

**A Most Curious Dialogue of Military and Amorous Exploits:
Paolo Giovio and Cervantes's *Novela del curioso impertinente***

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The critical reception of the *Novela del curioso impertinente* has been wildly divergent and at times contradictory.¹ It has been often noted that the internal audience of the novella gives it a mixed review, as Pero Pérez, the priest, questions the verisimilitude of such events transpiring between a husband and wife, although he concedes that its style “no me descontenta” (I.35, 446). And the reaction of contemporary readers was ostensibly negative as well, as the bachiller Sansón Carrasco explains: “Una de las tachas que ponen a la tal historia --dijo el bachiller-- es que su autor puso en ella una novela intitulada *El curioso impertinente*: no por mala ni por mal razonada, sino por no ser de aquel lugar, ni tiene que ver con la historia de su merced del señor don Quijote” (II.3, 63). Ever since then critics have attempted to figure out whether or not this tale is indeed totally out of place in *Don Quijote*, or if its inclusion can be justified.²

In a study published several years ago, I identified some possible sources of the anecdote related in the *Novela del curioso impertinente* of the ermine that allows itself to be captured by hunters rather than besmirching its pristine fur by crossing the enclosure of filth set as a trap (Cull 141-50). I alluded there to a number of interesting parallels to an emblem, or more accurately, an *impresa*, by Paolo Giovio.³ It is my purpose here to argue more forcefully and systematically that the key to understanding a good bit of what is at play in the Cervantine novella depends on a close reading of the image and text that are interwoven into Giovio's masterful device.⁴

¹ Some of the more amusing of these interpretations of the psychology of Anselmo are summarized by Zimic in his chapter on the *Curioso impertinente* (61-62). In his interrogation of Anselmo's motives, Ellis wonders: “Is he a homosexual who vicariously experiences the seduction of Lotario through his wife? Is he a misogynist? Is he impotent?” (178).

² Diana De Armas Wilson reviews many of the internal and external criticisms of the *Novela del curioso impertinente* (9-28; see, especially 9-11). Yvonne Jehenson also contributes some valuable observations on the critical reception of the novella (26-52; see especially 30-31). Juergen Hahn is another critic who ponders the pertinence of the interpolated tale (214), arguing that Cervantes intentionally chose to include the *Curioso* instead of *Rinconete y Cortadillo* due to its “thematically congenial, albeit narratologically awkward relevance” (234). Neugaard too offers a succinct summary of critical response to the tale and also considers as possible sources Cristóbal Villalón's *Crotalón* and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (2-4). La Barbera dedicates all of his chapter four to the sources of the *Curioso impertinente*, rejecting any possible influence of the *Crotalón* and concluding that *the source* [emphasis added] was instead Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (79-101). In a lengthy study of the *Curioso impertinente*, Helena de Percas Ponseti considers as sources Ariosto, the *Crotalón*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the satirical dialogues of Lucian, and even St. Anselm's *De Veritate* as a source of philosophical inspiration (I: 193-202). This study is also valuable for its review of several controversies surrounding the novella, including its pertinence (I: 182-188) and its exemplariness (I: 188-191). Morón Arroyo goes so far as to state that all attempts to justify the insertion of the novella in *Don Quijote* “son penas de amor perdidas” (163). On the pertinence question, see also the chapter “La pertinencia de *El curioso impertinente*” in Marías.

³ Susan Byrne has devoted several studies to the possible influence of other works by Giovio on Cervantes and *Don Quijote* (Byrne 2009 and 2010).

⁴ No one understanding of any work by Cervantes can claim to be definitive. The *Curioso impertinente* has been artfully read and interpreted by many critics who have appreciated different dimensions from those analyzed here. E. Michael Gerli provides one especially insightful reading when he notes that “Cervantes cleverly situates the work at the mid-point between truth and lies, at the very intersection of poetry and history [...] ‘El Curioso’ exists to explore

Giovio, a Humanist physician, prelate, biographer and historian, first published his *Dialogo dell'impresse militari et amorose di Monsignor Giovio Vescovo di Nocera* in Rome in 1551. A second Italian edition appeared in 1556 in Venice with a different title and an introduction by Girolamo Ruscelli: *Ragionamento di Mons. Paolo Giovio sopra i motti e i disegni d'arme e d'amore che comunemente chiamiamo Imprese, Con un discorso di Girolamo Ruscelli, intorno allo stesso soggetto, appresso Giordano Ziletti all'insegna della stella*. The first Spanish translation of Giovio's book, *Diálogo de las empresas militares, y amorosas, compuesto en lengua italiana* [...], was published by Alfonso de Ulloa⁵ in 1561.

If Capra's approximate date of 1525 for Ulloa's birth is correct, he would have been 33 years old when he signed his dedication to his Maecenas, Francisco de la Torre, "del Consejo del Emperador, y su Embaxador acerca della Illustrissima Señoría de Venetia,"⁶ on June 15th, 1558. This does not seem to jibe, however, with his claim of having journeyed his way "hasta l'adolescente edad en que agora me hallo" (f. 2r). In any event, his tireless search for patronage to reward his efforts would certainly have resonated with the often destitute Cervantes, who debased himself so obsequiously on numerous occasions in search of a generous patron: "Confiado en que por el camino encontraría con algún Señor liberal, y generoso, que me amparasse, y ayudasse, viendo mi zelo, y sancta intención" (f. 2v).

The printer of the translation, Guilliemo Rouille, explains in a preliminary document, "Gvill Rovillio Impressor al Benévolo Lector", that he had received from Ludovico Domenichi three years earlier a copy of Giovio's work written in Tuscan and illustrated, along with a "Razonamiento" penned by Domenichi, which he then prepared for publication. In the process, shortly before writing this document, Rouille came across Ulloa's Spanish translation printed by Gabriel Giolito de Ferrariis (Venice, 1558), though unillustrated ("menguada de figuras", n. p.). Therefore, since he had the illustrations at hand, and since his Spanish friends in León de Francia (Lyon) insisted on it so vociferously, he agreed to illustrate the Ulloa translation, corrected by his friend and neighbor, Hernán Pérez.⁷

The book then is presented as a dialogue, a form widely cultivated by Renaissance Humanists,⁸ with Bishop Giovio and Ludovico Domenichi as the interlocutors. It begins with Giovio explaining to Cosimo de Medici, the Duke of Florence from 1537-1574, that the stifling heat of August has caused him to put aside the burdensome chronicle he was writing in order to converse on various topics with Domenichi (1). One of the topics of conversation that gave rise to the treatise was the "inuenciones, y empresas, que los grandes Señores, y Caualleros esforçados suelen traer en nuestros tiempos, en sus vestidos, libreas, y vanderas, para significar parte de sus generosos y altos pensamientos" (2). The dialogue's point of departure, then, is the

the problematics of the truth and to probe the border that delineate fact from fable, the lines that set off art from nature" (109).

⁵ Relatively little is known about Alonso de Ulloa, a native of Galicia who took up residence in Venice around 1546 and established himself as a prolific editor of classical Spanish texts in their original language and translator of works into Italian and Spanish. His name appears as the corrector and reviser in the colophon of the 1568 edition of Jorge de Montemayor's *La Diana* (Venice: Cosme de Trino e Monferrato). For more on Ulloa, see Daniela Capra's article.

⁶ With the exceptions of resolving ligatures and modernizing accentuation, I respect the original orthography.

⁷ As indicated by the complete title of the book, this volume includes not only Ulloa's Spanish translation of Giovio, but also his translation of Domenichi's *Razonamiento*, a theoretical disquisition on famous imprese presented in the form of a conversation between the interlocutors Pompeo della Barba, Arnaldo Arlenio and Ludouico Domeniqui, which is followed by his translation into Spanish of Gabriele Simeoni's *Les Devises, ou Emblèmes héroïques, et morales*, (G. Rouillé, Lyon, 1559), with the title: *Devisas o emblemas heroicas y morales hechas por el noble varón Gabriel Symeon, al muy illystre señor el Condestable de Francia*.

⁸ See Ana Martínez Aracón's introductory study (9-31).

antiquity of the use of imprese and blazons, with Giovio explaining that the ancients wore them on their shields and helmets (3). It is interesting that Giovio mentions the imprese adopted by many of Don Quixote's heroes: "Los valientes doze pares de Francia [...] que cada vno dellos traxo particular empresa, y blasón; como Roldán vn Quartel; Reinaldos un León Vandado; Danés un Escalón, Salamón de Bretaña un Axedrez, Oliueros un Grifón, Astolfo un Leopardo, y Ganó, un Halcón. Lo mesmo se lee de los Caualleros de la Tabla redonda de Artús el esclarecido Rey de Inglaterra. Usáronlo assí mesmo los muy valientes, y esforçados Caualleros Amadís de Gaula, Primaleón, Palmerín, y Tirante el Blanco" (4).⁹

Giovio continues on to discuss the more modern invention of the impresa as coat of arms to declare one's illustrious lineage: "Agora en esta edad más moderna [...] se introduxo en costumbre las insignias de los linages, que llamamos armas, dados por los Príncipes, por merecimiento delas sanctas empresas, hechas en la guerra, sólo para ennoblecer, y honrar los esforçados Caualleros" (4). Giovio then elaborates the five conditions or aspects that an impresa must have in order to attain perfection:

La primera justa proporción de ánima, y de cuerpo. La segunda, que no sea tan obscura, que sea menester llamar la Síbila para entenderla; ni tan clara, que cualquier hombre vulgar la entienda. La tercera, que sobre todo tenga hermosa vista, la qual parece alegre y muy hermosa. [...] La quarta no le conuiene ninguna forma humana. La quinta, y vltima ha menester vn mote, ques el ánima del cuerpo, y quiere ser ordinariamente de vna lengua diuersa del Idioma del que haze la empresa, por quel sentido sea algo más cubierto: quiere assí mesmo ser breue, pero no tanto que se haga dudoso; de manera, que dos, o tres palabras quadran muy bien; saluo si no fuessen en forma de verso entero, o de pie quebrado. (6)

As the dialogue progresses, with Domenichi asking questions and Giovio responding, examples of both good and ridiculous imprese are offered and interpreted by the two speakers. But the reader must use caution, for the commentary immediately above or below an illustration in this particular book does not necessarily correlate to the image on that page. This is in fact the case with our impresa of the ermine rendered motionless by a wall of mud or dung.

⁹ Don Quijote describes for Sancho the imprese sported by many of the knights who fight in the battle between Pentapolín del Arremangado Brazo and Alifanfarón de la Trapobana (I.18, 219-220).



Y porque se ha de seguir la orden de la nobleza, os quiero dezir las empresas de los quatro vltimos Reyes de Aragón, y entre las otras lo que queria dezir el libro abierto, que fue la empresa del Rey don Alonso primero. DOM. Que libro fue esse *Non Señor? IO VIO*. Este Rey Don Alonso traxo por empresa vn libro abierto, como os he dicho, el qual no teniendo anima de ningún mote, muchos dudauan, y no sabian que queria dezir; y por que fue Rey muy virtuoso, y dechado, y resplandor del arte militar, y de la erudicion, y en de platica del gouierno ciuil, quien dezia vna cosa, y quien otra; pero acabó la mayor parte de la gente adeuinò, que queria dezir, que la libertad era la cosa mas preciosa, que podia tener el hombre, y assi como prudente, y sabio nunca jamas se quiso casar,
 por no

The *pictura* shows a crown suspended in the air above an ermine surrounded by a wall of mud or dung, with the motto *Malo mori quam foedari*, indicating that it would rather die than sully itself.¹⁰ A reader familiar with normal emblem book practice fully expects that the text on the page below the image, the *subscriptio*, would offer an explication of the emblem's meaning. In this case, however, the two interlocutors are discussing a different *impresa* not illustrated: that of king Alonso, consisting of an open book without a motto. A cursory glance at the page then by someone expecting the normal structure of emblem books of the period might lead the reader to mistakenly attribute the interpretation of Alonso's device to the visual image of the ermine depicted on the page: "Que quería dezir, que la libertad era la cosa más preciosa, que podía tener el hombre, y assí como prudente, y sabio nunca jamás se quiso casar, por no hazerse sieruo, casándose" (28-29).

The actual subject of the device of the ermine illustrated on page 28 is clarified on the following page. It represents Fernando I de Nápoles, the bastard son of king Alfonso V of Aragón. According to Giovio, the *impresa* symbolizes the clemency¹¹ that Fernando displayed towards his treacherous brother-in-law, who allied himself with John of Anjou in the latter's attempt to usurp the crown of Naples. Fernando (or Ferrante), instead of executing the ungrateful Marino de Marçano, had him imprisoned, and as evidence of his clemency, adopted the *impresa* of the "armiño, cercado de vn reparo de estiércol, con un mote, que dezía, MALO MORI QVAM FOEDARI, siendo de tal naturaleza el Armiño que quiere más presto padecer la muerte, y hambre, y sed, que ensuziarse, siéndole forçado para huir, que passe por lugares suzios, por no ensuziar la blancura, y limpieza de su blanca piel" (29). It is difficult to comprehend the connection between this *impresa* and the attribute of clemency. Indeed, the erroneous meaning of freedom from the bonds of matrimony seems more logical and appropriate, given the ermine's entrapment within a wall of dung. For these reasons it is easy to understand how one might think that the commentary found beneath the emblematic *pictura* of the ermine applies to it.

It is my contention that Cervantes crafted a great deal of his *Novela del curioso impertinente* as a ludic and metaliterary reshaping of both the title of Giovio's book of *impreses* and the content of the device dedicated to Fernando I. Let us begin our analysis with a consideration of how Cervantes plays with the title. The entire novella can be viewed as a series of dialogues of military and amorous exploits. These dialogues occur primarily among the three main protagonists, whose conversations revolve around amorous pursuits, or undertakings. And the siege on Camila's virtue is couched systematically in a militaristic lexicon.

The anecdote of the ermine that is voiced by Lotario in order to dissuade Anselmo from his rash determination accords perfectly with the pictorial depiction in Giovio's *impresa*:

¹⁰ An almost identical emblem, minus the crown, and with practically the same motto ("*Mori malo quam foedari*") appeared in the *Symbola et emblemata* (Centuria, I: 1590, II: 1595, III: 1596, IV: 1604) published by Joachim Camerarius the Younger (the fourth Centuria was issued posthumously by his son). It is clear that the picture and motto were taken from Giovio. The brief textual *subscriptio* printed below the emblem has some possible bearing on the *Curioso impertinente*, because it comments on the mortal cost of honor (Cull 145-46).

¹¹ Jacob Burckhardt reveals that the alleged *clemency* of imprisonment may well have been instead an excuse to sadistically torture his brother-in-law: "Besides hunting, which he practiced regardless of all rights of property, his pleasures were of two kinds: he liked to have his opponents near him, either alive in well-guarded prisons, or dead and embalmed, dressed in the costume which they wore in their lifetime. He would chuckle in talking of the captives with his friends, and make no secret whatever of the museum of mummies. His victims were mostly men whom he had got into his power by treachery; some were even seized while guests at the royal table. His conduct to his prime minister, Antonello Petrucci, who had grown sick and grey in his service, and from whose increasing fear of death he extorted 'present after present,' was literally devilish" (cited from online edition).

Cuentan los naturales que el arminio es un animalejo que tiene una piel blanquísima, y que cuando quieren cazarle, los cazadores¹² usan deste artificio: que, sabiendo las partes por donde suele pasar y acudir, las atajan con lodo, y después, ojeándole, le encaminan a trueco de no pasar por el cieno y perder y ensuciar su blancura, que la estima en más que la libertad y la vida. La honesta y casta mujer es arminio, y es más que nieve blanca y limpia la virtud de la honestidad; y el que quisiere que no la pierda, antes la guarde y conserve, ha de usar de otro estilo diferente que con el arminio se tiene, porque no le han de poner delante el cieno de los regalos y servicios de los importunos amantes, porque quizá, no tiene tanta virtud y fuerza natural que pueda por sí mesma atropellar y pasar por aquellos embarazos; y es necesario quitárselos y ponerle delante la limpieza de la virtud y la belleza que encierra en sí la buena fama. (I.33, 408-09)

In the context of the interpolated tale, the precious and easily tainted fur of the ermine is of course Camila's virtue, and the family honor. She is surrounded by an enclosure of mud, or dung that is both a fortress that must be penetrated from the outside by the constant onslaught of Lotario's relentless siege as well as the obstacle of public opinion and societal norms that keep her fenced in and constrains her from straying.

Part of what is at play in the Cervantine novella, that I believe to be a palimpsest written over the impresa by Giovio, is a constant punning on the double nature of the word *empresa*. In the entry for the verb *emprender* in the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, Covarrubias Horozco defines both the verb and the noun derived from it: "Determinarse a tratar algún negocio arduo y dificultoso [...] y de allí se dijo *empresa* el tal acometimiento. Y porque los caballeros andantes acostumbraban pintar en sus escudos, recamar en sus sobrevestes, estos designios y sus particulares intentos, se llamaron empresas; y también los capitanes en sus estandartes cuando iban a alguna conquista. De manera que *empresa* es cierto símbolo o figura enigmática hecha con particular fin, enderezada a conquistar lo que se va a pretender y conquistar o mostrar su valor y ánimo."¹³

The military terminology employed throughout the *Novela del curioso impertinente* is striking almost from its very inception. Even before Lotario has agreed to the undertaking proposed by Anselmo, the latter refers to "esta tan ardua empresa" (I.33, 403) as a "batalla" (I.33, 403; I. 33, 418) and "amorosa batalla" (I.33, 404). It is hardly coincidental, I think, that Lotario meets his death "en una batalla" (I.35, 446). The word *empresa* is evoked constantly in the novella (I. 33, 412; I. 33, 415; I.34, 419; I.34, 421). Synonyms of the military verb *emprender* include *acometer*¹⁴ and *intentar*, and these are interspersed with great frequency in the interpolated tale as well. For example, Lotario asserts that

el *intentar* las cosas de las cuales antes nos puede suceder daño que provecho es de juicios sin discurso y temerarios, y más cuando quieren *intentar* aquellas a que no son forzados ni compelidos, y que de muy lejos traen descubierto que el *intentarlas* es manifiesta locura.

¹² I would suggest that it is no accident that Lotario's favorite pastime was the hunt (I.33, 399), since it is he who uses all his wiles to coax Camila out of the fortress of her virtue. Zimic also calls attention to hunting imagery in the tale and Lotario's predilection for the hunt, especially in pursuit of his "empresas' libertinas" (65).

¹³ The *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1732) is even more explicit in associating the verb with military exploits: "*Emprender*: Determinarse tratar y hacer alguna cosa ardua y dificultosa: como una facción militar, una conquista, etc."

¹⁴ "Acometer: Arrojar con ímpetu contra el enemigo y ganándole por la mano; acometimiento, el tal hecho" (*Tesoro de la lengua*). "Intentar: probar a hacer alguna cosa con fin dudoso" (*Tesoro de la lengua*).

Las cosas dificultosas *se intentan* por Dios, o por el mundo, o por entrambos a dos: las que *se acometen* por Dios son las que *acometieron* los santos, *acometiendo* a vivir vida de ángeles en cuerpos humanos, las que *se acometen* por respeto del mundo. [...] Estas cosas son las que suelen *intentarse*, y es honra, gloria y provecho *intentarlas*. (I.33, 406, emphasis added)

What is more, the campaign waged against the battlements of Camila's virtue is described in part with the term *asaltos* (I.33, 406; I. 33, 417; I.34, 437).

The novella also includes a number of extended metaphors based on military terminology. For example, we read: "Vióse Lotario puesto en la *estacada* que su amigo deseaba, y con el *enemigo* delante, que pudiera *vencer*, con sola su hermosura a un *escuadrón* de caballeros *armados*..." (I.33, 413, emphasis added). Another case of an extended metaphor structured on a military lexicon describes Lotario's resolve to undertake the siege on the fortress that guards Camila's virtue: "Finalmente, a él le pareció que era menester, en el espacio que daba la ausencia de Anselmo, apretar *el cerco* a aquella *fortaleza*. Y así, *acometió* a su presunción con las alabanzas de su hermosura, porque no hay cosa que más presto *rinda* y *allane las encastilladas torres* de la vanidad de las hermosas que la mesma vanidad, puesta en las lenguas de la adulación. En efecto, él, con toda diligencia, *minó la roca* de su entereza con tales *pertrechos*, que, aunque Camila fuera toda de bronce, *viniera al suelo*" (I. 34, 419, emphasis added). In a general sense, then, Cervantes structures the whole of his curious tale as a series of dialogues on military and amorous undertakings, in clear homage, I believe, to the title of Giovio's book.

Let us return once again to the motifs, motto and authorial explication of Giovio's *impresa* to understand how Cervantes incorporates them into the narrative fabric of the *Novela del curioso impertinente*. The pictorial motifs include a crown, the ermine and the wall of mud or dung that surrounds it. It appears to be no coincidence that Cervantes evokes the word "corona" on several occasions in the novella, quite often in an ironic context. For example, Lotario praises Camila to Anselmo as a woman who "dignamente puede ser ejemplo y corona de todas las mujeres buenas" (I.34, 420). Anselmo, in turn, explains to his friend that he can only appreciate a woman whose virtue has been tested, and who as a result has earned the "corona del vencimiento" (I.33, 403). And in the play that Camila, Lotario and Leonela put on to deceive the hidden Anselmo, the servant praises her swooned mistress as "la flor de la honestidad del mundo, la corona de las buenas mujeres, el ejemplo de la castidad" (I. 34, 430).

The ermine itself is mentioned only once in the Curioso impertinente, in the anecdote cited above. However, Cervantes does continue to evoke allusions to the attributes embodied by the ermine, as specified in Giovio's *explicatio*, as we have already seen: "Siendo de tal naturaleza el Armiño que quiere más presto padecer la muerte, y hambre, y sed, que ensuziarse, siéndole forçado para huir, que passe por lugares suzios, por no ensuziar la blancura, y limpieza de su blanca piel." That is to say, then, the ermine so prizes its whiteness and cleanliness that it makes no attempt to flee the trap of the hunters. Camila then, the ermine or pursued quarry in the Cervantine tale, makes no attempt to flee the trap laid by her hunters, Anselmo and Lotario: "En fin, se resolvió [...] en el quedarse, con determinación de no huir la presencia de Lotario" (I. 34, 419). And she even places blame on herself for not fleeing occasion in the drama she stages to deceive Anselmo, lamenting "el poco recato que he tenido del huir la ocasión" (I. 34, 433).

The precise moment when the fortress of Camila's virtue topples is marked stylistically by the use of the rhetorical device of chiasmus, a form of antithesis, or "a reversal in the order of words so that the second half of a statement balances the first half in inverted word order" (Shaw 73). It is quite literally a visual and verbal realization of the topos of the world topsy-turvy: "Rindióse Camila, Camila se rindió" (I.34, 420). And this lost purity is attributed ironically to

Camila's not fleeing: "Ejemplo claro que nos muestra que sólo se vence la pasión amorosa con huilla" (I.34, 420). When Camila does finally flee her husband's house, thus abandoning her matrimonial vows, at the end of the novella, it leads only to another walled enclosure, that of the convent, and then to her death.

The first mention of the ermine's whiteness and cleanliness after Lotario relates the anecdote occurs almost immediately: "La honesta y casta mujer es arminio, y es más que nieve blanca y limpia la virtud de la honestidad" (I. 33, 409). However, since Camila ultimately succumbs to desire, she cannot claim the ermine's purity. It is only in the mock lines of her staged play that she protests her cleanliness: "Limpia entré en poder del que el cielo me dio por mío; limpia he de salir dél, y cuando mucho, saldré bañada en mi casta sangre y en la impura del más falso amigo que vio la amistad en el mundo" (I. 34, 431).

The wall of mud or dung is the last of the motifs in the *impresa* that is echoed in the *Curioso impertinente*. Giovio's precise terminology for what is depicted iconographically in the *impresa* is that the ermine is "cercado de vn reparo de estiércol." The word *cerca* in Spanish means 'wall.' *Cerco*, in addition to being a circular enclosure, also has military connotations. Covarrubias Horoco explains that the verb "*cercar*, en otro sentido, es poner cerco sobre algún lugar fuerte y sitiarse" (*Tesoro de la lengua*). This is the sense we find in the *Novela del curioso impertinente*, as part of the extensive use of figurative language of a military nature. We have already seen Lotario's decision to "apretar el cerco a aquella fortaleza" (I. 34, 419). This same phrase is repeated almost verbatim later in the same chapter, in Leonela's advice to Camila: "Por la mañana suele poner el cerco a una fortaleza, y a la noche la tiene rendida, porque no hay fuerza que le resista" (I.34, 424). Giovio's motto, finally, of *Malo mori quam foedari* ("Antes morir que ensuciarme") is paraphrased by Cervantes as "se está quedo y se deja prender y cautivar, a trueco de no pasar por el cieno y perder y ensuciar su blancura, que la estima en más que la libertad y la vida." (I.33, 408-09)

What then does the *Novela del curioso impertinente* mean with respect to both the Giovio *impresa* and the larger frame of *Don Quijote*? Is it indeed out of place, as Sansón Carrasco contends, and a work "que tendrá necesidad de comento para entenderla" (I.3, 64) as don Quijote fears? As is so typical of the exemplary novels of Cervantes, *La novela del curioso impertinente* is fundamentally a tale of the clash of human desire (capitulation to the sexual instinct) and honor (as embodied in matrimony, the social institution to curb and channel desire). Indeed, the words "deseo" and "honra" occur some 38 and 54 times respectively (their variants included) in the course of the novella. This is clearly no coincidence. Let us recall that the tale is read at the inn, and its audience includes among others Cardenio and Dorotea, both of whom are on the verge of marrying partners who in the eyes of society have already tarnished their honor, as well as the already married inkeeper and his wife, whose marriage seems to be unhappy. She must contend, after all, with the "cola [...] toda pelada, que no puede servir para lo que la quiere mi marido" (I.35, 441). The novella can be read an exemplary warning of the evils that befall a legendary friendship once one of the friends marries. If Cervantes was one of those readers who mistakenly concluded that the meaning of Giovio's *impresa* was "que la libertad era la cosa más preciosa, que podía tener el hombre, y assí como prudente, y sabio nunca jamás se quiso casar, por no hazerse sieruo, casándose" (28-29), then its inclusion at this juncture of *Don Quijote* makes perfect sense.

Although the *Novela del curioso impertinente* might just be obscure enough to require commentary, as don Quijote feared, this is a trait recommended and indeed obligatory for a good

impresa, as Giovio explains. The pitfalls of human desire can ensnare even the most cautious lovers, as the novella proves: “Desire and deception extend metonymically through the characters, always promising gain when, in fact, they only accumulate increasingly imminent potential for betrayal” (Pérez 95). The tale’s reading at the inn is not at all out of place, but rather a strategic and exemplary warning to the young couples on the verge of reconciliation about the hidden dangers of marriage.¹⁵ And what is more, it is a confirmation that don Quijote’s refusal to marry the Princesa Micomicoma just prior to the novella’s narration (I.30, 377), is the prudent course of action, in spite of Sancho’s protestations.

Don Quijote is not the only work in which Cervantes evokes the anecdote of the ermine as found in Giovio. In the first chapter of book 4 of *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, at an inn a day’s journey away from Rome, “Periandro” and “Auristela” meet a pilgrim, an erudite man who defines himself, interestingly, as “un hombre curioso” (416). He is a man who has devoted his earlier years to the “ejercicio de la guerra” and his more mature years to that of “las letras”. This curious man of “armas y letras” explains an ingenious plan he has concocted: “Y es que a costa ajena quiero sacar un libro a luz, cuyo trabajo sea, como he dicho, ajeno, y el provecho mío. El libro se ha de llamar: *Flor de aforismos peregrinos*, conviene a saber, sentencias sacadas de la misma verdad” (416). He asks strangers that he meets on the road to jot down any witty sayings or aphorisms they know in a *cartapacio* that he carries with him. All the guests at the inn agree to add to the project. When it is Belarminia’s turn, she contributes: “La mujer ha de ser como el armiño, dejándose antes prender que enlodarse” (418). If my reading of the relationship between Giovio and *El curioso impertinente* is correct, then the Cervantine novella, derivative of Giovio’s book of imprese, constitutes a book that is indeed the work of another, but the benefits accrue to Cervantes.

¹⁵ In my 2002 article on this topic I postulated that Cervantes may have also had in mind Alciato’s emblem LXXIX *Lascivia*, which features a temptress garbed in ermine pelts who is being watched by two ermines or sables (Alciato’s Latin calls them white mice, which they clearly are not) at her feet on the ground. Diego López interpreted this emblem of lust or wantonness in his commentary to Alciato’s emblem to be a reprimand of those women who dress in such a way as to entice men’s thoughts toward the delights of the flesh. If marriage exists in part as the social institution that sanctions and controls the expression of erotic urges, then the interpretation of this episode as a warning against marriage is further strengthened (Cull 144).

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