy appellation Andrés, and in the process, becomes a somewhat reluctant participant in a social masquerade involving class inversion. Ironically, Preciosa is also participating, unknowingly, in the self-same masquerade.

Furthermore, Andrés demonstrates that like Preciosa, his inherent nobility is evinced in his principled behavior. Although he agrees to live among the gypsies, he nevertheless cannot bring himself to commit the crimes and injustices that are endemic to the gypsy lifestyle. He secretly resolves to "seguir y conseguir su empresa sin entremeterse nada en sus costumbres," and counts on his stash of wealth to stave off and compensate "las cosas injustas que le mandasen" (124).

The particulars of this reversal, which is based upon mutual exchanges of social identity and gender-oriented behavior, resembles what Margaret Higonnet describes as "the intersexuality of forces that operate within the social structures of fiction" (xviii). The interplay and exchange of active and passive behavior between Preciosa and Andrés reflects both the initial imbalance (Cervantes's depiction of *el mundo al revés*) which informs the first half of the tale as well as its eventual

recovery once the patriarchal order is restored. Preciosa's role initially encompasses an active mode which, in the early modern narrative, is typically assigned to and associated with a male protagonist, whereas Andrés assumes the subordinate passivity which typically corresponds to the feminine.⁴

For example, Andrés nearly swoons upon hearing the love sonnet that the page composes in homage to Preciosa: ". . . que Andrés, en oyendo el soneto, mil celosas imaginaciones le sobresaltaron. No se desmayó, pero perdió la color . . ." (113). Earlier, Andrés experiences a similar assault on his senses when he encounters Preciosa unexpectedly: "cuando vio a Preciosa perdió la color y estuvo a punto de perder los sentidos . . ." (108). Preciosa, on the other hand, seems to enjoy the control she exercises over Andrés.⁵ She promptly dismisses his meek request that she no longer frequent Madrid with a spirited retort: "Eso no, señor galán . . . sepa que conmigo ha de andar siempre la libertad desenfadada" (101), and later chides him out of his jealous stupor after the discovery of the page's sonnet, whispering "¡Gentil ánimo para gitano!" (114); then continues to poke fun at the subordinate nature of his love-struck condition by singing an amusing chant that both reproaches his jealousy and encourages him to pursue her:

Cabecita, cabecita, / tente en ti, no te resbales / y
 apareja dos puntales / de la paciencia bendita / Solicita
 / la bonita / confiancita; / no te inclines / a pensamientos
 ruines; / verás cosas / que toquen milagrosas, / Dios
 delante / y San Cristóbal gigante. (114)

The assignment of active and passive roles, however, is neither a

fixed nor a permanent structure in the course of the narrative; rather, it represents the fluctuant state of the protagonists as their characters evolve toward self realization. As Higonnet further states:

Social forces are seen to have simultaneously shaping and disintegrating effects, at work both on their subjects and on their objects. The roles men and women play not only are complementary or capable of inversion but are doubled by individuals playing both at once. Women and men function as mutual signifiers and signifieds. (vxiii)

As the tale culminates, the “shaping and disintegrating effects” of social forces will generate a dramatic transformation upon Preciosa’s character. The discovery of her noble heritage will totally eradicate any trace whatsoever of her colorful *desenvoltura*, and Preciosa’s exuberant character will disintegrate into the passive noblewoman Costanza de Azevedo. The conversion of Preciosa’s character has not escaped critical notice. As Rodriguez-Luís remarks, “Tan pronto como se descubre su identidad, Preciosa deja casi por completo de hablar por sí misma” (137).⁶ For contemporary readers especially, Preciosa’s sudden silence and passivity seem to stretch the limits of her literary credibility—much more so, in fact, than her celebrated combination of chastity and *desenvoltura* that we had come to accept and even admire. However, this perplexing transformation is perhaps the most accurate representation of social mores in the entire tale, for it clearly illustrates the gender-encoded behavioral expectations that inform class distinction in seventeenth century Spanish society.

Once she is reunited with her parents, Preciosa wholly conforms to

the paradigm of prescribed behavior of female nobility. She abandons her spirited eloquence, and demonstrates a pronounced sense of obedience and resignation toward her parents when questioned about her feelings for Juan, as she admits to her mother "... con vergüenza y con los ojos en el suelo . . . que no tenía otra voluntad que aquella que ellos quisiesen" (154). Vigil's study of the conditions that regulated women's lives in Spain during this period states: "Una joven de clase media o alta . . . debía estar sometida a sus padres y seguir en todo momento sus dictados, con objeto de no dificultar su matrimonio" (89). Preciosa's transformation reflects an unwavering adherence to this standard, in which echoes of Vives and Fray Luis de León's views on silence and submission are also discernible.⁷

Furthermore, the silencing of Preciosa's character reaffirms the existence, as well as the foreseeable outcome, of the "sexualizing of the principle of activity" pattern posited by Carolyn Heilbrun, which predicts just such an end for all active women in literature:

The women in literature who try to act, or to exercise will, are by the books' denouements either prisoners or paralytics, literally or psychically. What tends to be considered aggressive and egocentric in a woman might as easily be considered a quest for liberty in a man. (62)

While it may seem extreme to conceive of Preciosa as either a prisoner or a paralytic in her "happily ever after," there nevertheless remains certain traces of incontestable evidence that indicate Preciosa's loss of her former freedom and autonomy. She all but disappears

completely from the final pages of the tale, and it is the narrator who appropriates her voice and mediates her responses once her nobility is revealed. To be sure, her dancing days are over, and as her transformation has already made clear, every aspect of her happy *desenvoltura* must be drastically subdued in order for her to conform to the noblewoman paradigm. In contrast to the carefree wandering and the spirited imagery of Preciosa whirling under a rainstorm of coins, the sedentary lifestyle that awaits Costanza de Azevedo is, in fact, nothing less than paralytic. Hutchinson's observations on "wandering women" in the Cervantine narrative further corroborate Heilbrun's views, and posit an explanation for why Preciosa's presence fades from the end of the tale:

Whereas male mobility very often has nothing to do with making or breaking potential marriage bonds, female mobility normally can't be understood without reference to love and marriage. Apart from a few remarkable cases of adultery where marriage itself is problematized, Cervantes's nubile female protagonists move about until their marriage or impending marriage converts them and their male counterparts into sedentary beings beyond novelistic interest. (103)

Contemporary feminist theory tells us that re-readings of early modern literature, by and large male authored texts, must attempt to uncover the gaps in order to interpret what is left unsaid, or glossed over, in narrative discourse (Heilbrun and Stimpson 62-63). In the case of the *Novelas ejemplares*, what can be uncovered from the abrupt halt

which invariably follows the resolution of the heroine's story is the clear-cut indication that marriage will marginalize her character into the vast beyond: "beyond novelistic interest." Marriage or the promise of marriage demystifies and neutralizes the challenge or threat that her sexual availability once presented.

The thematic recurrence of marriage as a means of resolution, redemption, or reward within the framework of Cervantes's tales has been duly recognized and examined (Piluso 155-58; Casaldueiro 11-17). A contemporary re-reading which focuses on the message of marriage and exemplarity must, therefore, avoid revisiting such familiar territory. "What is important about a fiction," Kolodny reminds us, "is not whether it ends in a death or marriage, but what the symbolic demands of that particular conventional ending imply about the values and beliefs of the world that engendered it" (5).

A consideration, or more appropriately, a reconsideration of the societal value system that governed Cervantes's world is clearly called for. Friedman has shown how crucial it is that we take into account the implied author when interpreting the dual message system inherent in narrative discourse: "The authorial presence in the text mediates language and meaning, social doctrine and rebellion" (75). He refers here not to the author of the text itself, but to the reading audience (as in Lázaro de Tormes's *Vuestra Merced*) toward whom the narrative is directed. Critical interpretation of message and meaning must allow for the anticipated reaction of this authorial presence. In the critical examination of Preciosa's dramatic character reversal, indeed, of the entire scheme of inversion which informs the plot of "La Gitanilla," it is imperative that we consider the reaction of the implied author to the message that Cervantes ultimately conveys. Under what conditions

would such a reversal of gender and societal roles, as well as a historically unrealistic portrait of a despised minority, be acceptable, entertaining, and more important, exemplary to Cervantes's reading audience?

The double inversion of Andrés and Preciosa, playing with identities both dangerous (in light of the *pragmáticas*) and fictitious, can only be fully realized through a noble marriage that will set right the *mundo al revés* by realigning and reaffirming the patriarchal order. The picaresque-like representation of the gypsy lifestyle which Cervantes depicts is given a decidedly benign spin that privileges fiction over reality. Friedman's assertion that the texts of picaresque antiheroines "allow for harmless insurgence without threatening social stability" (76) offers a valid explanation for what takes place in "La Gitanilla" as well. Preciosa's threatening behavior, as long as she remains chaste, is indeed nothing more than a harmless insurgence once her true identity is disclosed. Whatever threat to social stability she may have posed is fully insubstantiated by the revelation of her noble heritage and the subsequent silencing of her character.

Preciosa and her amiable band of gypsies are fictional representations; thus Cervantes's "willingness to give prominence to antisocial orders and points of view" (*El Saffar*, *Novel* 87) is contingent upon the "deshacer tuertos" principle of his most celebrated literary creation. The undoing of injustice, the wrongs or societal imbalances that must be set right, guide the predictable trajectory for Cervantes's outsiders. The antisocial order, be it gypsies, rapists and their victims, transvestite maidens, or unwed mothers, will be allocated only so much literary space and freedom before it is converted and integrated into the inflexible social code of seventeenth-century Spain.

Yet perhaps it is that decisive moment of transgression, what El Saffar calls “the border crossing” (“*Confessions*” 266), which holds the slippery *exemplum* that Cervantine critics have attempted to decode over the ages. Was Cervantes merely attempting to convey a message that would reaffirm the existing patriarchal order? Or, as El Saffar suggests, is it the act of transgression itself, the crossing of borders and boundaries, both physical and psychological, social and gender-determined, that must be reexamined? Juan de Cárcamo renounces his noble lifestyle and willfully transgresses social boundaries in the name of love, while Preciosa’s crossings, from the borders of nobility to the gypsy world and back again, are dictated by events with which her volition had nothing to do. Although their respective crossings may appear to be structurally balanced, they are fundamentally differentiated by gender-inscribed notions of characterization: the conferment of power and volition to the hero, and the corresponding lack of power and resources available to the heroine. Regardless, both Preciosa and Juan manage to find their way back to the path that their respective birthrights have forged. The successful realignment of their identities, however, is not necessarily the only message conveyed by these transgressions:

Whether the effort is successful or not, the act of transgression signals a view of the world based not on *essential, eternal* separations, but on the sense that all distinctions are at base arbitrary. Categories and distinctions develop out of the operations of desire and fear, but achieve the status of the absolute as a result of power. When the categories accepted as universal are

transgressed, their arbitrary nature is momentarily revealed. (El Saffar, "Confessions" 266)

The ever-fluctuating world that Preciosa and Juan inhabit is nothing if not a testimony to the arbitrary nature of categories and class distinctions. Preciosa is a gypsy girl whom the world reads as a virtuous noblewoman and who, like Don Quijote, becomes the authenticated embodiment of the fictional self that her intuition has projected. Juan de Cárcamo, masquerading as the gypsy Andrés Caballero, avenges an affront which challenges his nobility-ingrained set of convictions and commits a savage murder. His recovery from the enchantment of his gypsy impersonation to the reality of his social persona suggests a leap from the arbitrary territory of make-believe to the sobering reality of present-day consciousness:

. . . alzó la mano y le dio un bofetón tal, que le hizo volver de su embelesamiento y le hizo recordar que no era Andrés Caballero, sino don Juan caballero. Y arremetiendo al soldado con mucha presteza y más cólera, le arrancó su misma espada y se la envainó en el cuerpo, dando con él muerto en tierra. (145)

Even the secondary characters transgress the boundaries, revealing identities that correspond to be the flip side of what they appear to be. Doña Clara, the wife of *el señor teniente* and the recipient of Preciosa's ribald palm-reading, is clearly penniless despite her retinue of maidservants. She announces that she has not a single coin in her possession to pay for Preciosa's services: "No tenemos entre todas un cuarto" (91),

while her husband the lieutenant, affecting the proper degree of astonishment, rifles through his pocket only to admit that he too is equally strapped: “. . . y poniendo la mano en la faldriquera, hizo señal de querer darle algo, y habiéndola espulgado, y sacudido, y rascado muchas veces, al cabo sacó la mano vacía y dijo: ‘¡Por Dios, que no tengo blanca!’” (94). The lieutenant and his wife are also participating in the social masquerade; their straitened circumstances suggest that very little separates them from the gypsies who are there to entertain them.⁸

Ultimately, beneath the pastoral and picaresque conventions of masquerade and class inversion, Cervantes reduces that which separates Preciosa from doña Clara, and later that which separates Preciosa from doña Costanza de Acevedo, to the illusory nature of categories and social distinction. Like Don Quijote, Preciosa knows who she is; she possesses an intuitive faith in herself that will ultimately be substantiated by others. The same can be said for Juan de Cárcamo, whose social inversion, being voluntary, further demonstrates just how deceptive and inconsistent the categories of class distinction can be. By transgressing the boundaries so meticulously constructed and relentlessly observed in seventeenth century Spain, the struggle of the protagonists who are able to negotiate a successful return signals a Cervantine view of the world which embraces a unique dichotomy: the imaginary order, charged with possibilities, and the cultural order, embedded in absolutes.

Chosen as the first to open the collection of tales, Preciosa sets a telling precedent for the sorority of exemplary heroines who follow her. The trajectory of her character delineates the foremost “honesto fruto” that the reader may pluck from between the lines: a virtuous woman who remains so in the face of constant trials and tests is not only

exemplary, but worthy of nobility and a Christian marriage. She may transgress the boundaries, or even occupy the fringes of society, but a happy *desenlace* awaits her if she learns to manipulate her fate through an understanding of the value of silence and conformity. Further clarification of this message is presented in the characterization of Preciosa's antithetical rival Juana Carducha. The considerable dowry which she is able to offer Andrés (a requisite that Preciosa cannot, as a gypsy girl, fulfill) does not in itself render her worthy of marriage. Although Juana, like Preciosa, is depicted as "desenvuelta" (143), her actions demonstrate that she is devoid of virtue. Whereas Preciosa's attribute is balanced with grace, wit, and discretion, Juana's *desenvoltura* takes on an increasingly pejorative meaning as her characterization unfolds.

Juana's desire for Andrés is based on evil impulses; the narrator plainly attributes her infatuation to the most impure and transitory of emotions: corporeal lust.⁹ While watching Andrés perform in a dance with the other gypsies, Juana is easily overcome by sinister forces. The expression "la tomó el diablo" (143) implies not only possession but frailty of character. Clearly, Juana is incapable of resisting temptation. She hastily seeks out Andrés and, following a brief preamble regarding her economic qualifications, offers herself to him, never once alluding to love: "Hasme parecido bien: si me quieres por esposa, a ti está; respóndeme presto, y si eres discreto, quédate, y verás qué vida nos damos" (143). Her aggressive solicitation of Andrés, her promise of wealth, and her impatient marriage proposal stand in stark juxtaposition to the ideology and behavior that has governed the courtship of Andrés and Preciosa. The thwarted outcome of Juana's subsequent vengeful plot against Andrés holds a double message regarding exem-

plary models of behavior. Social status, particularly nobility, does not necessarily or invariably correspond to nobility of character. As Preciosa's antithetical double, Juana represents the inversion of virtue and discretion. She shows that she does not understand the value of silence or conformity: she transgresses the boundaries, violates social codes of honor and behavior, and is left dangling on the fringes of the narrative as a mere afterword. Consequently, Juana offers an *exemplum* which is predicated on the punitive outcome of her brazen behavior. She depicts the folly of desire when it is based on nothing more than an impulse for instant gratification, while Preciosa's stipulations and time conditions reveal her wise intention to cultivate a mutual desire that is based upon reason, respect, and "her refusal to be treated as an object" (El Saffar, *Novel* 95).

The critical readings of Preciosa's character have applauded her originality, her eloquent speech, and her unique combination of seemingly incompatible traits. Such notice, particularly in light of her comparison to the heroines who follow in the *Novelas ejemplares*, has led to the presumption that after creating Preciosa, Cervantes broke the mold. In fact, the opposite is true: Preciosa's pattern survives and resurfaces, not only in the *Novelas ejemplares* but in the *Persiles* as well. Recognizing the paradigm of what constitutes her exemplarity will bring to the forefront those heroines who have long stood in obscurity. Preciosa does push the boundaries as a representational paragon of virtue and excellence. Cervantes endows her with a greater amount of freedom than any of her other exemplary constituents. It is the provisional aspect of her freedom, however, that must be re-examined, as well as the manner in which Cervantes depicts the perilous combination of freedom and femininity.

The metamorphosis of Preciosa in the final pages of the narrative where she becomes uncharacteristically silent endorses a belief system as manifest as any of her explicit disquisitions on love and marriage. The unsettling effect of Preciosa's instantaneous transformation, her silence which replaces her eloquence, her deferment in place of her spirited willfulness, is lost in the crescendo of fortuitous events that close the tale. Ultimately, we are left to synthesize the incongruous identities of the vibrant Preciosa of before with the pallid Costanza of after.

The celebratory tone of the ending, which has been shown to be consistent with the structural conventions of romance, induces the reader to interpret as ideally resolved each and every conflictive aspect of the plot, from Juan's reunion with his estranged father to Juana's belated confession and subsequent pardon. Cervantes closes his *novela* with a vision of indelible bliss, then seals it with a blend of the disciplines to which he was irresistibly drawn: poetry and history. The tale is immortalized by the poets of Murcia, who "tomaron a cargo celebrar el extraño caso, juntamente con la sin igual belleza de la gitanilla" (157), and is likewise inscribed into history by the licentiate Pozo, in whose verses "durará la fama de la Preciosa mientras los siglos duraren" (158).

If we read Cervantes's tale as textual archaeologists, with a view to uncover the gaps, trace and codify patterns of silence and absence, and "pick the clever, intricate locks of language that secure the more subtle secrets of the narrative" (Heilbrun and Stimpson 62), we are inevitably confronted with the necessity of interpreting the disparate nature, as well as the finality, of Preciosa's silent characterization as a representational device in an exemplary—and therefore didactic—context. Whether

or not Cervantes intended to deliberately encode his *exemplum* with an endorsement of female silence and submission, the conclusion of “La Gitanilla” nevertheless equates the assimilation of these traits with conjugal happiness and a sense of balance and resolution.

Willingly, knowingly, Preciosa surrenders her marvelous *desenvoltura* in exchange for social and marital status, and in the process her gypsy identity is revealed to be a falsehood. This information alters, retrospectively, the perception of Preciosa’s initial freedom, as well as her former notions of autonomy. While justification for her virtuous conduct and her “*espiritillo fantástico*” is disclosed, the identity which allowed her to express her autonomy is disproven, infusing the depiction of Preciosa’s *desenvoltura* with a rationale that conjoins illusion and inauthenticity.

The fact that Cervantes disassociates Preciosa from the lively traits of her former self suggests that the concept of a virtuous noblewoman who is also *desenvuelta* is not only incongruous, but inconceivable. There is irony in the idea that Preciosa must forfeit those engaging yet problematic aspects of her identity which emphasized her positive notions of selfhood before she may embody what is clearly intended as a fully-realized model of female exemplarity. It is not only the significance, but the minimization of that loss, rendered almost subliminal by the crescendo of resolution, which looms between the lines: an exemplary subtext which imparts as requisite the necessity of sacrificing individual freedom in exchange for exemplary femininity.

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NOTES

¹ Sánchez describes the expediency with which Ferdinand and Isabel issue the document against the gypsies as “casi inmediatamente después de su instalación en el país” (31), and adds that the *pragmática* of 1499 stipulates “los reparos para su colocación,” although it appears in the document “sin hacer en ello mayor énfasis” (31). This leads Sánchez to conclude that the gypsies were “objeto de una discriminación evidente” (31). Amezúa y Mayo presents a thorough summary of documented discrimination against the gypsies (5-15).

² Weber presents a reading of the conflictive discourses operating within the text, “one irreverent and parodic, the other reverential and exemplary” (60) as a reflection of Cervantes’s ambivalent view of humanist-authored female conduct books.

³ In terms of literary development, Weber rightly concludes that Preciosa’s character “has inspired the most fervent sort of encomium” (60). She has been consistently hailed as the perfect Cervantine heroine: Avalle-Arce calls her “la más cautivadora y lograda de sus creaciones femeninas” (28); Amezúa y Mayo concurs that she is “la figura más perfecta, lograda, y cautivadora de todas las suyas femeninas” (14); Casaldueiro sees in Preciosa a synthesis of the qualities delineated in Fray Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* as well as the incarnation of “el idea moral de lo femenino en la Contrarreforma” (51); and Forcione calls her “one of Cervantes’s most literary characters,” in that she encompasses a myriad of classical and mythical female sources which “surround her and mysteriously become her” (115).

⁴ An overall synopsis of feminist theories on gender-encoded behavior is available in Heilbrun and Stimpson 61-73. Heilbrun has labeled this pattern

“the sexualizing of the principle of activity, both exterior and interior, physical and mental” (62). She views this process as fundamentally responsible for the assignment of behavioral paradigms to a specific gender: “Literature has tended to masculinize most activity, particularly worldly activity, even as it has recorded it” (62).

⁵ This reversal is also suggestive of the courtly love paradigm; Preciosa could certainly be conceived as *la belle dame sans merci*, while Andrés solemnly pledges his life for the honor of serving her.

⁶ Rodríguez-Luis attributes Preciosa’s transformation to social forces as well, suggesting that her voice was imperative to her gypsy identity, but unnecessary to her now as a noblewoman: “Preciosa desaparece ahora para ser sustituida por doña Costanza de Acevedo, la cual no necesita una voz propia, como si le ocurría a la gitanilla, cuyo escenario era el mundo real” (138). Conversely, the “mundo real” of the gypsies, as depicted by Cervantes, has been shown in the *pragmáticas* to be anything but, while the interior world which the now-silent Preciosa inhabits is a much more verosimil representation of the social reality that governed women’s lives during that period.

⁷ Like Preciosa, the Corregidor also adheres instantly to the prescribed behavior which corresponds to his particular role as paternal overseer, now responsible for securing a prosperous and appropriate marriage for his daughter. His fatherly admonition “Calla, hija Preciosa . . . que yo, como tu padre, tomo a cargo el ponerte en estado que no desdiga de quién eres” (152), recalls the tone and intent of Vives’s document cited earlier (“Cata, hija . . .”).

⁸ A discussion of the parallel of *abundancia* and *esterilidad* in the houses of Don Francisco de Cárcamo and the *teniente* is presented in Horst 87-127.

⁹ The overtones of Juana’s “carnality” have not escaped critical notice. She

has been identified as a "mujer lasciva" (Casalduero 48), her desires have been described as "malos" and "impuros" (Piluso 125), and her actions as indicative of her "sensuality and covetousness" (Horst 115).

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