The Great Chain of Being and Human Transformation in Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares*

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From the prologue to the final paragraph of *El coloquio de los perros*, Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* abound in images of ascent and descent. The author's observation about his short stories in the preliminary pages that, "algún misterio tienen escondido que las levanta,"establishes a leitmotif that reappears in his characters' aspirations to elevate themselves socially, morally, intellectually, and spiritually (1:53). In his protagonists' struggles to perfect and refine themselves, Cervantes constructs a vision of the human experience that pulsates with both the dignity and folly of our condition. Despite the prominence of human matters in Cervantes's works, however, there also exists a full range of life forms; as Kevin Larsen has observed, "Cervantes' *homo fictus* does not exist in a biological vacuum, but is surrounded by a rich ecological milieu" (64). The two, in fact, are not separate, for in the *Novelas ejemplares* Cervantes uses images from the natural world –a multitude of animals, rocks and plants– to reflect his protagonists' educative processes. Similar to many of his contemporary writers, particularly humanists influenced by Neo-Platonic thought, Cervantes represents the human potential for transformation in line with the prevailing model of the universe: the *scala naturae* or Great Chain of Being. In the pages that follow, I aim to demonstrate that the Great Chain of Being forms an important part of the fabric of the *Novelas ejemplares*, functioning as a framework through which Cervantes envisions his characters' moral and spiritual transformations.

The Great Chain of Being and Christian Humanism

With roots in Plato, Aristotle and the Old Testament, the Great Chain of Being held sway as a model of the universe and an explanation for the unimaginable plenitude of God's creation through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, persisting into the eighteenth century[1]. As E. M. W. Tillyard explains, "The chain stretched from the foot of God's throne to the meanest of inanimate objects. Every speck of creation was a link in the chain, and every link except those at the two extremities was simultaneously bigger and smaller than another: there could be no gap" (23). In *Introducción del símbolo de la Fe* Fray Luis de Granada delineates nine grades of perfection in the universe, with superior qualities and increased capacities as one ascends towards God. Regarding man's position and faculties, he observes that "en el séptimo ponemos al hombre, que además de lo dicho [de tener vida, sentido y movimiento], tiene razón y entendimiento con que se aventaja y diferencia de todos

[1] A.O. Lovejoy contends, that "it was in the eighteenth century that the conception of the universe as a Chain of Being […] attained their widest diffusion and acceptance" (183).

los brutos. Sobre el hombre ponemos el ángel, que tiene más alto entendimiento y es substancia espiritual apartada de toda materia…" (26).

The relative value of man's position and his precise advantages over those beings below him in this scheme were points of debate for many thinkers of the European Renaissance. Among the most influential accounts of the Great Chain of Being and man's position in it appears in *Theologia Naturalis*, written by the Catalan Raimundo Sabunde between 1434 and 1436. Sabunde endeavors to demonstrate that the human mind has the unique privilege, through the use of God-given reason, to contemplate the order of the universe and to "come to know and to enjoy God" (Green 2: 15). Furthermore, Sabunde optimistically asserted that with this knowledge man could morally refine himself: "among living things, only man is capable of perfecting himself" (Green 2: 128).[2] Some fifty years later, the Italian Neo-Platonist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola exuberantly and controversially asserted that the dignity of man consisted in his uniquely indeterminate position in the universe and his ability, through the use of his free will, to fashion himself as he desired: "Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine" (225).

In contrast to these optimists, some writers expressed a preference for the life of the brutes as compared with the human situation, taking a position that George Boas calls "intellectualist theriophily" (Huges 384). An important point of discourse on this matter centered around Plutarch's dialogue, *Whether the Beasts have the Use of Reason*, in which Ulysses' companion Gryllus, whom Circe had transformed into a hog, refuses to be restored to his human shape.[3] Such prominent thinkers as Laurentius Valla, Machiavelli and Montaigne appeared to promote the idea of the superiority of the animals, much to the dismay of Christian humanists like Juan Luis Vives.[4] In his essay "Apology for Raymond Sebond" Montaigne laments that while nature guides animals with "maternal tenderness" she is a "very unjust stepmother" for humans since she "abandons [us] to chance and fortune" (333).

Unlike many of these writers, Cervantes did not make a definitive or unambiguous statement on the human capacity to educate, refine and perfect oneself. Scholars tend to agree with Américo Castro's view that Cervantes did not share the "naïve and burning faith" of humanists, like Pico, of the early sixteenth century.[5] Thomas Greene,

[2] Otis Green notes that "so excessive is this optimism [that man has the privilege, through the use of free will and the divine gift of grace, to attain understanding and the contemplation of the good and eternal] that the book was temporarily placed on the Index" (2: 128).

[3] Hughes notes that "when the humanists undertook the practical business of education, even the most liberal of them were apt to think in terms of the redemption of youth from the wiles of Circe […]" (386).

[4] See Hughes (385) on the contentious debate about Plutarch's paradox.

[5] "No se piense en modo alguno que presentamos a Cervantes como si fuese un entusiasta humanista de principios de mil quinientos, con fe ardiente e ingenua en los valores naturales que exaltaron

for example, views *Don Quijote* as a powerful attack on the "transforming imagination" that held sway in the Renaissance, bringing this optimistic period to an end: "With the intuitive recognition across the continent that Don Quixote's hope was tragically anachronistic, an age was over" (264). As Timothy Hampton argues, humanist faith in the imitation of exemplary models from history is deflated by the knight's follies: "Cervantes depicts a world in which the imitation of models has run amok, but where the concern for virtue so central to the humanist ideology has virtually vanished" (238). In the *Novelas ejemplares*, however, Cervantes appears to espouse a more optimistic view on the matter, as many of the protagonists overcome their initial brutish vices of jealousy, possessiveness, pride, arrogance and lust to ultimately achieve moral and intellectual refinement.

As several readers have noted, a majority of the transformations of identity that occur in the *novelas* are merely "tropelías," that is, superficial changes of appearance, a façade or mask worn temporarily to make an impression in public.[6] Thomas Hart, for example, views Cervantes as a skeptic of Pico's radical conception and argues that the characters' transformations in the *Novelas ejemplares* are simply instances of "lateral resourcefulness," in opposition to a vertical movement along the Great Chain of Being (102). Steven Boyd similarly notes that the many changes of identity in the *Novelas ejemplares* are "more often partial, incipient or merely aspirational" (22). While it is true that there are many instances of superficial or temporary metamorphoses throughout the *Novelas ejemplares*, for instance Don Juan de Cárcamo's incarnation as a gypsy in *La gitanilla* or Teodosia's stint as a male knight in *Las dos doncellas*, there are also numerous occasions in which Cervantes's protagonists make efforts to transform essential, interior components of their moral and spiritual being. Most importantly for the scope of this study, Cervantes depicts this latter type of transformation with a wide array of images from the natural world.

While the concept of the *scala naturae* was "common property of western Europe of the sixteenth century," a part of the collective mind of the people, modern readers often fail to appreciate the nuances of this far-reaching trope (Tillyard 25). Cervantes's examination of human transformation in the *Novelas ejemplares* is deeply embedded in humanist discourse centered on the Great Chain of Being. Like nearly every major writer of the period, Cervantes rewrites the Circe figure as part of an examination of the competing potentialities inherent in man.[7] Cervantes's version appears in the witch "la Camacha" from *El coloquio de los perros*. Cañizares, who studied under la Camacha's tutelage, claims that "las Eritos, las Circes, las Medeas […] no la igualaron

místicamente a un Mirándola, a un Sannazaro o a Rabelais: esto sería anacrónico y, en último término, amenguaría la poderosa originalidad de Cervantes" (172).

[6] Cañizares, the witch of *El coloquio de los perros*, explains the dogs' current canine appearance as a "tropelía" which she defines thus: "Hace parecer una cosa por otra" (2: 337). The term also appears in *El licenciado Vidriera* (2: 48). For an analysis of *tropelía* and the Aristotelian concept of *Eutrapelia* in the *Novelas ejemplares*, see Bruce Wardropper and Colin Thompson.

[7] See, for example, Ariosto's Alcina, Spenser's Acrasia, Tasso's Armida, among many others.

[a la Camacha]" and that she, "convertía los hombres en animales" (337). While Berganza and Cipión have purportedly been literally transformed into a canine form, in other instances a protagonist's descent to a subhuman level is metaphorical or it manifests in the physiognomy of beast-like characters, like Monipodio of *Rinconente y Cortadillo*.[8] In the pages that follow my aim is to first trace the extreme poles of the spectrum to which characters of the *Novelas ejemplares* ascend and descend; I then turn my focus to *El celoso extremeño*, which, in my estimation, best exemplifies Cervantes's use of detailed patterns of images from the natural world to reflect his protagonist's moral and spiritual education.

In the first two *novelas* alone, Cervantes explores the full range of potential human transformations along the *scala naturae*. In *La gitanilla*, the remarkably independent and precociously philosophical gypsy girl, Preciosa, guides the impetuous aristocrat Juan de Cárcamo in his moral development, encouraging him to overcome serious character defects of jealousy, possessiveness and a superficial conception of love. Despite her "rough upbringing" among the gypsy community, Preciosa is "en extremo cortés y bien razonada;" her wise words, charm, and physical beauty captivate crowds as she sings and her uncanny knowledge and diverse abilities verge on the supernatural[9] (1: 62). The amoebaean song that Juan (Andrés Caballero) and Clemente sing in praise of Preciosa elevates her beyond the habitual human sphere to a celestial and angelic level: Juan asks Clemente to use his "divino ingenio" to contemplate Preciosa's countenance among the "estrellado velo" and later asserts, "la fama yo quisiera/ que le llevara hasta la octava esfera" (1:119-20). Juan indicates that it is only with the divine powers of his soul that Clemente will be able to envision Preciosa's ascent; the latter reaffirms this notion, stating "que no hay humano ingenio que le alabe,/ si no toca en divino" (1: 119). On the celestial ascent of Preciosa's soul, Alban Forcione has noted:

> For the neo-Platonists the translunary world of the empyrean and the spheres of the fixed stars and the planets is the realm of the Cosmic Soul, through which the divine radiance passes before entering the darker realms of nature and matter. (1984, 140)

Juan both highlights Preciosa's Platonic ascent along the Great Chain of Being and demonstrates his own moral development when he sings, "la sirena, que encanta/ y adormece a los más apercibidos;/ y tal es mi Preciosa,/ que es lo menos que tiene ser

[8] David A. Boruchoff argues that Monipodio is represented as "less than fully human" with regards to his moral and intellectual capacities and that the narrator "casts his physiognomy in terms usually reserved for beasts and savages" (380).

[9] A fellow gypsy girl tells Preciosa "tu sabes más que un sabio" (1: 73); her gypsy grandmother states: "Satanás tienes en tu pecho, muchacha ¡mira que dices cosas que no las diría un colegial de Salamanca!" (1: 87); finally, in a self-reflective moment Preciosa notes that "tengo un cierto espiritillo fantástico acá dentro, que a grandes cosas me lleva […] alcanzo más de aquello que mi edad promete, más por mi buen natural que por la experiencia" (1: 85)

hermosa" (1: 120). Preciosa is thus placed at the level of intelligences or angels, whom, as Tillyard explains, were believed to be "identical with those heavenly sirens, who, in Plato, sit upon their spheres and, each singing their different note, compose a harmony of ravishing beauty" (44). Juan's observation that "es lo menos que tiene ser hermosa" demonstrates an important point that he has learned from Preciosa's moral lessons.[10] Forcione highlights this important advance in Juan's being:

> Thus Juan, who begins his courtship by responding to the urgings of his "eyes of the body" ("ojos corporales"), a faculty which, according to the neo-Platonist doctrines of love echoed throughout the poem, pertains to the *anima secunda* or lower soul, has come to perceive his beloved with the highest faculty of his mind […], which unites him most directly with the Cosmic Mind and enables him to contemplate its supercelestial ideas. (1984, 140)

The same language of celestial ascent, moral refinement and the use of one's higher faculties appears in León Hebreo's *Diálogos de amor*: "[Los vulgares] no pueden comprehender otra hermosura que la que los ojos corporales y los oydos comrehenden" (259). Significantly, Cervantes's Neo-Platonic guide, Preciosa, was raised in a 'vulgar' community that throughout the *novela* is associated with beasts and the natural world.[11]Her extraordinary story functions as an illustration of the mysterious transformative potential of human beings and its position as the first *novela* of the collection highlights what will be a central theme of the *Novelas ejemplares*.

If humans are capable of ascending beyond their habitual sphere, as in the case of Preciosa, they also are seen to degenerate to lower life forms in the *Novelas ejemplares*. In line with the conventions of Byzantine romance, *El amante liberal* begins *in medias res* with an unnamed Christian protagonist who laments his condition as a captive of the Ottoman Empire. Northrop Frye underscores several important points about romance formulas: "In the descent there is a growing *isolation and immobility*: charms and spells hold one *motionless*; human beings are turned into *subhuman creatures*, and [...] hero or heroine are trapped in *labyrinths or prisons*" (129, my emphasis). Although the Christian captive, whose name, we soon learn, is Ricardo, does not suffer from any charm or spell, per se, he does suffer from the equally powerful and immaterial curse of unrequited love; furthermore as a captive he

[10] Many of Preciosa's lessons are based on the faculty of vision and its connection to understanding, for example: "Nunca los celos […] dejan el entendimiento libre para que pueda juzgar las cosas como ellas son: siempre miran los celosos con antojos de allende, que hacen las cosas pequeñas grandes; los enanos, gigantes, y las sospechas, verdades" (1: 111)

[11] On several occasions the gypsies are likened to "águilas" whose clutching talons reflect the community's dedication to professional thievery (1: 62, 102); their primitivism and connection to the natural world is highlighted in the gypsy elder's speech that depicts them as "señores de los campos, de los sembrados, de las selvas, de los montes, de las fuentes de los ríos" (1: 101).

is immobile, he refers to his plight as "el confuso laberinto de mis males," and, most importantly for my analysis, he appears to have degenerated to a subhuman level (1: 140).

Grief stricken and perceiving similarities in their current disgraceful and devastated condition, Ricardo seeks solace by attempting to engage the stone ruins of Nicosia in dialogue:

> ¡Oh lamentables ruinas de la desdichada Nicosia, apenas enjutas de la sangre de vuestros valerosos y mal afortunados defensores! Si como carecéis de sentido, le tuviérades ahora, en esta soledad donde estamos, pudiéramos lamentar juntas nuestras desgracias, y quizá el haber hallado compañía en ellas aliviara nuestro tormento. (137)

Cervantes makes reference to Ricardo's metaphoric descent from the human level of the *scala naturae* by highlighting his absent godlike faculty of reason and his beast-like enslavement to his instincts and passions. Like his fossilized interlocutor, Ricardo is immobile and currently without his higher capacities, as the narrator notes: "Propia condición de afligidos que, llevados de sus imaginaciones, hacen y dicen cosas ajenas de toda razón y buen discurso" (1: 137). When Ricardo narrates his failed pursuit of Leonisa to Mahamut he recalls his petrified state, "me quedé como estatua sin voz ni movimiento alguno" (1: 143). In stark contrast to the virtuous man whose will and reason hold his passions in check,[12] Ricardo is unable to control his emotions, as is evidenced in his narration of one of several emotional paroxysms: "Me ocupó el alma una furia, una rabia y un infierno de celos, con tanta vehemencia y rigor, que me sacó de mis sentidos" (1: 143). Similar to Juan from *La gitanilla*, Ricardo's metaphorical descent along the Great Chain of Being is accompanied by a loss of the human faculty of vision; he suffers temporary blindness of his "ojos corporales" ("se me puso una nube ante ellos [los ojos], que me quitó la vista"), but his clouded perception also indicates his failure to employ his higher faculties ("los ojos de entendimiento") (1: 150).

Ricardo's return from a fossilized stratum to his original human level of the *scala naturae* is only possible via sincere and meaningful dialogue with another human being, the apostate Mahamut, who guides him to reflect on his misfortunes with reason and distance. Ricardo's initial conundrum reflects a strain of humanism that stressed the importance of civic engagement in place of solitary contemplation. As the Italian humanist Alessandro Piccolomini argued:

> The man who places himself outside human relationships and flees into the forests and mountains, 'driven by a foolish mood or by misfortune' will have to stoop, as long as he retains the appearance of man, to

[12] On weak-willed men Tillyard observes: "Such a man may forget that reason should rule the passions and, prompted by the stellar influence, may give way to them. In this he becomes near the beasts" (52).

> 'conversing with thorny shrubs and stones'. But even so something will have been subtracted from his human nature; for the 'solitary man will be taken for a wild beast rather than for a man'. (Garin, 173)

Mahamut, who laments his own youthful folly of abandoning his religion and culture,[13] is particularly well suited for the role of sympathetic interlocutor for the rather impetuous Ricardo.[14] Like Ricardo, his "pocos años" led him to a serious "desatino" (religious conversion) that he now regrets; a similar lack of self-control and self-knowledge led him to make impulsive decisions on matters that would have serious life-long consequences (1: 154). Thus, sincere and open discourse with Mahamut helps Ricardo purify his passions and rediscover his human faculties of reason and freewill. This is the first step in Ricardo's character development and the first of a series of obstacles that must be overcome before the tale closes with marital union. In the first two *novelas* of the collection, then, Cervantes establishes the extreme poles to which his human protagonists will ascend and descend; the majority of his characters in the remaining tales, however, are most commonly associated with the level of the beasts, as we shall see in *El celoso extremeño*.

El celoso extremeño

El celoso extremeño is a compelling exploration of the intellectual, spiritual and moral development of the individual and the horrific human potential to mold youth with complete disregard for freewill and subjectivity. Carrizales's perverse attempt to confine and fashion his young bride, "a [sus] mañas," into a form that suits his jealous condition is best appreciated when juxtaposed to the Jesuit schoolmasters of *El coloquio de los perros*, whom Berganza praises as exemplary models embodying honesty, prudence, and profound humility (2: 102, 316). In terms of the *scala naturae*, these two cases illustrate opposing trajectories: under Carrizales's nefarious tutelage, Leonora and the community of servants and slaves that attend her degenerate into a subhuman condition; in contrast, the Jesuit fathers' humanist lessons refine and elevate Berganza beyond his canine position.[15] Berganza admires their commonsensical and good-willed approach to education, which is firmly centered on their pupils' moral development through the study of good letters and examples of virtues and vices.[16] As I aim to demonstrate below, in the figure of Carrizales,

[13] Mahamut refers to "el deseo encendido que tengo de no morir en este estado [de turco] que parece que profeso" (1: 139).
[14] On the topic of character pairs in the *Novelas ejemplares* and its connection to humanist dialogue, see José Montero Reguera.
[15] Berganza illustrates his moral ascendance in two observations: "Domestiquéme con ellos de tal manera que me metían la mano en la boca y los más chiquillos subían sobre mí". He later speaks of eating salad "como si fuera persona" (2: 316).
[16] Alban Forcione has noted that "[the Jesuit fathers'] emphasis on the moral development of the individual through the study of good letters, the rejection of coercion and punishment as instruments of

Cervantes depicts a portrait of a depraved moral and intellectual guide who hinders the development of those in his power, causing their descent along the *scala naturae*.

Readers of *El celoso extremeño* have often noted the abundant use of animal imagery applied to all but the least significant characters of the *novela*. Nevertheless, their observations have typically been limited to noting the prominence of the motif and associating it, in a very general sense, with the descent of the protagonists to a subhuman level where instincts and appetites are unchecked by reason. Careful examination of *El celoso extremeño*, however, reveals Cervantes's nuanced exploration of the connections between humans and beasts and the rich panoply of connotations that these images convey. Kevin Larsen's observation about Cervantes's theater –"his beasts have a metaphorical and even a metaphysical valence that is not always fully recognized or appreciated"– is equally true of the *Novelas ejemplares* (73).

Unlike the "idealistic" *novelas* that, in line with the conventions or romance literature, entail characters with superior morality and elevated spiritual and intellectual development,[17] the characters of *El celoso extremeño* appear to exist at a subhuman level as is reflected in the language Cervantes employs to describe them. Inhabiting the *casapuerta* is Luis, "un negro viejo y eunuco" (2: 104). This antechamber, which functions as an intermediate space separating the interior of the house from the street, is also "una caballeriza para una mula" (2: 103). Of all the confined characters, Luis is enclosed in the tightest and most degrading quarters; he is condemned to care for the mule and is prohibited from entering the patio or the street. Like the beast he cares for, he is sterile and of low intelligence, as Loaysa's effortless manipulation of him thoroughly demonstrates.

The community of female servants and slaves enclosed in Carrizales's house are consistently depicted as an irrational multitude of uncontrolled emotion suffering from an insatiable thirst for new and varied stimuli. Separated from the external world for over a year, their minds have grown dull from a narrow field of sensory experience; as one slave puts it, "me muero por oír una buena voz, que después que aquí nos emparedaron, ni aun el canto de los pájaros habemos oído" (2: 114). It is appropriate, then, that their animal analogues in the *novella* are innocent and subservient creatures incapable of independent or critical thought. Overawed by Loaysa's first song, which they hear through the locked turnstile door, they are described as a "rebaño de mujeres" (2: 115). It is precisely like an entranced and servile flock of sheep that they listen to Loaysa, the "milagroso músico," who plays his intoxicating melodies from behind the turnstile door. Impeded vision, however, only increases their desire to see the "galán": "Rogáronle que hiciese de suerte que ellas le viesen" (2: 116). Loaysa

guidance […] the determination to make education pleasant […] and the advocacy of a practical approach to education which would exploit the child's imitative faculty," reflects Erasmus's convictions on proper education of youth (1984, 149).

[17] See El Saffar and Mancing on how the twelve *novelas* have commonly been classified according to their predominant literary genre.

shrewdly intoxicates the sense-deprived collective, inspiring them to dance "con silencio extraño" in the patio as their master Carrizales sleeps the light slumber that his extreme jealousy dictates nearby (2: 115).

The group gravitates to Loaysa's music like a flock of doves attracted by a lure: "la banda de palomas acudió al reclamo de la guitarra" (2: 117). Similarly, they scatter like doves when Guiomar sounds a false alarm, mistakenly informing them that Carrizales is awake and en route:

> Quien ha visto banda de palomas estar comiendo en el campo sin miedo lo que ajenas manos sembraron, que al furioso estrépito de disparada escopeta se azora y levanta, y olvidada del pasto, confusa y atónita cruza por los aires, tal se imagine que quedó la banda y corro de las bailadoras, pasmadas y temerosas. (2: 126)

Like sheep, doves carry the connotation of innocence and purity, attributes that are reflected in their whiteness. Cervantes highlights their skittishness here, but their capacity for flight and association with the Holy Spirit demonstrates Cervantes's balanced treatment of animal images, employing a range of positive and negative traits, a feature that readers have noted.[18] On another occasion the community of servant and slave girls is referred to as a "caterva," which once again underscores their depiction as an unthinking mass of innocent victims that are easily manipulated by cunning predators (2: 124).

Cervantes depicts lustfulness with animal images, particularly in Marialonso, but also as a nascent instinct in Leonora, on two occasions. As numerous readers have pointed out, the curious visual image of the prostrate *dueña* and *señora* communicating via the *gatera* of the married couple's bedroom metaphorically conveys the moral descent of their betrayal of Carrizales: "Llegándose a la gatera, hallo que estaba Leonora esperando tendida en el suelo de largo a largo, puesto el rostro en la gatera. Llegó la dueña y, tendiéndose de la misma manera, puso la boca en el oído de su señora" (2: 120). Percas de Ponseti calls the scene a "representación gráfica de la bajeza del engaño" (146). Maurice Molho reads the governess and pupil as "dos avatares de un único ser contradictorio –han tenido que abajarse a infrahumanidad, descendiendo a nivel animal" (767). Comparing the earlier (1600) "Porras manuscript" version of the story to the final version published in 1613, Forcione contends that Cervantes made a systematic effort in the latter to "differentiate Leonora from the representatives of uncontrolled instinct [the community of servants and slaves]" (1982, 69). The early version of this particular scene describes Leonora lying on the floor, "puestos los labios […] en los oídos de la dueña," a gesture that for Forcione "recalls the demonic kisses of Loaysa and

[18]Forcione notes that Cervantes has balanced the "positive and negative associations of his animal imagery" such that it "fails to coalesce in any pattern of narrow moralization" (1982, 61). See John 1:32 for the association of doves to the Holy Spirit.

underscores her active participation in the evil plot" (69). What no scholar, to my knowledge, has previously made note of, however, are the specific metaphorical valences that cats had in Roman mythology and later in Christian art and literature and how these characteristics reflect Leonora and Marialonso's condition at this particular moment in the *novela*.

Cats have long been associated with fertility, heretical beliefs and actions, sorcery and lustfulness. In Apuleius's *Golden Ass* witches transform into cats as does the goddess of the underworld, Hecate, according to Ovid. Beryl Rowland notes that in the Christian world, "heretics were accused of worshipping the Devil in the form of the cat" (51). In 1233 Gregory IX wrote of lustful rituals in which devotees would kiss the Devil's feline posterior and proceed to "the most abominable fornication with no regard for shame or relationship, and if more men than women were present they would satisfy their shameful lust together" (qtd. in Rowland 51). When read in light of these traditional associations, Leonora and Marialonso's feline incarnation can be interpreted in more precise terms than simply as a descent to a subhuman condition. Cervantes exploits the connotations of the feral and demonic lustfulness of cats at the precise moment when Marialonso compels her pupil Leonora to undertake an active role in her unchaste plan. In addition, Marialonso is repeatedly depicted in diabolical terms; for example, when she uses "colores retóricos" in an attempt to persuade her inexperienced *señora* of the pleasures and delights she will experience with Loaysa: "Pintóle de cuánto más gusto le serían los abrazos del amante mozo que los del marido viejo, asegurándole el secreto y la duración del deleite, con otras cosas semejantes a éstas, *que el demonio le puso en la lengua*" (2: 129, my emphasis). When she leads Leonora by the hand to the room where Loaysa awaits her she gives them a blasphemous blessing, "con una risa falsa de demonio" (2: 129).[19]

Marialonso's lustfulness, as well as the potential or nascent lust in Leonora, emerges in yet another animal image: that of the chimaera. The song Marialonso sings with Loaysa's accompaniment states: "Es de tal manera/ la fuerza amorosa,/ que a la más hermosa/ la vuelve en quimera" (126). A hybrid creature with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent, the chimaera, as Rowland observes, was "associated with lust or *amoris fluctatio*"(54). Rowland cites from a Vatican mythographer who claimed that the three parts of the animal illustrated the three steps of casual love,

> which invades us ferociously in adolescence like a lion. Then follows the fulfillment of love, designated by the goat because that animal is most prompt in lechery […]. In the posterior parts it is like a dragon, because after the act, the prick of the penance goads the mind. (54-55)

[19] Interestingly, the initial version of the 'Porras manuscript' described the dueña's laugther as that of a monkey: "risa de mono" (Forcione, 1982, 57)

Similarly, Marialonso's song warns that young, impressionable souls, like that of Leonora, are exposed to the most peril: "El pecho de cera, / de fuego la gana" (2: 126).

The animal images that Cervantes chooses for Loaysa foreground the *virote*'s cunning manipulation of others and his deceptive use of language. When he detects Marialonso's sexual desires for him he vows to "ponerla [la mala intención de la dueña] por anzuelo para pescar a su señora" (2: 127). The image is a most effective illustration of Loaysa's character; in his systematic use of deceit to penetrate Carrizales's fortress-house, including his elaborate disguise as a crippled beggar-musician who baits Luis, his tantalizingly veiled initial concert that ignites the passions of the servant and slave girls, and his shrewd manipulation of the final obstacle, Marialonso, he appears precisely as a seasoned hunter who masterfully manipulates his prey's desires in order to fulfill his ultimate objective.

As if to prove his proclamation that deceit is a necessary tool for survival ("todos aquellos que no fueren industriosos y tracistas morirán de hambre"), he dupes the community of servants and slaves with guileful language in his false vow of honorable intentions, swearing to be as obedient as "el más doméstico y enseñado perro" (2: 113, 118). As in previous instances in the *novela*,[20] Loaysa is skillfully exploiting the multivalent nature of language, for his true intentions are certainly canine in nature; they align, however, with the aggressive and instinctual connotations of a dog's late night prowl. Furthermore, as John Beusterien has noted, there is a long history of aversion to dogs in Spain, as is reflected in numerous expressions with decidedly negative connotations and even, perhaps, in the lexical preference for "perro" in place of the more ancient and favorable "can" (99). Finally, Loaysa's use of the term "enseñado perro" brings to the forefront the *novela*'s central motif of education. There are several teacher-disciple relationships in the tale, all of which demonstrate the potential corruption and perversion of misguided instruction. As Forcione points out, these "symmetrical relationships" are "variants on a fundamental pattern of travestied education" (1982, 69). They include Carrizales's intention to fashion his wife "a sus mañas," the *dueña* who, upon triumphantly revealing the procured key to the servants, is raised in the air "como a catedrático," and Loaysa's pledge to teach Luis "en menos de seis días más de seis mil sones," which provokes one servant to question this educative miracle, "si no es algún demonio el que te ha de enseñar, que yo no sé quien te pueda sacar músico con tanta brevedad" (2: 102, 122, 114). Given his cynical and twisted vision of "education," Loaysa's metaphorical self-transformation into "el más doméstico y enseñado perro"only serves to reassure the reader of his devious intentions (2: 118).

[20] Other instances of Loaysa's use of duplicitous language include the promise he makes to the female community at the house's threshold: "Nunca mi intento fue, es, ni será otro que daros gusto y contento en cuanto a mis fuerzas alcanzaren" (2: 123); and his ironic vow to kiss the cross "con mi boca sucia," utilizing the expression of humility, common at the time, to veil the literal impurity of his mouth (2: 119). For an enlightening analysis of the way Loaysa and Carrizales utilize language in opposing manners, see Edwin Williamson.

Carrizales, too, is associated with animal imagery that highlights his moral imperfections and degenerate position in the Great Chain of Being. After spreading the ointment over his body Leonora proclaims that her husband is in a deep slumber, "ronca como animal" (2: 124). Carrizales's beast-like unconsciousness at this particular moment reflects his general lack of awareness of himself, his wife, and of human nature in general. Even after his 'desengaño' Carrizales continues to misperceive the world, for he incorrectly assumes that Leonora has committed adultery with Loaysa. He is correct, however, in recognizing his fatal mistake, and he does so with yet another reference to animal imagery: "Yo fui el que, como el gusano de seda, me fabriqué la casa donde muriese, y a ti no te culpo ¡oh niña mal aconsejada! (2: 133). Significantly, then, at the end of the tale and despite his partial mental clarity, Carrizales fails to fulfill his human potential and remains linked to lower stratum of the *scala naturae*.

In addition to images related to animals, Cervantes uses a rather elaborate collection of images of inanimate materials to examine the spiritual and moral growth of the individual. A motif that appears throughout the *novela* is the opposition of wax and stone, physical materials with distinct properties. Carrizales places his trust in the elevated stone walls that he constructs to impede views from the exterior and to confine Leonora and her servants. His faith rests on the putatively permanent and robust quality of stone such that, "por ninguna vía la industria, ni la malicia humana podía perturbar su sosiego" (2: 105). It is, however, the chameleon-like properties of wax, a material that is malleable when heated and solid when allowed to cool, which ultimately topple Carrizales' fortress. In a literal sense, the 'walled-in' community utilizes wax to overcome the barriers separating them from the exterior world and its varied sensations. Driven by the insatiable desire to see and hear the "milagroso músico," the servants drill a hole in the wall that separates the interior of the house from Luis's entrance chamber; to hide this breach in Carrizales' protective barrier, Loaysa suggests, "que después lo taparían [el agujero] con cera" (2: 116).

Although never fully executed, the prospect of making an impression of the master key in wax and utilizing that mold to make a duplicate key looms large in the *novela* and once again underlines the superiority of wax to stone. Loaysa offers Luis "un pedazo de cera donde las [llaves] imprimiréis," a plan that cannot come to fruition since Carrizales cautiously keeps the only key under his pillow (2: 110). Leonora, however, is uniquely positioned to access the master key. On the climactic night she anxiously awaits with pliable heated wax: "En durmiéndose el viejo, haría por tomarle la llave maestra y sacarla en cera, que ya llevaba preparada y blanda" (2: 120). The metaphorical and literal valences of wax intersect at this significant point in the tale, for the wax in her hand parallels Leonora's young and pliable interior, which is precisely what is at risk of receiving a lasting imprint should Loaysa gain access to the house.

Leonora's young and therefore impressionable soul is associated with wax early in the novela: "La plata de las canas del viejo a los ojos de Leonora parecían cabellos de

oro puro, porque *el amor primero que las doncellas tienen se les imprime en el alma como el sello en la cera*" (2: 106, my emphasis). The image is repeated in Marialonso's song, which warns young women that the perilous force of love's fire can burn one's "pecho de cera" and convert them into a "quimera" (2: 126). Later, Leonora is said to have a "corazón tierno" and that the duenna's convincing speech about the virtues of Loaysa would have moved even a hardened marble heart ("endurecido mármol") (1: 129).[21] Beginning with Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* and reappearing throughout Western history, memory has been depicted in terms of an impression in wax. According to Socrates, one's mind contains a block of wax whose size, consistency, and pliability vary according to each individual and that when we wish to remember something:

> We hold this wax under the perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we might stamp the impression of a seal ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know. (897)

There is a parallel, then, between the key's impression in wax and the impressions stamped into Leonora's malleable being. The fact that she carries out rather detailed preparations to make the impression of the key but does not, in the final and decisive moment, follow through with the plan significantly mirrors the adulterous act that would have left an indelible impression in her soul.

Carrizales's formidable stone enclosure has been an evocative symbol for readers, provoking diverse interpretations of what is often viewed as the central protagonist of the *novella* (Casalduero 176). It has been called "un paraíso artificial" (Avalle-Arce 199); an "islote en plena ciudad del Guadalquivir" (Dunn 91); it has been likened to a harem (Reed 199), a convent, a New World colony, and even to Sancho Panza's *ínsula* (Fernández 974).Through the interpretive lens of the *scala naturae*, Cervantes's potent symbol evokes a subhuman underworld where immobility and the suffocation of life and opportunities for growth has led its human captives to regress to lower stratums of the universe. Such a reading can be substantiated by the repeated references that represent Loaysa as a modern day Orpheus,[22] who, like his ancient Greek precursor, descends to a forbidden underworld in order to regenerate a lifeless soul with the power of music. As Covarrubias explained, the music of Orpheus "movía las selvas y

[21]Cervantes employs this trope on many occasions. In *La gitanilla* Juan says: "Para con ella *es de cera mi alma, donde podrá imprimirlo que quisiere*; y para conservarlo y guardarlo no será como impreso en cera, sino como esculpido en mármoles, cuya dureza se opone a la duración de los tiempos" (1: 84, my emphasis).

[22] Loaysa is referred to as Orpheus on two occasions: when Luis opens the door and allows him to enter the house, "recogió dentro a su Orfeo, y maestro;" and when the dueña praises him, "le alababa y le subía sobre Absalón y sobre Orfeo" (2: 112, 116)

peñas, refrenaba los ríos y amansaba las fieras" (qtd. in Molho, 768). In place of Hades Loaysa descends to Carrizales's fortress, which is repeatedly associated with death and the underworld: upon turning over their daughter to Carrizales, Leonora's parents weep because "les pareció que la llevaban a la sepultura" (2: 104). When Leonora spreads the ointment over Carrizales's body, the narrator states: "Fue lo mismo que haberle embalsamado para la sepultura" (2: 121). Shortly thereafter Leonora proclaims, "[Carrizales] duerme más que un muerto" (2: 121).

One final point that substantiates my reading is Cervantes's use of images from the lowest stratums of the *scala naturae,* namely stones and wax, in a manner that reflects the concept of man as a microcosm of the universe. As Tillyard observes, man had "the unique function of binding together *all* creation, of bridging the greatest cosmic chasm, that between matter and spirit" (emphasis in the original, 60). Man was called the 'little world' because he incorporated both the physical materials and the faculties of every level of the Chain of Being. Leonora's determined will, like the wax that is used to defeat Carrizales's enclosure, proves to be stronger than both the walls that contain her and the will of Loaysa and Carrizales. She resists their attempts to fashion, shape or mold her to their purposes. As James D. Fernández observes: "Carrizales and Loaysa […] overlook or underestimate Leonora's will, agency and resistance; they both seem to assume that if the fortress walls are hurdled, adultery is inevitable" (976).

Insofar as Carrizales's house represents the supreme human folly of attempting to subjugate another's will and hinder an individual's moral, intellectual and spiritual development, it stands among the most memorable images of humanist discourse on education. On the other hand, Leonora's ability to exert her will and to resist the significant external forces that stunt her interior growth reveals Cervantes's vision of human dignity. While the *Novelas ejemplares* reflect the seemingly infinite human propensity to err, they also illustrate the mysterious potential to ascend to a more perfect form.

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