

**From Babel to Paradise: Typologies of Speech, Language, and the Quest for the Word in the *Persiles***

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Si linguis hominum loquar, et angelorum, caritatem autem non habeam, factus sum velut aes sonans, aut cymbalum tinniens [...]. Nunc autem manent fides, spes, caritas, tria haec: major autem horum est caritas.

(*1 Corinthians* 13: 1, 13)

A universal hubbub wild/Of stunning sounds and voices all confused. (John Milton, *Paradise Lost* [2.95-52])

Aurora Egido has observed that there is a pervasive ethics of silence that shapes Cervantes's *Persiles*. She notes that "La ética del silencio en el *Persiles* va unida al eje conceptual [de la obra] puesto que las observaciones sobre la prudencia, la discreción, etc., que acarrea el callar, van mucho más allá de los niveles de la elocución y alcanzan al propio discurrir vital de los protagonistas y la meta amorosa y religiosa de su peregrinar" (1991, 41). Yet, from its very beginning, the *Persiles* self-consciously and conspicuously also deals in obstreperous verbal acoustics--vast linguistic noise--that suggests the alienation of human discourse from communication as it foregrounds the overriding need for audible intelligible and responsible speech, for language, languages, their clear articulation and their comprehension, underscoring the significant role language plays in ethics and in the drama of human salvation. To be sure, the centrality of audible, comprehensible language to the *Persiles* cannot be overstated. At the outset, the dramatization of the inefficacy of language and, in the absence of understanding, its link to violence and mayhem is arresting and to any reader familiar with Scripture recalls on a typological level St. Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*.<sup>1</sup> In that epistle (12-15, but especially 14), Paul holds forth on human speech and prophecy, and directly connects brutality and violence to the lack of human communication. He avers that a person becomes "barbarous" to others in the absence of comprehension: "If then I know not the power of the voice, I shall be to him to whom I speak a barbarian: and he that speaks a barbarian to me." ("Si ergo

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<sup>1</sup> Typology grants meaning to what occurs by implicating it in a pre-established pattern of figural historical interpretation, as, for example, the human Fall from Grace in Genesis and the later biblical prophecies of redemption and the recovery of Paradise in both the Old and New Testaments. Figural interpretation was, and of course continues to be, one of the common modes that shape the art of sacred reading, especially scriptural exegesis, and it was one of the distinguishing marks of the medieval craft of thought and later humanistic practice (Carruthers; Lampe and Woolcombe, 1957). As Erich Auerbach explains, figuralism "establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life" (1984, 53). Armstrong-Roche (281-85) summarizes the Exodus-Promised Land, Abraham-Isaac, and Jonah typologies scholars have identified in the *Persiles*. My interest here focuses on the Old and New Testament typologies of speech and language deployed in the *Persiles*, especially the typologies of the Sacred Word.

nesciero virtutem vocis, ero ei, cui loquor, barbarus: et qui loquitur, mihi barbarus” 14,11). From the initial din and polyglot disorder of the universe, accompanied by the raucous, violent cacophony of the Isla Bárbara which opens the *Persiles*, equated by Deana De Armas Wilson (2000, 203) to a wildness comparable only to the new, mysterious American landscape, the work constitutes itself as a symbolic journey through the labyrinth of Babel, as its characters traverse a geography filled with a multiplicity of different cultures, tongues, and verbal contradictions in their journey to Rome. For all its reverberation, the acoustic space of the Isla Bárbara is devoid of any sacral understanding; embodied words belong to the fallen, material world and must be transformed into the Incarnate Word, which takes places in the heart through the discovery of charity and leads to revelation, meaning, and final comprehension. The *Persiles* in this way from its very beginning takes language, communication, and the problems of interpretation as some of its central themes and enacts a passage through a vast community of languages and cultures in the European world in an attempt to discover, and recover, in that crossing a higher lost order and lost understanding.

Alban Forcione has noted a larger typology that defines the *Persiles* as a romance that is profoundly shaped by Christian ideals. He notes that,

The structure of the *Persiles* is animated by the spirit of orthodox Christianity, as the adventures often have biblical overtones, suggesting an analogy between the heroes, God’s chosen in search of the Promised Land, and mankind awaiting the advent of the Redeemer, and the establishment of the custodian of his Word, the Holy See in Rome, itself to be followed by the New Jerusalem. Thus one can observe in the *Persiles*, in symbolic concentration, the entirety of history as presented by the Christian mythology. (1972, 31)

As the text portrays this linguistic and cultural pilgrimage, it moves from the frigid, outer margins of civilization to its resplendent center, just as it strives toward order, gathering, and cohesion finally disclosing in Christianity the definitive universal presence of the univocal Word, defining a sense of what the Greeks called cosmos. In the *Persiles*’s procession and progression of language from din and wild clamor to measured speech, ordered communication, empathy, and rational syntax, it is possible to perceive the construction and instantiation of a teleology linked directly to the ancient biblical question of language and the Sacred Word; one which points to an overarching epic plot, to closure, and to final resolution inscribed in the universal history of humankind.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, concern with the Word of God (where “Word” is a crucial metaphor for God Himself) has marked the Hebrew-Christian tradition since its very beginning. However, it is in the New Testament where the metaphor takes on a particularly salient role, signifying Christ, the Word Made Flesh. The Gospel of John is explicit in linking the two testaments by means of the presence of the Word, as it couches both the Creation and Christ as *Verbum*: “In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (“In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum . . . et verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis” 1:1, 14). The history of the Word Made Flesh in the New Testament speaks of trials, suffering, and redemption, culminating in renewal and in the final hope of eternal salvation: the recuperation of lost Grace through the sacrifice of the crucified Christ.

The *Persiles* comprises an allegory of the Christian journey of the Fall from Grace to the Word Incarnate— or final redemption--whose trajectory spans the simultaneously real and symbolic geographical space that ranges from the dark landscapes of the Isla Bárbara and Ultima Thule to final repose in sunlit, Christian Rome where dispersed humanity is finally gathered back into the arms of the Church. On a typological level, this is nothing less than the fulfillment of the well-known prophecy of Isaiah 25:6 (“And the Lord of hosts shall make unto all people in this mountain, a feast of fat things, a feast of wine, of fat things full of marrow, of wine purified from the lees.” “Et faciet Dominus exercituum omnibus populis in monte hoc convivium pinguium, convivium vindemiae, pinguium medullatorum, vindemiae defaecatae”), where the dissemination of the Word through the history of time fulfills the prophecy and culminates in the epic closure of Apocalypse and the Supper of the Lamb, incorporating believers “from every race, tribe, people, and language” (“ex omnibus gentibus et tribubus et populis et linguis” Revelation 7:9). It is toward the realization of this foretelling that the teleology of Christian history progresses through the mediation of Faith, which functions as the communal focal point for the propagation and interpretation of the Sacred Word.

Cervantes’ well-known assertion that the *Persiles* was composed in the manner of Heliodorus of Emesa, as an epic in prose, serves as crucial point of departure for grasping the entire work, but especially its preoccupation with language, divergent ethnicities, understanding, and the centrality of the Word. The classical epic’s connection to the theme of language may be traced back to the *Aeneid* and Aeneas’s foundation of Rome. To be sure, epic is a type of narrative that seeks its authority in the ability to signify and create unwavering historical meaning and significance through the use of convincing, illocutionarily forceful language. The *Aeneid*’s influence as a model of epic in this regard was so commanding in the Renaissance formulations of heroic discourse that, in his exploration of the relationship between epic and empire, David Quint finds “the defining tradition of Western epic” in it (1993, 21-46). A significant development in the history of the verse epic came about in the late Early Modern period at the hand of poets like Torquato Tasso, who in his *Gerusalemme liberata* (Ferrara: Febo Bonnà, 1581) sought to compose an epic whose deeds and conquests had Christian ends. In contradistinction to these earlier models, Cervantes adopting a mode that is neither strictly political, military, nor mercantile but Christian in spirit and character composed the *Persiles*. While the model of Rome most certainly remained a source of secular imperial aspirations and the symbol of political hegemony throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for Cervantes it would transcend the earthly Rome of both the ancient and modern Caesars signaled in empire, as he uncovered in the image of Christian, but especially Pauline, Rome the ideal of a reformed Universal Faith and the restorative powers of the *Logos* through the Incarnation of the Word in Christ.

Acutely conscious of the generic conventions of epic, Aristotelian poetics, and the Italian theoretical commentaries on heroic literature (especially Tasso, see Forcione 1970, 12-17, 24, 68, 142-43, and *passim*; 1972, 6-10, 17-18; Armstrong-Roche), Cervantes in the *Persiles* sought to change the rhetorical mode, plot structure, and the political and historical referents of epic, privileging prose over verse and spiritual over territorial conquest. Following Heliodorus, who, as noted, had declared that the epic might also be written in prose, in the *Persiles* it is clear that Cervantes was aware of the full implications and conventions of epic, which he strived to revise, as always in his writing, when he completed this, his last work, literally on his deathbed.

From early critics like Casaldueiro, the *Persiles* has been regarded as a narrative that aspires to draw a universal lesson, a picture of what Casaldueiro referred to as “la historia de la humanidad y del hombre vivida en el presente,” as well as to highlight humanity’s existence “en medio del dolor y de las tentaciones del mundo, guiados por la virtud,” so as to be able to “depurar nuestra fe para alcanzar el triunfo de la paz para llegar al puerto seguro”(227). Following Casaldueiro’s line of reasoning, Avalor-Arce sees in the *Persiles* an expression of the Counter Reformation’s vision of redemption and has proposed the work’s emplotment according to the scheme of the Great Chain of Being, which, he says, shapes its vision of human history. (Avalor-Arce, *Persiles*, introduction, 20-2). Following these basic perceptions, Forcione detects in the *Persiles* an elaborate, overarching allegory of the History of Revelation and Human Redemption as seen through orthodox Christian teaching in which the characters wander through the fallen world in search of the expiation of sin (both personal and Original) and their final deliverance in the Universal Christian Church. For all three of these critics, the *Persiles*, then, traces a large mythic arch, a quest for the recovery of a lost Grace for fallen humanity. Refining these observations, Michael Armstrong-Roche has recently confirmed an epic design in the *Persiles* that seeks to define a “Christian empire of the spirit” (31) animated and sustained by a Pauline vision of *caritas*. The characters’ peripatetic adventures all underscore the role played by individual conscience and the ethical foundations of the faith over its ritual practice, as they seek to challenge crucial early modern public mythologies regarding ethnic alterity, religious orthodoxy, barbarism, political beliefs, and heroism through the use of irony and paradox.<sup>2</sup>

In a nod to its epic genealogy, the *Persiles* is shot through with allusions to Homer and Virgil, most specifically with direct references to the *Aeneid*. In addition to several rhetorical techniques (the beginning *in medias res* and the subsequent exposition of events preceding the beginning), and the adventure-filled voyage itself, as Forcione notes (1972, 78), among the most prominent is the boat race on the island of the fishermen, reminiscent of the *lusus Troiae*, or celebrations at Anchises’ grave (*Aeneid* V, 244-285) and Periandro’s Palinurus-like stargazing while at the helm of the ship. The work also resonates with Homeric and other Greek echoes that evoke scenes from the *Odyssey*, especially the allusions to both Circe and the Sirens in Periandro’s visit to the island paradise, and, finally, to the legends of Alexander the Great and the taming of Bucephalus. More than simple references, however, Periandro’s narrative at the court of Policarpo in both form and substance is meant to summon Aeneas’s narrative before Dido and her court at Carthage and thus insert the work unambiguously into an epic plot. The *Persiles* thus uses these and many other classical references precisely so as to remain connected to, and highlight the intertextual presence of the epic tradition in the fabric of its composition.

The hero of the *Persiles*, however, differs from all other epic exemplars since he is not one but two individuals, a man and a woman, Periandro-Persiles and Auristela-Sigismunda. In this way, the protagonists stand not just as specific personages within the work, but rather as a sort of modern Adam and Eve, an Everyman and Everywoman who follow the path to redemption, and who like a

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<sup>2</sup> Childers offers important insights into the representation of cultures and immigration in the *Persiles*, finding an attempt by Cervantes to recognize communities that transcend ethnic and religious difference.

redeemed Adam and Eve learn the sum of wisdom through the practice of hope, faith, but especially charity, leading to the recuperation of lost grace, symbolized in the recovery of their true identities at the end of their journey. Although their action in the work is portrayed as a personal passage significant for them alone, they nevertheless remain exemplary characters: they comprise a type of Christian *figura* for all to see and follow. By means of their journey, and that of their fellow travelers, Cervantes creates a human trajectory that is both eschatological and psychological in meaning and subject. In the *Persiles*, he transforms the understanding of the deeds that constitute heroic agency into Christian spiritual struggle, as he strives to surpasses Tasso and define the idea of the heroic not in terms of armed conflict and supernatural intercession but as an expression of the interior labors of the soul in its search for God and the pious life.

The *Persiles* in this way is a narrative of ethical rather than political or military struggle, although its ethical vision remains fully engaged in the political. As Armstrong-Roche has written, the *Persiles* is “an epic that celebrates the heroism of mutual consent over violence . . . of charity over doctrine and sacraments . . . of letters and conjugal love over arms . . . and of royal justice over tyranny” (293). Ultimately the *Persiles* does model itself on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer and the *Aeneid* of Virgil (journeys from the periphery to Rome marking arduous trials, separation, return, and final vindication), but looks to Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* as the point of departure for the idea of heroic Christian agency, finally settling on ethics as the definitive field of battle. Like most epics, the *Persiles* is a grand narrative of travail and adventure, focusing on courageous figures, and invoking and advancing the values of an entire culture, carried forward, as in the epic tradition, by the use of astonishing feats and established literary conventions, but with a richly complicated, interlaced plot structure that psychologically and emotionally enhances the epic’s tradition of linear development just as it effaces its emphasis on violence and martial exploits as means of agency (on interlacing narrative in Cervantes, see Quint, 2003).

The first chapter of the *Persiles* may be described as a conflict between the forces of civilization and barbarism marked by and first inscribed in a linguistic agon. The text opens with a conspicuous reference to the unintelligible din and dissonance of the “Voces” que “daba el bárbaro Corsicurbo a la estrecha boca de una profunda mazmorra, antes sepultura que prision de muchos cuerpos vivos,” and to the fact that although the barbarian’s “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 encerradas” (51). From its very beginning, then, the *Persiles* portrays a fallen universe marked by images of torture, enslavement, darkness, linguistic discord and confusion. Hampered by one of the essential symptoms of wildness, linguistic disorder (White, 1985, 16), human understanding seems impossible in the world of the Isla Bárbara, which appears like a world of the living dead, a place where existence is played out in a region of shadows and figurations, a realm of unlikeness. Yet, immediately after the opening reference to the incomprehensible “voces” that fill the dark air, in a passage that evokes long-established scenes of Christian martyrdom, Periandro’s first gesture when lifted from the dungeon where he has been kept is to look to heaven, to transcendence, reach up for the sky and assert God’s infinite mercy as well as his own Christian faith in clearly articulated speech:

No mostraba el gallardo mozo en su semblante género de aflicción alguna; antes con ojos al parecer alegres, alzó el rostro, y miró al cielo, por todas partes, y *con voz clara y no turbada lengua* dijo: “Gracias os hago, ¡oh inmensos y piadosos cielos! De que me habéis traído a morir donde vuestra luz vea mi muerte, y no adonde estos oscuros calabozos, de donde ahora salgo, de sombras caliginosas la cubran. Bien querría yo no morir desesperado a lo menos, porque soy cristiano; pero mis desdichas son tales, que me llaman, y casi fuerzan a desearlo.” (52)

With this unambiguously enunciated profession of faith, Periandro is delivered from the darkness into the light just to confront his captor’s inability to understand his words: “ninguna de estas razones fué entendida de los bárbaros, por ser dichas en diferente lenguaje que el suyo” (52). Despite the clarity of Periandro’s spoken language, explicitly linked here to virtue and to Christianity, it fails to be understood by his barbarian captors, who more than foreign are not Christians. Periandro is thus brought forth into the fallen universe of Babel, where violence and mutual incomprehension reign.

It is surely not by chance that the text’s description of the confusion of tongues and Periandro’s profession of faith are so closely spaced in the opening chapter of the *Persiles*. The link between the Word of God and the word of humankind is shown to have broken down, as Babel spews forth from the human mouths in the fallen universe of the Isla Bárbara. Ephemeral, human utterances lack permanence and understanding in this heathen universe, doubtless pointing to the central tenet of Christian belief that only “the Word of God stands forever” (Isiah 40:8). To be sure, the din of Babel reigns in the text until Periandro is led to the cave where he finds Ricla, Antonio, and their children, all of whom are revealed to be speakers of Castilian, but most importantly to be believers, Christians who came to their faith through the mediation of love (*caritas*) and its expression in the Castilian language.

In the last chapter of her book on *Cervantes, the Novel, and the New World*, Diana de Armas Wilson has called attention to Tansila, the translator, who at crucial moments in the *Persiles* provides a linguistic bridge of understanding across the welter of languages in the *Persiles*. But there is much more to language and speech than translation in this work. As she signals the importance of Tansila, Wilson points us in a direction of the ethics and eschatology of language, and how it had been understood throughout the Middle Ages well into and through early modernity. To understand this, the crucial figure in this scheme is Ricla, the barbarian convert to Christianity, who by means of her apprenticeship in Castilian gains access to a different, more momentous understanding of the Word, the Word in its full and ancient Christian sense. Ricla, as George Mariscal notes, serves as a touchstone in the book because “her identity is premised on the dialectical relationship between her non-Spanishness--and I would add her initial description specifically in terms as a barbarian--and her conversion to the “true faith,” to the extent that she becomes the mother of a new mestizo family . . . Ricla’s offspring are half Spanish, half ‘barbarian,’ but more important, one hundred percent Catholic” (207). In this regard, Ricla stands as an emblematic figure not just of cultural but spiritual conversion and translation.

It is by means of the story of the converted Ricla and her Spanish “husband” Antonio (they are, of course, not married canonically until the very end of the text) that the historical intertext of the

*Persiles* goes significantly beyond the one centering on the question of the origins of the novel explored by De Armas Wilson. Ricla's narrative and the story of her conversion point us not so much in the direction of contemporary history and colonialism as to the course of the Universal History of Humankind, the master plot of Christianity. If the events of the Isla Bárbara may be read as reflections of the American experience in the *Persiles*, their larger sense points us well beyond the American landscape, as does ultimately Shakespeare's Caliban in the *Tempest*, toward human abjection; an abjection that signals a fallen humanity, and one that can only transcend its bestiality through the acquisition of a knowledge of Christianity, indicated by the grasp of a higher order dependent on the acquisition of an understanding of charity and the Word Incarnate, Christ.

The link between speech, language, and faith is further developed into the realm of ethics and virtue in the opening chapters of the *Persiles*. At several key junctures in the first book, the mouth and tongue, the very loci human of articulation, become the sites that not only transmit thoughts and speech but bear symbolic responsibility for them. The very physical organs of communication are deeply implicated in these scenes in questions of ethics, responsibility, and ultimately in the salvation of the human soul. This is the case with the starkly emblematic wounding of the mouth and tongue portrayed in the opening chapters of the work. In the first of these instances, the "barbarian" Bradamiro, described as "menospreciador de toda ley. Arrogante sobre la misma arrogancia, y atrevido como él mismo, porque no se halla con quién compararlo" (64) declares that Auristela, at the instant of her sacrifice, will be his and that the cross-dressed Periandro, for whom he feels a physical attraction, will be set free because it is Auristela's wish, only to be shot through the mouth with a bolt from a bow and arrow:

Apenas hubo dicho esto, cuando el bárbaro gobernador, indignado e impaciente sobremanera, puso una grande y aguda flecha en el arco, y desviándose de sí cuanto pudo extenderse el brazo izquierdo, puso la emulguera con el derecho junto al diestro oído, y disparó la flecha con tan buen tino y con tanta furia, que en un instante le llegó a la boca de Bradamiro, y se la cerró quitándole el movimiento de la lengua y sacándole el alma. (67-68)

The episode is followed fast by the appearance of the as yet unnamed, Castilian-speaking adolescent "barbarian," amidst a conflagration that immolates the island. The boy leads Periandro, Auristela, and Cloelia from the scene of Bradamiro's murder into the illuminated reaches of a cave where Antonio and Ricla, the young barbarian's Christian father and converted "barbarian," mother live. It is through this encounter with the sounds of Castilian, in the company of Christians in an alien world that Periandro's journey of deliverance culminating in the light of Christian Rome begins. Following Cloelia's profession of faith, her death, and pious burial, despite the holocaust of the prior day, the characters emerge from the darkness into a garden-like, purified setting that conjures images of prelapsarian Eden: "Estaba crecida la hierba porque las muchas aguas que de las peñas salían las tenían en perpetua verdura" (79). The demonic world of the Island is immolated in a purifying holocaust to reveal a recuperated paradisiacal landscape, along with the discovery of a common language and the mediation of Christian charity. The symbolic passage through the labyrinth of an abject, brutalized world deprived of both coherent language and charity leads to the first step on the path to salvation and to the symbolic center of the Christian universe, to the Eternal City, Rome, the resting place of both Peter and Paul, at the end of the book.

Later in Book II, Chapter VIII, there is another, equivalent symbolic death by means of a fallen mouth and tongue when Clodio, the slanderer, as if by an act of divine punishment is wounded by an arrow to the mouth, struck by a bolt fired by Antonio that had been intended for another transgressor, the lascivious witch Cenotia:

No fue el golpe de la flecha en vano, porque a este instante entraba por la puerta de la estancia el maldiciente Clodio, que sirvió de blanco y le pasó la boca y la lengua, y le dejó la vida en perpetuo silencio. Castigo merecido a sus muchas culpas. (203)

In this way, in the *Persiles* sins, transgressions, and deviance are closely tied symbolically to the fallen faculty and organs of speech. To be sure, in this rendering, the transgressions of language (Clodio, the mendacious, slandering poet) are deemed more wicked than those of those of the body (Cenotia).

A treatise titled *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue According to God's Word* published in London in 1601 provides, I think, a significant point of comparison with these events in the *Persiles*. Its author, the recusant Catholic William Perkins, an almost exact contemporary of Cervantes, holds forth there on the “government of the tongue,” the ethics of speech, and the centrality of both the literal and metaphorical Tongue and Word to the notion of Christian community, as he situates his treatise in the context of Early Modern religious controversy. In the *Government of the Tongue*, Perkins stresses that two things are required for “the holy usage of the Tongue according to God's Word,” namely purity of heart, and what he calls “the language of Canaan,” or the understanding of God's grace and the exercise of charity, acquired through the contemplation of the sacrifice of the crucified Christ (5), which “consequently doth” allow the spirit to “familiarily talke and speak with God” (7), he says. If looked at through the pages of Perkins's *Government of the Tongue* and placed within a larger Christian eschatological framework, language in the *Persiles* is cast not just as a medium of communication, or something capable of producing confusion, but as something much more—a moral and theological complication entangled in the master narrative of the history of Christian salvation.

In an earlier widely diffused treatise on language, Erasmus in *De Lingua* (1525) had raised the specter of Babel and linked it to contemporary doctrinal dissonance in the Church, while alluding to Philippians, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of John. He proffered that, although Christians could not fully arrive at a consensus on doctrine, they could remain united in the spiritual fellowship of the Church through a foundational belief in the Word and the exercise of charity. The idea of the Eucharist as the crucial hermeneutic event in the life of the Christian, the communal act through which the Word is remembered, recuperated, shared, and incorporated, is interpreted as the consecrated process that transcends all individual difference and gathers the community of the faithful under the common spirit of charity (Quint, 1983, 185). The Incarnate Word was thus conceived as the central principle of Christian unity and community and the means for achieving spiritual reconciliation in a divided faith.

Since early medieval times commentators on Adam's pre-lapsarian ability in Genesis to invoke the nature of things through their mere naming portray human language as a flawless, grace-filled medium in which the names of things corresponded perfectly to their essence: “Omne enim quod vocavit Adam animae viventis ipsum est nomen eius” (Genesis 2:19). The original human tongue,

undivided from the objects it signified, and not yet partitioned into different languages, was composed of sounds given by God which were consubstantial with the things they signified. However, according to many medieval commentaries on the Fall, when humankind disobeyed God, the human word was cast asunder from the primordial Word and the continuity of language as well as being was disrupted (see Bloch, 1983, 35-40). Humanity was banished from Eden to a *regio disimilitudinis*--a realm of unlikeness--and condemned to live and wander in exile in a confusing region of shadows and figurations where signs and gestures failed to agree with the intent behind them. Indeed, a common designation for *Genesis* 11 during the Middle Ages was “*Confusio linguarum et dispersio populorum*,” implicating the story of Babel in the estrangement from grace, the dispersion of humanity, and the larger figure of divine banishment and retribution for the sins of Eden (Ferguson, 1975). In this way, the cultural divisions and linguistic confusion that reign in the world arise as a direct consequence of the choices and temptations of the Fall from Grace. In the *Persiles*, Periandro and Auristela’s journey seems to traverse just such a fallen realm of linguistic and figurative confusion as they seek redemption through virtuous action and personal atonement, and arrive at Catholicism’s symbolic center for the recuperation of the primordial Word that only Christ and the Church can vouchsafe, Rome the end of their pilgrimage.

The principal synthesis of Pauline Christianity with the theme of the allegorical Christian pilgrimage is, of course, found in Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, a book Cervantes knew well and one to which he returned throughout his life.<sup>3</sup> On two specific occasions in the *Persiles*, Cervantes alludes to a fundamental Augustinian idea and image: the soul that remains in continuous movement until it finds its final repose in the Creator: “*Están nuestras almas siempre en continuo movimiento, y no pueden parar ni sosegar sino en su centro, que es Dios, para quien fueron criadas*” (275, repeated by Auristela again almost verbatim at 458). In this essentially Neoplatonic vision, the soul, like language, is condemned to wander in the fallen world of shadows and figurations, until it can find its way to God. Augustine, in *De Ordine*, for example, speaks of the failure of human language to convey truth because of “the corporeal matter of verbal signs” (1.III.4), while in Book XII of the *Confessions* (really a commentary on *Genesis* and the Fall) he portrays redemption as the recuperation of lost grace through the ability to recall and grasp the intention of the primordial Word ever present in all Creation. As manifestations of the lapsed material world, human signs and gestures fail to comprise truth unless mediated by grace because they belong to a corrupt medium of signification, the code alienated from grace at the time of Adam’s sin. Fallen human discourse may only serve the narrow purpose of signaling to others what is and has always been present in the heart of the speaker and what memory may discover in the recesses of the individual conscience. True meaning thus lies beyond the realm of lapsed sensorial signs, which exist only to stir memory and prompt the soul’s recovery of its pre-lapsarian recollection of God (what Augustine calls *memoria Dei*). Conventional signs and language are precarious and must be played out by perception against an interior standard—the law of charity engraved on every human heart and that resides in memory and is inherently present in humankind as a vestige of its pre-lapsarian goodness.

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<sup>3</sup> Juan de la Cuesta, the publisher of the posthumous *Persiles* (1617), published Antonio Rois y Rosas Castilian translation of *De Civitate Dei* in 1614. On *De Civitate Dei* and Cervantes, see Di Salvo, 1984.

Theologically, the problem of the inconstancy of post-lapsarian language was solved by means of the Incarnation. As God took on human form in Christ--the Word Made Flesh--language as well as humankind could be redeemed and it became possible through charity to restore corrupt signification to its primordial referent. As the perfect expression of God and the *Logos* Christ annulled the curse of Eden and prompted humankind to remember God, restoring ordinary words to the original grace-filled Word as it was understood in Paradise prior to the Fall. Only the Word Made Flesh was capable of surmounting the imperfections of human discourse, an extension of the material world, and repairing humankind to Divine Grace—to the immediate intellection of God’s ultimate goodness, will, and intention.

It is only through the careful reading of that sign that the recognition of Christ’s divinity and God’s Incarnation may be understood and that the Word can be recuperated, endowing it and the text that follows with a sense that is absolute, eternal, righteous, and unequivocal. This is so because, as a part of the Trinity, Christ is nothing less than the Word itself, and thus capable of annulling the fallen nature of language. By engaging our memory through the contemplation of His image it is possible to begin the spiritual quest for inner truth, ordained only through charity, the highest form of love. As all things in the fallen world, words and language must be subjected to charity, or the “law of love” inscribed on the human conscience since Creation, to permit the soul to know itself and discover *veritas interior*. As such, the world without the Word makes it impossible to extract any possible meaning from it. In an Augustinian context, our salvation or damnation turns on our moral position as both users and interpreters of language, since signs may lend themselves either to terrestrial or celestial readings depending on whether we choose to employ them or not for our edification .

It is to Felician de la Voz whom we must turn to discover the full meaning of the voice, the Word, and of language in the *Persiles*. As Casaldüero notes, the main protagonist of her tale is the Voice itself (1975, 148), just as De Armas Wilson reminds us that the very first word of the *Persiles* is “Voces” (1991, 28). Felician’s story, of course, conflates the emblematic, mythic history of all women captured in the anagram Eva/Ave, the fallen Eve and the Virgin Mary (Egido, 1998, 20; Micozzi, 721-23), the two overarching images that designate the beginning and end of the History of Human Salvation and that symbolically circumscribe Felician’s own personal story of fall and redemption. Her emblematic name points to the progress of her soul from fallen state to the joyous proclamation of her devotion to the Virgin, and the discovery of the simultaneously human and divine medium of the Incarnation. Typologically, Felician is identified not only with her own voice, but with *Vox Mea*, or the voice of Providence. Her seemingly odd characterization (see Ife, 2009) also brings together a series of other images and biblical typologies ranging from the prophecy of Isaiah (“*Vox calamantis in deserto*” 1:40) reiterated in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John to herald the coming of Christ, to the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:46-55, whose root of prophecy in the OT is Samuel 2:1-10), the Song of Songs (4:12) and Revelation (12:1-17). In Catholic belief, the voice that is to be heard above all others is *Vox Mea*, the *Logos* or voice of the Lord as it speaks to one’s conscience. In Spain, the crucial importance of *Vox Mea* in schemes of salvation had been articulated as early as the thirteenth century in Gonzalo de Berceo’s *Vida de Santa Oria*, which depicts the allegorical other world journey of the anchoress Oria, who literally shuts tight her mouth

to fallen, human speech, and is met in Paradise by *Vox Mea*, the handmaiden of the Lord, symbol of the heavenly Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

Appropriately intoned at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Felician's song to the Virgin alludes to the prophecies of the coming of Christ and specifically evokes the Word Incarnate (*Verbo*) and its role in Deliverance from Original Sin and the recuperation of lost Grace. When the pilgrims enter the sanctuary where they hear Felician, they kneel at an altar with images of Christ, the Virgin, and St. John the Divine, effigies that mark crucial milestones in the Universal History of Creation and which point to the Incarnation of the Word, the New Covenant, and the conclusion of time in Revelation, the beginning, middle, and the end of God's plan for the Salvation of Humankind and the restitution of Grace. Dedicated to Mary, Felician's canticle is a song of liberation, placed by Cervantes in the text not at the moment of its occurrence but retrospectively after Felician's restoration to her family (Forcione, 1972, 127). Its text quite consciously weaves in the typologies and prophecies that announce the Virgin's role in the Incarnation of the Word, thus annulling the curse of Eden and signaling the path to salvation. It is only through the intercession of Mary (who is, of course, described as *gratia plena* at the Annunciation) that Grace and the original Word could be understood and recuperated by fallen humankind:

Sois la paloma que al eterno fuistes  
 llamada desde el cielo, sois la esposa  
 que al sacro Verbo limpia carne distes,  
 sois el brazo de Dios, que detuvistes  
 de Abrahán la cuchilla rigurosa,  
 y para el sacrificio verdadero  
 nos diste el mansísimo Cordero  
 .....  
 creed, Señora,/que sois universal remediadora. (311)

As the first half of the *Persiles* dramatically concludes with the encounter with Felician at Guadalupe, in the words of Forcione, the episode "prefigures the pilgrims' attainment of the ultimate goal of their quest" (1972, 73). I would add that it indicates specifically the point in the text where the Word is joyously proclaimed to have become flesh and come to reside among the pilgrims ("verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis"). It is only through Felician's grace-filled song, at the moment her father and brother recognize her extraordinary voice, moved by a higher power and infused with love and the spirit of charity, that the expected violent outcome of the secular drama of honor that constitutes Felician's tale is turned aside, and that her relatives renounce their intention to avenge their honor with her death. It is by means of a new language--one of friendly persuasion mediated by love and tempered by an understanding of the Word-- that they do no harm and seek to reconcile with her. It is clear that Cervantes sought to portray Felician as the voice for the Word, and as understanding the typological links between Old Testament prophecy and Mary, underscoring the Virgin's role as the vital intercessor in Christian redemption and the means for the Incarnation of

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<sup>4</sup> To this day, numerous medieval church bells that survive in Spain and the rest of Europe carry the inscription *Vox Mea*, *Vox Domini*, *Vox Vitae*, and *Voco vos ad sacra venite*, as memorial to the abiding Word and Voice of God.

the Word. In this way, her song inscribes the Incarnation in the *Persiles* at a key turning point in the plot and invokes the universal history of humankind as it was broadly understood in Christian exegesis, evoking images from the Old Testament that were later interpreted as adumbrations of Redemption in the Gospels. At the same time, the reference to Christ as the “Venidero Augusto” in Feliciano’s song points us in the direction of the implicit secular and religious epic coordinates of the pilgrims’ quest, just as it places Cervantes, the author of the *Persiles*, in the position of a Christian Virgil, poet of the Incarnation, the Spirit of God become flesh. In this way, Cervantes merges the biblical quest of humankind for redemption and salvation with the quest of Aeneas to establish the new Troy, Rome. Medieval interpretations of the *Aeneid* stressed the *Pax Augusta*, or the Roman Peace during which the Redeemer would appear and the city of Rome would be transformed into the center of the world and, most importantly, the custodian of the Redeemer’s Word.

The most succinct formulation of the universal absolution of Grace offered by the Word Incarnate is distilled in Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, where the Apostle famously emphasizes the universal supremacy of Grace over sin, stressing the instrumental role of charity and mercy in the forgiveness of trespass: “Now the law entered in that sin might abound. And where sin abounded, grace did more abound.” (“Lex autem subintravit ut abundaret delictum. Ubi autem abundavit delictum, superabundavit gratia: Ubi abundavit delictum, super abundavit gratia” Romans 5:20). Feliciano’s song captures this core belief and is filled with rich Christian typologies, not the least of which is the one that probably led to Feliciano’s invention as a character in the book: the Voice in the wilderness (“Vox clamantis in deserto”), recognized as one of the earliest Old Testament prefigurations of the Word Incarnate, for which Feliciano is the modern, joyous embodiment. The image, first found in Isaiah (1:40), is subsequently restated throughout the New Testament, but most notably in the Book of Matthew, where “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” famously alludes not just to John the Baptist, but more importantly, to one who makes known the way of the Lord and the coming of the Word (Matthew 3:3).

Once in Rome, the narrator summarily describes how Periandro and Auristela are catechized into the Catholic faith (435-36), underscoring Cervantes predilection for affective piety and charity rather than the ritual practice of the sacraments. And once they have prevailed over the sordid, historically fallen Roman world of Zabalón, the Jew, the celestinesque temptress Hipólita, and her criminal accomplice Pirro Calabrés, Auristela, physically transformed, symbolically resurrects and they renounce the names they have used throughout the work to take on their new identities as Persiles and Sigismunda, an allusion to the revelation of the truth, their spiritual transformation, and their adoption into the Christian faith. It is certainly not by chance that at the close of the *Persiles*, in Rome, Periandro and Auristela are transformed into Persiles y Sigismunda, publically acquiring their new names. Nothing short of a christening, the gesture entails the cancellation of their former selves--the erasure of their alien, perhaps even demonic, identities by means of the onomastic transformation. The alteration of their names is the linguistic compliment of their spiritual renewal. The adoption of a new name in effect converts them from their former selves into new Christians: although their bodies remain the same, the transformation of their souls is symbolized by their newly adopted names. In this regard the *Persiles* does indeed also echo themes arising from a colonial discourse, since new Christian names were given to individuals upon their entry into the Church, be

they Jews, pagans, Protestants, or Muslims. Naming anew became the means for marking the spiritual transformation of all people who, having acquired the meaning of the true Word, entered into the universal fellowship of the Church with a Christian name.

Although not a sacramental baptism in terms of ritual cleansing, the acquisition of *Persiles*' and Sigismunda's new names is symbolic of their initiation into the Church and their spiritual conversion, as they take off the old and put on the new to embark on the righteous path of truth, spiritual unity in the Church, and the Word Incarnate. It is as if everything leading to the final denouement of the *Persiles* were a reification of Paul's greatest commandment, a dramatization and performance of the Apostle's mandate to exercise charity, apply tender mercies, and pursue reconciliation:

“Lie not one to another: stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of him that created him. Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. But Christ is all and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience: Bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another. Even as the Lord has forgiven you, so do you also. But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body: and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly: in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” (Nolite mentiri invicem, expoliantes vos veterem hominem cum actibus suis, et induentes novum eum, qui renovatur in agnitionem secundum imaginem ejus qui creavit illum: ubi non est gentilis et Judæus, circumcisio et præputium, Barbarus et Scythia, servus et liber: sed omnia, et in omnibus Christus. Induite vos ergo, sicut electi Dei, sancti, et dilecti, viscera misericordiæ, benignitatem, humilitatem, modestiam, patientiam: supportantes invicem, et donantes vobismetipsis si quis adversus aliquem habet querelam : sicut et Dominus donavit vobis, ita et vos. Super omnia autem hæc, caritatem habete, quod est vinculum perfectionis: et pax Christi exsultet in cordibus vestris, in qua et vocati estis in uno corpore : et grati estote. Verbum Christi habitet in vobis abundanter in omni sapientia, docentes, et commonentes vosmetipsos,” Colossians 3, 9-16)

Noticing the prominence the *Persiles* accords to Paul, especially in its final pages, Michael Armstrong-Roche comments that “it is as if Cervantes were placing . . . his book under Paul's patronage, in pointed contrast to the Church's Apostle Peter” (121). In fact, in sharp distinction to Peter and the Roman Church, the book could arguably be described as both an historical and symbolic pilgrimage to Pauline Rome, the Rome that is both the actual, historical earthly resting place of the Apostle, the maker of Christianity whose tomb meaningfully lies *extra muros*, and a Rome that pointedly avoids the institutionalized Church and serves as the spiritual symbol of salvation and the chosen faith for all humankind.

At the end of the lengthy journey, after she has fallen ill and like some latter day saint who has undergone a trial of her spirit and seen her corporal beauty fade as it inversely reflects the beauty of her soul, when Auristela requests that Periando release her from their vows, we encounter the second key Augustinian resonance in the *Persiles* in her reasoning. Indeed it is an almost direct citation of

the *Confessions* (Forcione, 33, n. 26), by which she describes to Peraindro her new found faith and calling, expressed in an entirely new language inscribed on her soul:

Hermano mío, pues ha querido el cielo que con este nombre tan dulce y tan honesto ha dos años que te he nombrado, sin dar licencia al gusto o al descuido para que de otra suerte te llamase, que tan honesta y tan agradable no fuese, querría que esta felicidad pasase adelante, y que solos los términos de la vida la pusiesen término . . . Nuestras almas, como tú bien sabes, y como aquí me han enseñado, siempre están en continuo movimiento y no pueden parar sino en Dios, como en su centro . . . Si te pareciese, hermano, que este lenguaje no es mío, y que va fuera de la enseñanza que me han podido enseñar mis pocos años y mi remota crianza, advierte que en la tabla rasa de mi alma ha pintado la esperiencia y escrito mayors cosas; principalmente ha puesto que en sólo conocer y ver a Dios está la suma gloria, y todos los medios que para este fin se encaminan son los buenos, son los santos, son los agradables, como son los de la caridad, de la honestidad y el de la virginidad. (458-59)

The evocation of the soul in movement toward its resting place in God, taken, as noted, from the *Confessions* is linked here to the acquisition of a new idiom and the attainment of a higher understanding. Auristela ironically exercises her new grasp of language by relexicalizing the word *hermano*, changing it from its literal and, in terms of her relationship with Peraindro, fictitious sense, and endowing it in Pauline fashion with an entirely new spiritual meaning meant to mark the transformation of the lie that has bound them socially from the beginning of the work into a new form of symbolic, fraternal truth. By means of the instruction she has received, she tells Peraindro, she has learned to discover the writing on the *tabula rasa* of her soul, a remark that points to Augustine's "lex intima in corde conscripta" (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 57,1), or the principle of Christian charity and understanding indelibly engraved upon every human heart since the moment of Creation.

The implied presence of all of these Christian concepts and biblical typologies of speech and language are discernible from the very opening of the *Persiles* beginning with its portrayal of the linguistic confusion that reigns among the barbarians followed by the multiplicity of tongues that, apart from Castilian, many of the characters in the work speak. In this way, the *Persiles* moves from images of confusion, fragmentation, and dispersion to coalescence and deliverance, from Babel and the fallen universe to Redemption under the mantle of the Word Incarnate. Throughout, the Castilian vernacular appears as the idiom that most closely approximates, or is perhaps least alien from, the salvific Word since it becomes the primary vehicle for conversion. Although absent of charity, like all human tongues in the *Persiles* it is not without its limitations, it is, nevertheless, the language through which Ricla learns about Christianity from Antonio, and it is the one that seems capable of mediating all the other alien tongues represented in the book. In this regard, it may indeed point us in the direction of America, since the learning and use of Castilian had become state policy that went hand in hand with the evangelization of the Indies. Although the initial response of New World Spanish Colonial policy was to have, as in the case of Columbus's first voyage, a European learn a native language in order to facilitate conversion, official Crown policy from the earliest date after the Spanish arrival in the New World was to teach the indigenous inhabitants Castilian. In theory, it was the objective of the colonial enterprise to have Castilian and Catholicism spread together, Castilian

-serving as the medium for transmitting the one and only religion and propagating the culture of the Roman west. The link in the Spanish imaginary between Christian conversion and the Castilian language was thus well established, captured in the idiom “hablar cristiano,” and the ties between it and the promise of salvation seemed closely bound. As we have seen, in Periandro’s initial appeal to heaven in the opening sentences of the text, the clarity and intelligibility of speech is explicitly identified with the profession of Christianity.

Through his interest in the close alliance of the spoken word with the sacred and the ethical, particularly in the role it plays in the Hebrew-Christian tradition as evidenced in his invocation of it in Feliciano’s song and the many other images of language, the word, and the voice he deploys in the *Persiles*, Cervantes reveals that in a world where presence had penetrated time and space as never before, human beings needed to seek God in the Word Incarnate through charity, the intercession of the Virgin, and a belief in the fellowship of the universal church, which reconciles all difference and is the path that leads from the fallen material world of sound and sight to the restoration of the Word’s original grace-filled spiritual message of love and redemption.

With its insistence on salvation, civilization, and the unity of the Word in Christianity, the *Persiles* rejects both Babel and Babylon, the confused city of earthly disarray, allegorized in the Isla Bárbara and Policarpo’s court, Protestantism and the frozen reaches of the north, where “la verdadera fe católica no está en el punto tan perfecto como se require” (432), a place where, as Forcione notes, “the dominant motifs are darkness, winter, sterility, and death” (1972, 74). The work, rather, aspires to the light and to the Church, to the City of God, as symbolized in Augustine’s Jerusalem (*De Civitate Dei*, Book 14), opportunely changed by Cervantes into Pauline Rome, God’s city on earth, the resting place of the Apostle, and the keeper not of the Keys to the Kingdom but the custodian of the Eternal Word.

The *Persiles* thus brings symbolic closure to the curse of Babel, concluding with a dramatization of the church’s apostolic mission to reunite the world in the Word--the Christian faith--and annul humanity’s fall from Grace. In it, through pilgrimage to Rome all the nations of the earth are symbolically gathered and united in the unfolding history of salvation. The nonsense of Babel is stilled and transformed into the interpretive community of the Word and Christian consensus. The pilgrims’ arrival and final repose in the Eternal City enacts a double conclusion: the end of the story for those who have made the journey and, on a higher symbolic plane, an apocalypse that signals resolution and the fulfillment of the Church’s spiritual mission: the restoration of God’s Word on earth. The preoccupation with language and the Word in the *Persiles* points to a work that at its core is engaged with the master narrative of sacred human history, the narrative of the prophetic chronicle of humankind embedded in its poetic fiction as the pilgrims advance toward Rome in the search for an ending, for a resolution of the trials of Persiles and Sigismunda and a place of repose for all the Christian souls that make the journey to the Eternal City with them.

I would like now to return to the question of literary modes and Cervantes’s artistic aspirations in the *Persiles*, which he made the effort to complete on his deathbed. When examined from a linguistic perspective, the basic teleology of its epic scope moves from dispersion to coalescence and unity, from heterogeneity to community and a common form of mediation—charity--that spans all gaps of language and culture as it seeks to unravel the curse of Babel through the intercession of the Flesh

Made Word. Epic seeks to impose linguistic as well as, narrative and political order, as suggested by David Quint in his exploration of the dynamics of epic and empire, where he has investigated the emergence of the understanding of Christian empire focused on the Word as articulated in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1993, 41-45). However, I believe that it is not to Milton but to Cervantes that we must look to find the first cogent seventeenth-century articulation of a universal Christian epic centered on the Sacred Word; not one depicting hypostatic wars in heaven or rebellious angels, but one that moves from chaos and sin toward coalescence, peace and reconciliation at the level of the human conscience, a vision which emphasizes a spiritual struggle that finds its resolution in the community and fellowship of the universal Church. The aspirations of Cervantes to compose a Christian epic, I think, become clear in the closing chapters of the *Persiles*, where the *poeta peregrino* embraces the painter and tells him the story of the prophetically painted planks he saw in the museum of one of the members of the papal curia. The planks, he says, are for recording the images of the most famous poets of the future. Two of the many planks the poet examined had been only partially completed, one bearing the name "Torcuato Tasso, y más abajo un poco decía *Jerusalén libertada*" and "en la otra estaba escrito *Zárate*, y más abajo *Cruz y Constantino*" (440). Both Tasso's *Gerusalemme* and López de Zárate's *Poema heróico de la Invención de la Cruz por el emperador Constantino* were, of course, considered in their time to be the maximum, if imperfect, literary expressions of the Christian ideal in epic form.

Periando, however, interrupts the poet and asks rhetorically "¿habrá otras tablas aderezadas para poetas venideros?" (441). The response is, of course, "Sí . . . que me doy a entender que la edad, cuando estos vengan, que según me dijo el que me guiaba, no puede tardar" (441), and comprises what is doubtless one of the many examples of ambitious self-reference that Cervantes makes throughout his works. This, in consonance with López Pinciano's adoption of Heliodorus' assertion that the epic could also be written in prose, subsequently embraced by the canon in *Don Quijote* (I,47) in what is believed to be the description of the partially completed *Persiles*, underscores the fact that we must seek to explore further the notion of the *Persiles* as a Christian epic of conscience and, indeed, as Cervantes's last gesture toward the expression of a Christian ideal posited upon a personalized sense of piety and seen as a quest and a journey of the soul. The *Persiles* enacts a human passage through time, space and an array of contrasting cultural precincts, yet at the same time the trials that it portrays mark the progression of a symbolic, spiritual quest. In this way it aims to depict both historical and timeless, universal events, reconciling the oppositions in types of narrative discourse singled out in Renaissance literary theory. As a created human story, a crafted text, and as a master narrative of human destinies it may be read simultaneously in two fundamental ways, as both poetry and history.

Cervantes' express desire to compete with Heliodorus, and his claim that the epic may also be written in prose, must be taken seriously. After an examination of episodes like the one of la Isla Báraba and its inscription in themes that point to the Universal History of Humankind, it is clear that we must continue to pay close attention to Cervantes' claim and seek to discover in the *Persiles* yet other signs that may point to his aspirations to complete a Christian epic in prose.

With its repeated emphasis on language, the sovereign theme of the *Persiles* is the quest for the discovery of distinct meaning in a world seemingly devoid of it. Meaning, of course, implies the

search for determinacy and univocality as it is ordered by language. The discovery of the Word of God by the protagonists of the *Persiles*, made manifest in Christ and the Virgin, constitutes the triumph of the restitution of universal linguistic order and intelligibility over the senseless noise of Babel in a fallen world. At its highest level the victory of the Sacred Word in the work is thus equal to the assignment of a definite, overarching narrative sense upon universal history; a meaning that is identical with the closed structure of Christian teleology, and one that transcends all the possible vagaries and cycles of the fallen world. In this way, the *Persiles* fundamentally aligns itself with epic, a type of narrative that finds its power in the ability to signify and create unwavering historical sense and significance. Yet, in contradistinction to the classical secular epic, the *Persiles* suggests that its own capacity to produce meaning is derived from a higher power beyond the arms and the man: the power of the Word Incarnate, whose righteous triumph in the human spirit over babble, bedlam, and falsehood it ultimately celebrates.

In short, there is more in the *Persiles*'s concern with language, cultures, and translation than a critique or transposition of colonialism and the policies and consequences of the historical movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is a broader moral, religious, and literary insight to a dispersed and fallen human universe presided over by tyranny, cruelty, oppression, linguistic confusion, cultural conflict, and the absence of civilizing forces which might temper them. In the *Persiles*, the quest for language and understanding is nothing other than the quest for an understanding of the Word of God, the recognition of the mediating force and power of faith, hope, and charity, the Cardinal Virtues that must be cultivated by every Christian soul in the struggle against adversity.

The *Persiles* is a work that holds forth the promise of a higher form of spiritual discernment and ultimate Christian redemption. Its moves both symbolically and geographically from an abject, barbaric world filled with the din of Babel to one of piety, self-sacrifice, revelation, and deliverance in the unity of the Sacred Word. Its initial brutal vision of tyranny, lawlessness, and abjection is tempered by the possibility of the moral transcendence of the individual through personal trial and spiritual endurance by means of the acquisition of the common idiom of understanding found only in the community of the Word. Finished almost at the hour of his death, the *Persiles* stands as Cervantes's final emblematic encounter with an objectively existing Church, the custodian of only one true Word; one where present sound matches divine intention through the practice and mediation of love and charity. In his final work, Cervantes strived to resacralize the Word, recuperating the visibility and legibility of what Augustine had described as the pre-lapsarian "lex intima" forever engraved upon the human heart.

To conclude, as Castro, Bataillon, Casaldueiro, Forcione, and Armstrong-Roche have all argued, the single driving principle of Cervantes's *Persiles*, the book he strived to finish on his deathbed almost as an act of atonement, resides in the universalizing power of Christianity, but especially in its Pauline avatar, and its espoused theology and teleology of salvation through the mediation of faith, hope, and charity. The Word Incarnate, Christ, is the single overarching idiom capable of reconciling all difference and transforming it into fellowship and understanding. In the end, Cervantes's last and ultimate articulation of a utopian belief in the possibility of Christian Redemption, the *Persiles* offers up a devotional vision of both faith and language--the latter, the very craft and medium at the center

of Cervantes's entire life and universe. It is no accident that speech, language, and translation take on such prominent, indeed epic, roles in the book. They comprise the themes that are the stuff of spiritual transformation and conciliation reaching back to Genesis, to Babel, and to the New Covenant. The sought after moment when translation is no longer necessary, when words through the mediation of charity signify spiritually, where the quickness of the spirit triumphs over the mortality of the letter, rests at the heart of the journey and movement of the *Persiles* from the barbarous margins of the world to its civilized center, the earth's symbolic Eternal City. When all the pilgrims arrive there, more than arriving at the wretched historical Rome that blemishes the map of human history they come figuratively to the threshold of salvation. Their trials draw to an end and they find themselves on the verge of a definitive form of understanding, a revelation that needs no human mediation. They reach both the earthly and figurative precinct of the Word Incarnate, Rome, "el cielo de la tierra," thus completing the pursuit which, according to Bartlett Giammati (1966), lies at the core of every Renaissance epic quest: the discovery of Paradise on earth.

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