

*Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda:
¿Historia occidental?*

The profound influence of classical tradition — as recovered, appropriated and re-invented by authors of the Renaissance — upon texts produced in relation to the initial phases of the encounter, conquest and colonization of America has been well documented. Beginning with the journals of Columbus, in which the *locus amoenus* of classical antiquity appeared within an actual historical context — that of the recently encountered Caribbean islands — the presence of a literary and/or historical subtext providing the interpretive and, consequently, structural basis for this and subsequent works has been clearly demonstrated. At the same time, studies such as those undertaken by María Rosa Lida de Malkiel and Stephen Gilman have pointed out the presence of the “chivalric novel” (a popular literary genre of the sixteenth century) as an underlying text in such early chronicles as Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España*, while the presence of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* has been illustrated in such “historical-epics” of the Conquest as the *Araucana* by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga.¹ More recently, Roberto González Echeverría has been so bold as to suggest that this phenomenon is peculiar to Latin America as it is rooted in the confluence of literary works and historical documents brought about by the encounter between the “Old World” and the “New”. In this sense, the “discovery” of America initiated a syncretic process that eventually lead to the

creation of a body of literary works, each possessing a set of characteristics that distinguish them from their European progenitors.

Surprisingly, far less has been said about the prolonged effect that contact with the "New World" had upon the established literary canons of contemporary Europe, particularly those of the Spanish Golden Age. In this article, I will suggest but one possible approach to the study of such a phenomenon while limiting myself to the analysis and comparison of two texts that illustrate one type of influence that the reality of America had upon authors of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain. The texts to be considered are the initial chapters of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's last novel, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, historia septentrional* (1617) and a "novelistic interlude" found in the *Mexicana*, a little known epic-poem dedicated to the heroism of Hernán Cortés composed by Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega and published in 1594.²

The basis of my argument hinges upon several important ideas that I will develop throughout this brief monograph: (1) That Cervantes cultivated a persistent interest in the New World and actively pursued the notion of traveling to America; (2) that Cervantes, as recorded in his *Viaje al Parnaso*, was not only familiar with, but admired the work of Lobo Lasso de la Vega; and (3) that the thematic and structural similarity that is to be found upon comparing the segments of the two works in question.

Upon careful observation, two distinct phases appear in which a textual symbiosis occurred between the literature produced "on-sight" in relation with the encounter and conquest of America (itself based upon classical models), and the ensuing works of the same nature created in Spain.³ Initially, the "discovery" of marvelous isles inhabited by noble yet innocent savages served to confirm not only the quasi-

scientific theories of such ancient scholars as Pliny and Aristotle, but at the same time provided the tangible, historical basis for the resurgence of what was until then considered fantastic (thus inverisimilar) literature — inspired mainly through the re-elaboration of mythological and “historical” works of the Greco-Roman tradition. One reference to such literature is expressed in the “Prólogo al lector” included in the *Novelas ejemplares* in which Cervantes invokes the *Persiles* “que atreve a competir con Heliodoro, si ya por atrevido no sale con las manos en la cabeza.” The reason that the author of the *Persiles* could compete with the work of such a venerated author of the classical tradition (whose texts were considered verisimilar at the time) and believe himself to be superior is, as I shall demonstrate, in part due to the fact that Cervantes had access to and exploited an array of creative possibilities as incorporated in the literature produced as a result of the discovery of America.

Paradoxically, then, with the “discovery” of America, what once existed as an *ou-topos* (i.e. a nonexistent place) revealed itself as a reality within which this literature could find a world of possibilities — an *eu-topos* (the best of worlds). In this context, the mermaids, cyclopes, cannibals and myriad other creatures that were until 1492 relegated to the time and space of Homer’s epic and Aristotle’s “torrid zone,” did indeed exist. Once the inhabitants of a long lost continent preserved through Western literary tradition, they were quite literally re-discovered (or re-invented) by early explorer-chroniclers such as Columbus, Pigafetta and Vespucci. Such a projection of Western tradition as applied to the interpretation of a foreign reality produced a reflection whose rays were thrown back upon the conquering civilization providing, in turn, an until then untapped source for Western artistic creation. This reflection is most clearly demonstrated by the influence of literary

works dealing with aspects of the discovery and conquest of the New World — composed by Peninsular, Creole and Mestizo authors — upon the works of literary figures of the Golden Age such as Lope de Vega and Miguel de Cervantes. During this third phase of assimilation, the reality of the New World and its marvelous inhabitants, along with the inevitable heroic encounters between Europeans and Indians, provided the material for literary creation of this nature. Thus, the influence of America, although initially limited to chronicles and epic poems, gradually worked itself into other genres, providing the Western imagination with an encyclopedia of creative possibilities. In this reflection, the initial impressions of the Spaniards as recorded in texts such as that by Ercilla previously mentioned, served as models for authors in contemporary Spain, who incorporated their marvelous contents into the prevailing canons of the age, or forged new ones, as in the case of Cervantes.

As evidenced by the references to America in a number of Cervantes' works, his fascination with "... las Indias, refugio y amparo de los desesperados de España, iglesia de los alzados, salvoconducto de los homicidas, palo y cubierta de los jugadores a quien llaman ciertos los peritos en el arte, añagaza general de mujeres libres, engaño común de muchos y remedio particular de pocos" (*Novelas*, 301), is clearly demonstrated. On the historical level, the fact that Cervantes seriously aspired to emigrate to the New World is apparent in a petition directed to Philip II in which he manifests this ambition:

Pide y suplica humildemente cuanto puede a V.M. sea servido de hacerle merced de un oficio en las Indias de los tres o cuatro que al presente están vacos [sic]... que con qualquier de estos

oficios que V.M. le haga merced la recibirá; porque es hombre hábil y suficiente y benemérito para que V.M. le haga merced; porque su deseo es continuar siempre en el servicio y acabar su vida, como lo han hecho sus antepasados que en ello recibirá muy gran bien y merced. (cited in Carrilla, 12)

The sources for Cervantes' knowledge of the New World, as expressed in various literary works, most assuredly were those chronicles written by official Spanish historians such as Francisco López de Gómara as well as other, less authoritative texts, such as Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales*, whose first book was published in 1609. Significantly, in their introduction to the *Persiles*, Rodolfo Schevill and Adolfo Bonilla argue that the work of El Inca Garcilaso, a mestizo of royal Spanish and Incan ancestry, constitutes a definitive thematic source for Cervantes' final novel. They point out that:

Rasgos hay en los dos primeros libros, como luego veremos, para los cuales tuvo en cuenta Cervantes verosímilmente las costumbres de los indígenas de América. El historiador a quien más recuerda es el inca Garcilaso de la Vega, que publicó, en vida de Cervantes, la Primera Parte de los *Comentarios Reales* que tratan de el origen de los Incas, Reyes que fueron del Perú, de su idololatría, leyes y gobierno en paz y en guerra, etc. (IX)

Nevertheless, more recent studies, such as that of Juan Bautista Avall-
Arce, have tended to reject *Los comentarios reales* as a source of certain aspects of the *Persiles*, arguing that other, earlier texts contain the same

information (in the form of references to Amerindian culture) as that provided by the Inca Garcilaso.⁴ I do not believe, however, that the possibility of America as an influential factor in the first part of Cervantes' novel should be completely dismissed until another text — itself an indirect product of the conquest — which shares many essential characteristics with this part of the *Persiles* is brought to light. As I shall to demonstrate, the "novelistic interlude" contained in the *Mexicana* by Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, presents a series of features that anticipate certain fundamental characteristics of the beginning of Cervantes' novel both in content, structure and theme.

To be sure, in this type of comparative study, in which the influence of one text has purportedly acted upon another, it is essential to demonstrate that the latter author (Cervantes) was acquainted with the work of the former (Lasso de la Vega). Fortunately, in this case such a familiarity is easily confirmed. In his *Viaje al Parnaso*, Cervantes not only mentions Lobo Lasso within the body of the work itself, but honors the poet by placing him in a heavenly carriage occupied by other literary dignities:

Passan volando la empinada sierra,
 las nuves tocan, llegan casi al cielo,
 y alegres pisan la famosa tierra.
 Con este mismo honroso y grave zelo,
 Bartolomé de Mola y Gabriel Laso
 llegaron a tocar del monte el suelo.
 (*Viaje* 81:14-18)

It must be pointed out, however, that Lobo Lasso's literary endeav-

ors were quite varied, as he composed not only epic-poetry but lyric verse, drama and panegyric treatises. His first recorded work is the *Primera parte del Romancero y tragedias* (Alcalá, 1587), followed by the *Primera parte de Cortés valeroso y Mexicana* (Madrid, 1588), the work that provides the basis for his *Mexicana* (Madrid, 1594). These works were followed by a book of lyric poetry, the *Manojuelo de romances nuevos* (Barcelona, 1601, segunda parte Zaragoza, 1603) and the *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones: Don Jaime, rey de Aragón; Don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle, y Don Alvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (Zaragoza, 1601). Unfortunately, his last work, the *Segunda parte del Manojuelo de Romances nuevos y otras obras* (Zaragoza, 1603) has been lost. Although Lobo Lasso is the author of so varied an opus, the figure of Cortés stands out as that which receives most of the poet's attention for, as is evident from the author's bibliography, the Spanish captain provides the subject for half of Lasso's surviving works.

The *Mexicana* is a little known work that I believe to be representative of one type of literature that — after having found its inspiration in texts directly related to the conquest of America — influenced literary production of Spain's Golden Age. Obviously, the immediate Spanish prototype for this work is Alonso de Ercilla's *Araucana*, first published in 1561. As has been pointed out, it was originally the influence of such epic poems of the Italian Renaissance such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516) that provided the structural and thematic basis for this and other similar works. Ercilla, however, is the first to utilize this traditional form of "fantastic literature" as a vehicle to commemorate the reality of such a marvelous encounter as that between the Spaniards and the Araucanians. The *Araucana's* immediate acceptance in the literary community of sixteenth-century Spain is attested to by its numerous

editions, additions and imitations. It is by no means insignificant then, that "don Alonso de Ercilla" himself provided the *aprobación* of Lasso's work, thus, it could be argued, incorporating it into a nascent genre that is best described as epic-poetry of the Renaissance tradition elaborated upon a historical model. Ercilla writes of the *Mexicana*:

Yo he visto este libro, intitulado
Mexicana, de Gabriel Lasso de la Vega,
 que se le ha dado otra vez licencia para
 imprimir, y asimismo lo añadido, y
 digo que se le puede dar mejor ahora,
 por haberle mejorado con más cuidado y
 curiosidad. (Lobo Lasso 3)

Although the content of this approbation does not directly link the *Mexicana* with Ercilla's epic, it does suggest that as an author of a similar work and the narrator of Spain's bloody contest with the Araucanians was the most appropriate candidate to evaluate Lasso's composition.

Lobo Lasso's poem, dedicated to the prowess of Fernando Cortés and the glorification of Imperial Spain is, to a certain extent, an expression of the prevailing Renaissance ideology in the sense that it addresses the achievements of an individual and his nation. The metric form of the poem (the *octava real*) is the standard meter of the Renaissance epic and consequently that preferred by such poets as Ariosto and Ercilla. Its content is not that based upon mythical heroes of ancient history and their adventures in non-existent places. On the contrary, the protagonist of the *Mexicana* is a recently deceased Spanish captain who conquered what only initially (due to lack of a geographical

referent) was interpreted to be an enchanted world.

In his *Manojuelo de romances*, Lobo Lasso (not surprisingly) derides those poets who, still engaged by an aesthetic based upon Greco-Roman models, sing praises to such ancient heroes as Scipio, Alexander and Hannibal instead of perpetuating the deeds of contemporary Spaniards:

Vuestro negocio haréis,
señores, en celebrarlos [españoles]
pues versos con ellos
quedarán perpetuados;
porque llegando a tratar
ahora de los Romanos,
lo que dellos más se estima
son los melones y gatos. (*Manojuelo* XVII)

Before entering into a detailed analysis of the two works in question, I believe that a cursory description of the genesis and characteristics of Lobo Lasso's work to be appropriate. The *Mexicana*, published in Madrid in 1594, constitutes the revision of a previous text entitled *Cortés Valeroso* and published in 1588. In his prologue to the former, Jerónimo Ramírez reminds the reader of the almost complete novelty of this version and, at the same time, presents a theory as to the recent inclusion of fantastic, or novelistic, interludes:

La impresión de ahora es tan diferente de la pasada, que puede pasar por nueva, así en la disposición, como en lo que lleva añadido. Van en convenientes lugares algunas ficciones

ingeniosas, sin las cuales pierden el ser y gusto las obras de poesía. No quiso antes usar de ellas el autor, por parecerle que de esta manera guardaría mejor el rigor que pide la historia: despues acá, considerando de la importancia que es (mayormente a los que escriben metro) juntar lo dulce con lo provechoso, quiso tomar la licencia que se concede al poeta para fingir.... (XXVII)

It is a work whose theme was designated by both a personal interest on the part of the author and a request made by Don Martín Cortés, marqués del Valle, son of the Spanish conquistador who had died the year of Cervantes' birth. In the prologue to the Cortés Valeroso, Lasso de la Vega explains why he set out to write such a poem:

El ser tan aficionado (y con justa razón) a los hechos y cosas de Fernando Cortés, y el entender ay en el mundo tantos de mi opinión con quien defender mi causa, ha sido la principal; justamente con la carta de don Martín Cortés, marqués del Valle, su hijo, de emprender cosa que si destas calidades careciera, se me pudiera atribuir sin disculpa a temeridad.... (Lasso XVI)

The historical sources for this epic surely were those included in the *Hispania Victrix* of Francisco López de Gómara, official biographer of Hernán Cortés. Lobo Lasso alludes to this in his *Cortés Valeroso*:

Que ya Gómara, y otros, nos han dado
entera relación de sus pisadas;

y con estilo claro y levantado
dellos han sido, y son manifestadas;
a los cuales remito los curiosos
de saber más que aquestas cudiciosos. (Lasso XX)

However, it is precisely in the deviation from the "official story" of Gómara incorporated in one of the two "novelistic interludes" contained within the *Mexicana* that provides the source of comparison between Lobo Lasso's poem and the *Persiles* of Cervantes.

Canto XIV of the *Mexicana* begins with an abbreviated introduction in the form of an epigraph that resumes the narration that is to follow:

Yendo Aguilar en seguimiento de un indio, le coge la noche en un espeso monte, por el cual discurriendo entra en una cueva de unos salteadores donde, con mucho riesgo de su vida, libra por la espada a Clandina de sus manos, a la cual tenían para sacrificar, habiendo valerosamente peleado y muerto muchos de ellos. (Lasso 106)

In the paragraphs that follow, I will resume the "novelistic interlude" contained in Lobo Lasso's poem, emphasizing those characteristics that serve to demonstrate its relationship with Cervantes' novel with the intention that upon presenting a similar outline of the initial chapters of the *Persiles*, the affinities become readily apparent. Because not only certain descriptive elements, but the structure and theme of the interlude as a whole are to be included in this comparative analysis, and owing to the fact that the *Mexicana* has been relegated to occupy bibliographies of the era (and is thus not readily known to contempo-

rary readers of Spanish literature of the period), a more detailed outline will be provided.

Canto XIV of the *Mexicana* begins, as do many poems of this nature, with an exhortation directed at the reader's sense of morality — in this case, a meditation upon the characteristics of true friendship between men. It is tied to the rest of the narration as the pretext for Aguilar's adventure is based upon the loss of his dear friend, Luzón, fatally wounded by unfriendly natives. This personal affront in turn, serves to introduce the Indian, described as an "alentado bárbaro," while at the same time presenting the theme of revenge as one of those to be encountered in this interlude.

After having rested during his search for Luzón, Aguilar is awakened from a terrifying dream in which he is startled by the apparition of a ferocious lion. Suddenly he notes "una pequeña luz no lejos vido / en un peñasco cóncavo y hundido" (107:10). This light emanates from a "seno cavernoso, prolongado, / que su cóncava entrada a austro inclina, / donde vio doce mozos desarmados, / en poner unas mesas ocupados" (107:11).⁵ Inside the cave he discerns "grandes fuegos encendidos, / do cantidad de carne humana asaban" (107:12) while its entrance is covered by an "estrecha puerta [que] cerraba, con rollizas palancas rodeado" (107:13). The residents of this subterranean domain:

De agudas flechas y arcos encorvados
venían y de espadas, proveidos,
de preseas los brazos ocupados,
con tres jóvenes tristes, afligidos,
que traían llorosos, maniatados,
dando sollozos y ásperos gemidos:

a quien soltando el peso desataron
y las tiernas cabezas arrancaron. (107:14)

The unfortunate victims are quickly tied to "asadores, / con los desechos cuerpos juntamente" (107:15) while thirty more enter the cavern "con nuevo orgullo y presa nueva" also to be dedicated "al vano dios de hurtos que adoraban / y gran gente a su honor sacrificaban" (107:16). Finally, with "una graciosa bárbara [entran] otros veinte, / con joyas de valor que habían robado... / entre ellos repartieron lo hurtado, / concordes en que fuese la doncella / ofrecida a su dios, por ser tan bella" (107: 17). After indulging in an abundant feast centered around a huge, elaborately prepared and inverisimil table, the majority of the Indians fall asleep "quedándose sobremesa desarmados, / en vino y carne humana sepultados" (107:18). Meanwhile, the apparent leader of this ruthless band is introduced and his talents are described in detail:

Mas un dispuesto bárbaro inhumano,
gran adivino entre ellos y agorero
(seg'n le celebraba el pueblo vano),
estimado por 'nico estrellero,
que se llamaba el sabio Millolano,
en juventud certísimo flechero,
hábil en el usado sacrificio,
el cual de sacerdote hacía el oficio. (108:20)

He has been called to perform the sacrificial rite upon "la tristísima doncella / que, sollozando, al punto fue traída / con lamentable y trágica querella" (108:21). Without a moment's delay:

De pedernal sacó un cuchillo agudo
 el arrogado bárbaro sangriento,
 de la víctima hace ofrecimiento
 a una imagen de oro, simulada,
 que había en la cueva, en sangre rociada. (108:22)

Before he can commit the lethal blow, his victim persuades the priest that "el apartado mozo prisionero / que con ella los veinte habían cogido / fuese, antes de su muerte, allí traído" (108:24). After being brought before the victim, the youth invokes the cruelty of the gods and promptly faints. Nevertheless, "por algunos bárbaros de aquellos, / foragidos, crueles, desgarrados, / fue del indio la joven desasida / y a las aras por víctima traída" (109:33).

To their surprise, the sacrificial rite is abruptly interrupted "cuando un ruido y voz extraña oyeron / que por la boca de la cueva entraba / y a todos su rigor amenazaba" (109:34). The voice is that of "Aguilar, que condolido, / de la joven a muerte condenada, / de detrás del peñasco había salido / ... quiso en un riesgo tal poner la vida / por que fuese la dama socorrida" (109:35). After having removed the sorcerer Millolano's arm with one blow, a terrible battle ensues in which the indigenous mob, described as: "la mísera canalla discuidada, / que repleta por tierra está durmiendo, / salta fuera de sí desacordada, / a las ausentes armas acudiendo" (109:38). The violent band "aferra el bastón grueso, nudoso, / quien de la ajena espada se aprovecha / quien de tizón rollizo más humoso, / quien del arco pintado y larga flecha" (109:39). As the battle ensues, Hipandro, along with twelve other captured Indians, happy to fight against "la dura opresión y tiranía" of the barbarous cannibals, help Aguilar to defeat the vicious throng.

In an important subtext included within the narration of the events, an angry "bárbaro" spies "una bella joven afligida / (que desde lejos el lidiar miraba), / con indignado rostro se acercaba" (110:47). He abducts the girl and takes her to "un cóncavo peñasco socovado, / apartado del trance peligroso, / do la metió..." (110:48). As it turns out, the vicious "bárbaro" has used this same cave to hide his treasure and consequently promises to return "a ofrecer, aunque es pobreza, / de aquel hombre atrevido [(Aguilar)] la cabeza" (110:49). Upon returning to the battle, her captor is fatally wounded by "una flecha veloz, que le rompía / el pecho, y por el suelo basqueando / rueda el gallardo mozo enamorado, / de la enemiga punta atrevesado" (111:50). Before expiring, he manages to return to the cave where his captive awaits. There, after a pathetic monologue, he dies. Meanwhile, the other Indians, recognizing their imminent defeat, "el lugar desamaparan y, corriendo, / por la cueva con paso diligente, / van en ciego tropel de ella saliendo" (111:57). Returning to the place of sacrifice, Aguilar finds the female victim and frees her. She expresses her eternal gratitude to the Spanish soldier and reveals her identity: "Clandina soy, señor, la desdichada / a quien vuestro valor y fortaleza / libró, en el monte espeso cavernoso, / del insolente Hirtano cauteloso" (112:62). She then describes how she and her lover, Hipandro, were abducted on the way to celebrate their marriage while "al pie de un verde mirto descansando" they were attacked and taken prisoner by twenty assailants.⁶ Finally, Clandina explains how, "a aquesta oscura cueva nos trajeron / y ricas piezas de oro nos quitaron ... en que muriese yo todos vinieron, / y la cruel sentencia pronunciaron; / al sacrificio estaba yo aprestada, / cuando el favor llegó de vuestra espada" (112:67).

True to form, Aguilar asks the Indians where the gold is hidden,

and proceeds, led by “cierta guía”, to the cave where the treasure is to be found. Upon entering the cave, they hear “una voz débil, lastimosa, / que flaca y tiernamente se quejaba” (113:70). They pause to listen to the lamentation in which the damsel is consoled only because she has conserved her honor: “Muero (aunque de esta suerte) consolada / con ver que, aunque cautiva y perseguida, / ha sido mi limpieza conservada / y siempre por los dioses defendida” (113:73). But, sadly, Aguilar and his guide “la bárbara toparon desdichada, / en su espumosa sangre revolcada” (112:74). They immediately bury the body and continue the search for the treasure which, upon discovery, is returned to its rightful owners. The noble Aguilar “sólo un alfanje de oro, bien formado, / tomó, y dos esmeraldas, no labradas” (113:77). The interlude ends when Aguilar meets a garrison of ten Spanish soldiers who had been sent to rescue him and all return to the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz.

Following this cursory description of the “novelistic interlude” contained within Lobo Lasso’s *Mexicana*, I shall resume those aspects of the initial chapters of the *Persiles* which appear to have been derived from the poem. Obviously, it is the image of the “mazmorra” that first brings to mind the *Mexicana* for, in both of the works, it is that which serves as the axis around which the action of the episode revolves and in the case of the *Persiles*, the point of departure for the novel. Cervantes’ novel which begins — as most Baroque novels do — *in medias res*, immediately presents us with as familiar situation:

Voces daba el bárbaro Corsicurbo a la estrecha boca de una profunda mazmorra, antes sepultura que prisión de muchos cuerpos vivos que en ella estaban sepultados. Y aunque su terrible y espantoso estruendo cerca y lejos se escuchaba, de

nadie eran entendidas articuladamente las razones que pronunciaba, sino de la miserable Cloelia, a quien sus desventuras en aquella profundidad tenían encerrada. (51)⁷

Corsicurbo asks Cloelia to send up a male victim, bound and gagged, as well as requesting her to “mira bien si, entre las mujeres de la pasada presa, hay alguna que merezca nuestra compañía...” (51). This request immediately brings to mind the *Mexicana* for, as will be recalled, it is due to her beauty that Clandina is to be sacrificed to the gods. However, in this case, the women are to serve a different purpose among the “bárbaros” of these islands. Upon contemplating his unfortunate circumstance with a stoic attitude, the young victim thanks God as “bien querría no morir desesperado a lo menos, porque soy cristiano; pero mis desdichas son tales que me llaman, y casi fuerzan a desearlo” (52). Unlike Lasso’s heroine, who laments her fate and denounces the inequitable treatment received from her gods, Cervantes’ character, (true to the characteristics of Baroque literature inspired by the doctrines of the Counter Reformation), maintains faith in his God and apparently prefers to die than to remain in the hands of such gentiles.

Cervantes, conscious of the importance of verisimilitude espoused by such philosophers as Pinciano, is quick to point out that “ninguna de estas razones fue entendida de los bárbaros, por ser dichas en diferente lenguaje que el suyo” (52). It should be mentioned that Lobo Lasso, although he never mentions the question of communication between Indian and Spaniard, chooses Jerónimo de Aguilar, a sailor who had been shipwrecked off the coast of Mexico for several years (and thus conversant in the native language), as the protagonist of his interlude. In this manner, both authors are careful to maintain a level of verisimili-

tude in their works, albeit it may be argued that the *Persiles*, as a genuine product of the author's imagination does not, unlike the *Mexicana*, purport to represent an actual historical encounter.⁸

The captors close the cell with "una gran piedra" and take their captive to the coast "donde tenían una balsa de maderos atados unos con otros con fuertes bejucos y flexibles mimbres" (52) in which they sail to another island. Although the "mazmorra" described by Cervantes appears to be a man-made construction, it recalls the "caverna" found in the *Mexicana* in several aspects: both are covered by an enormous stone, both serve as the prison and place of sacrifice for the victims and, as previously mentioned, they both serve as the focal point within which the narration develops.

In an effort to frighten the youth, one of the native captors "asió de un grandísimo arco que en la balsa estaba, y poniendo en el una desmesurada flecha, cuya punta era de pedernal, con mucha presteza le flechó..." (53). Although this is only the first occasion in which native weapons are described, they immediately recall not the arms of the residents of the Northern Hemisphere, but, as has been demonstrated by Schevill and Bonilla, those of pre-Colombian America. The bow with a flint-headed arrow is also, not surprisingly, one of several weapons common to both the natives of the *Mexicana* and the *Persiles*. The savage archer:

...sabiendo que no había de ser aquel el género de muerte con que le habían de quitar la vida, hallando la belleza del mozo piedad en la dureza de su corazón, no quiso darle dilatada muerte, tiéndole siempre encarada la flecha al pecho, y así arrojó de sí el arco, y llegándose al él, por señas, como mejor

pudo, le dio a entender que no quería matarle. (53)

Suddenly, the small craft is engulfed in a storm and the youth is left alone to fend for himself, tied to the timbers of the boat, when he is miraculously rescued by sailors from a ship anchored off the shore of one of the numerous islands. The benevolent captain orders the sailors to remove his wet clothing and “le vistiesen otros enjutos y limpios, y le hiciesen descansar y dormir” (54).

In chapter two, an important sub-narration is introduced in Cervantes’ novel in which, while regaining his strength, the youth is startled by the “congojosos suspiros y unas angustiadadas lamentaciones que a sus oídos llegaron, a su parecer, salidos de entre unas tablas de otro apartamento que junto al suyo estaba” (54). It will be recalled that the “novelistic interlude” in the *Mexicana* is also structured around two narrations, and both are similar to those found in the *Persiles* in that they deal with the tragic story of a heroine; in Lasso’s poem that of the incarcerated damsel and in this case, that of Auristela.

The youth immediately asks to hear the story of this sad maiden for, in his opinion, “las desgracias y trabajos cuando se comunican suelen aliviarse...” (55). She proceeds to tell “en cifra” of her sad fate while the youth listens attently from his cabin. As it turns out, she is the maiden of a damsel:

...de tanta hermosura, que entre las que hoy viven en el mundo, y entre aquellas que puede pintar en la imaginación el más agudo entendimiento, puede llevar la ventaja. Su discreción iguala a su belleza, y sus desdichas a su discreción y a su hermosura. Su nombre es Auristela. (56)

She explains how Auristela was purchased by the son of the king of Denmark, captain of the ship, who planned to make her his wife. “Pero ella se defendía, diciendo no ser posible romper un voto que tenía hecho de guardar virginidad toda su vida, y que no pensaba quebrarle en ninguna manera, si bien la solicitasen promesas o la amenazasen muertes” (56). Although the theme of chastity is a recurrent one in the literature of this period, it is worth recalling, for sake of comparison, that the heathen damsel found dead in the sub-narration of the *Mexicana*, is also concerned about this Christian virtue when, towards the end of the sub-interlude, she gives thanks to her gods that, if nothing else, her honor has been preserved.

Unfortunately, before Auristela’s vows could be put to the test, “sucedió que, andando [...] por la ribera del mar, solazándose, no como esclava, sino como reina, llegaron unos bajeles de cosarios, y la robaron y la llevaron no se sabe adónde” (56). In a similar fashion, Clandina and Hipandro were overtaken by a group of savages and brought to the cave where they were rescued by Aguilar. According to the maiden, Auristela was apprehended by several barbarians who:

...andan por todos estos mares, ínsulas y riberas, robando o comprando las más hermosas doncellas que hallan, para traerlas por granjería a vender a esta ínsula, donde dicen que estamos, la cual es habitada de unos bárbaros, gente indómita y cruel, los cuales tienen entre sí por cosa inviolable y cierta, persuadidos, o va del demonio, o va de un antiguo hechicero a quien ellos tienen por sapientísimo varón que de entre ellos ha de salir un rey que conquiste y gane gran parte del mundo; este rey que esperan no saben quien ha de ser, y para saberlo,

aquel hechicero le dio esta orden: que sacrificasen todos los hombres que a su ínsula llegasen...Tambien les mandó que tuviesen en la isla todas las doncellas que pudiesen o comprar o robar, y que la más hermosa dellas se la entregasen luego al bárbaro cuya sucesión valerosa prometía la bebida de los polvos. Estas doncellas compradas o robadas son bien tratados dellos, que sólo en esto muestran no ser bárbaros, y las que compran, son a subidísimos precios, que los pagan en pedazos de oro sin cuño y en preciosísimas perlas, de que los mares de las riberas destas islas abundan; y a esta causa, llevados deste interes y ganancia, muchos se han hechos corsarios y mercaderes. (57)

The presence of a sorcerer who decides the fate of the unlucky captives immediately recalls an analogous situation in the *Mexicana*, in which Millolano, the “gran estrellero” is responsible for the decision to sacrifice Clandina. While in Lasso’s interlude her attempted sacrifice is due to Clandina’s exceptional beauty, Cervantes modifies the situation in the *Persiles*, for as we have seen, the most beautiful maiden (i.e. Auristela) is to marry and consequently engender a superior race. It is the captive males, not females, who are to be put to death in Cervantes’ novel.

Arnaldo’s plan is to sell this poor creature to the “bárbaros” so she can act as a spy and determine whether Auristela is being held captive by the natives. The wretched girl “calló en diciendo esto, y al mancebo se le atrevesó un nudo en la garganta, pegó la boca con las tablas, que humedeció con copiosas lágrimas...” (58). Suddenly, Taurisa is called on deck by the captain, surely to be sent to the island to investigate

Auristela's whereabouts. Upon talking with the son of the King of Denmark, it turns out that the náufrago is:

Periandro, de nobilísimos padres nacido, y al par de mi nobleza corre mi desventura y mis disgracias, las cuales por ser tantas no conceden ahora lugar para contárselas. Esa Auristela que buscas, es una hermana mía que también yo ando buscando que por varios acontecimientos, ha un año que nos perdimos.
(59)

After this confession, he proposes to the captain that he, not Taurisa, be sent because "...ninguna persona hará esta diligencia tan bien como yo, pues mi edad, mi rostro, el interés que se me sigue, juntamente con el conocimiento que yo tengo de Auristela, me está incitando a aconsejarme que tome sobre mis hombros esta empresa" (60). The captain accepts this proposal and proceeds to outfit Periandro "de muchos y ricos vestidos de que venía proveído por si hallaba a Auristela, vistió a Periandro, que quedó, al parecer, la más gallarda y hermosa mujer que hasta entonces los ojos humanos habían visto..." (60). It is precisely at this point where the narration of Cervantes' last novel appears to become indebted not to Lobo Lasso's poem, but to those Byzantine and Chivalric novels so in vogue at the time. Nevertheless, it must be recalled that the *Mexicana* has provided the basis (in terms of detail, structure and theme) for the beginning of his *Persiles*.

It is suitable, while concluding, to point out that the relationship between Cervantes' interpretation of the Chivalric novel as demonstrated by a passage from the *Quijote*, the substance of Lasso's poem and the *Persiles* is not as disparate as one might assume. In fact, Schevill and

Bonilla posit that, indeed, the following passage of the *Quijote* is a direct reference to what would become the *Persiles*:

Dixo — escribe — que, con todo quanto mal avía dicho de tales libros (de caballerías), hallava en ellos vna cosa buena, que era el sujeto que ofrecían para que vn buen entendimiento pudiesse mostrarse en ellos, porque davan largo y espacioso campo por donde sin empacho alguno pudiesse correr la pluma, describiendo naufragios, tormentas, recuentros y batallas; pintando vn captain valeroso, con todas las partes que para ser tal se requieren... Pintando, ora vn lamentable y trágico suceso, aora vn alegre y no pensado acontecimiento: allí vna hermosísima dama, honesta, discreta y recatada, aquí vn caballero christiano, valiente y comedido; aculla vn desaforado bárbaro fanfarrón, acá vn príncipe Cortés, valeroso y bien mirado;...ya puede mostrarse astrólogo, ya cosmógrafo excelente... (cited in Schevill y Bonilla, VII)

I too believe that this passage provides a cursory description of that which will become the *Persiles* and would hasten to emphasize that in this synopsis of Cervantes' last novel appear those attributes that immediately recall the literature produced in relation with the encounter and conquest of America, notably those found in the *Mexicana* of Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. In this sense, it may be argued that the "discovery" of America initiated a syncretic process that eventually lead to the creation of a body of hybrid literary works, each possessing a set of characteristics that distinguish them from their European progenitors. It is not suprising that this phenomenon occurs in the

works of authors of Cervantes's generation, as certain Baroque aesthetics (fascination with the exotic, the primitive and the bizarre) are well represented by the objects, flora and fauna encountered in the Indies. Indeed, upon careful observation, two distinct phases appear in which a textual symbiosis occurred between the literature produced "on-sight" in relation with the encounter and conquest of America (itself based upon classical models), and the ensuing works of the same nature created in Spain, a construction that could be compared with certain structural preoccupations of the Baroque such as the novel within the novel (the *Quijote*) or a painting within a painting (Velázquez's *Las Meninas*).

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Notes

¹ I refer the reader to the articles cited by these authors found in the bibliography.

² The relationship between these two texts was first pointed out by Professor Carroll B. Johnson during a conversation regarding the possible motifs belonging to the pastoral novel as evidenced in Lobo Lasso's poem.

³ Works belonging to the first category are, among others, those composed by Columbus (and transcribed by Las Casas), Ercilla, Díaz del Castillo and Cortés himself, while those of the second category include the works of López de Gómara, Lobo Lasso de la Vega, Illescas, Jovio etc.

⁴ It is important to mention that according to Schevill and Bonilla, who are the original proponents of the "pre-Colombian connection," other possible sources for Cervantes' novel are: *Los amores de Clitofonte y Leucipe*, by Aquiles Tacio (published in Spanish as: *Historia de los amores de Clareo y Florisea* {1552}); the voyage of Zeni, *Viaggio del magnifico Messer Piero Quirino, Gentilhuomo*

vinitiano, nel quale...incorre in uno horribile & spauentoso naufragio, del quale alla fine con diversi accedenti campato, arriva nella Norue & Suetia, Regni Settentrionali; Olao Magno, Opera breve, la quale demonstra e dichiara ouero da il modo facile de intendere la charta ouer delle terre frigidissime di Settentrione, etc. (Venetia, 1539) and the *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Roma, 1555). A more probable influence is to be found in the *Historia delle genti e della natura delle cose settentrionali da Olao Magno Gotho, arcivescovo di Vpsala, etc.* (Venetia 1565). They are careful to point out that "ha de notarse que Olao Magno no es un historiador verídico, y que toma sin escrúpulo muchas noticias de los clásicos (Estrabón, Plinio y otros), sin olvidar a los historiadores de Indias" (XVIII-XXV).

⁵ The youths who are occupied in setting a large table immediately remind us of *Ercilla's Araucana*, in which a similar (in the sense that it is inverisimilar) scene is described by the poet

⁶ The image of the "mirto" which serves as gentle solace for the young lovers immediately recalls not only poems of the Greco-Latin tradition (Virgil and Ovid) but the genre of the Pastoral Novel (such as Montemayor's *Diana*) as well.

⁷ This and all other citations of the *Persiles* are taken from Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce's edition as cited in the bibliography.

⁸ In his *Filosofía antigua poética*, Alonso López Pinciano reminds authors that "las ficciones que no tienen imitación y verosimilitud no son fábulas, sino disparates, como algunas de las que antiguamente llamaron milesias, agora libros de caballería, los cuales tienen acontecimientos fuera de toda buena imitación y semejanza a verdad" (Cited in Schevill & Bonilla XVII).

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