

# Dialogue and Exemplarity in Montaigne and Cervantes

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*Le plus fructueux et naturel exercice de nostre esprit,  
c'est à mon gré la conférence.*

—Montaigne (III: 8)

Cervantes and Montaigne are key figures in a broad humanistic tradition, one which had its greatest bloom around the turn of the seventeenth century, and atrophied within the restrictive atmosphere of Counter-Reformation Europe. Major concerns include humanity's tenuous position between the divine and the bestial; the imagination's creative but also disordering potential; the disjunctions between mental constructs and reality; a distaste for pedantry and presumption, a satirical inclination coupled with an awareness of one's own folly; profound doubts regarding perfectibility, but an underlying confidence in humankind's potential for moral and intellectual improvement.<sup>1</sup> Through this tradition we observe how skeptical and civically engaged minds contributed and reacted to the gradual erosion of belief in a harmoniously ordered universe, with its fixed hierarchies and transcendent truths. The process, catalyzed by the momentous discoveries and schisms of the period, has been described in a number of ways: the shift from feudalism to absolutism, from aristocratic to mercantilist mentalities, from individual heroism to bureaucratic systematizing, the rise of "mass" and "directed" culture, the "civilizing process."<sup>2</sup> The instability, angst and sense of crisis unleashed by these shifts

were accompanied by a sense of novel possibility and freedom, which lead to emancipation in some quarters, repressive reactions in others.

Both Cervantes and Montaigne are keenly interested in what is gained and lost when the individual forms part of the “rational order” of society, with all of its harmonizing and homogenizing pressures. When Sancho shares the *bota* and rustic fare with Ricote and his fellow “pilgrims” in *Don Quijote* (II, 54), Cervantes suggests a natural bond between men despite the painful divisions caused by Spain’s expulsion of the moors (1609), an exclusionary policy he ostensibly supports. Wrenched by the civil wars of France, Montaigne repeatedly promotes a humane, accommodating ethic that contrasts with the polarizing imperatives of aristocratic honor and religious extremism. Cervantes and Montaigne examine different types of human community, from the civic space of the main square to the private banquet table, from the “official society” of the court to drinking partners on the road. Both writers depict the solitary, private individual as in many ways the freest and most authentic; but they also endorse the limitations and artificiality of participating in the civic sphere.

Focusing on dialogue and exemplarity from Erasmus and Castiglione through Navarre and Montaigne, Rigolot traces how the traditional dynamic of authoritative models imposed on a pliant audience is superseded by texts in which the controlling ideology of the author gives way to an activated reader. The waning of exemplarity, as veneration of static models and precepts is increasingly replaced by a receptiveness to the contingency and flux of lived experience, brings a renewed vitality to dialogue. The form opens up as interlocutors are no longer foils to the affirmation of a dominant figure acting as a surrogate to the author.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the liberated individual is also a burdened one, faced with the challenges of judgment and interpretation. As the agreed-upon values and homogeneity of the depicted communities erode, the implied reader becomes increas-

ingly isolated and disoriented. At the late stage of this trajectory, the optimistic sense of civic engagement through dialogue and rational persuasion collapses in a renewed assertion of pure rhetoric. "As the traditional faith in *consensus omnium* is shaken," writes Rigolot, "Hobbes will try to demonstrate the necessity of promoting arbitrary standards of judgment and the impossibility of making decisions through dialogic confrontation and the shared exercise of practical reason" (17). While the Spaniards Gracián and Calderón de la Barca might be compared with the Machiavellian and Hobbesian positions at the end of the process described by Rigolot, I will argue that Cervantes possesses the sort of mature skepticism but continued belief in dialogue associated with Montaigne.<sup>4</sup> In the writings of both men, substantive claims can come from unexpected sources, and the unruly narrative forms, which change direction by spontaneous association and argumentative counter-point, bespeak a genuinely dialogic discourse. Such a discourse can be produced by the interplay of characters or, as in the case of Montaigne, within a single narrative voice. With both Montaigne and Cervantes, a crucial dialogue is the one established between author and reader. As we shall examine below, the reader is both solitary and accompanied, and the act of reading cultivates within our own minds dialogic habits of thought. Unfortunately, such voices for relative tolerance, flexibility and moderation were in many ways drowned out as the political and religious tensions of the seventeenth century called for more definitive assertions of identity and power, and correspondingly reductive conceptions of the human subject.

### **I. External Order and Interior Authenticity**

In the prologues to *Don Quijote* and the *Novelas ejemplares* Cervantes sets forth striking images of the individual at leisure. *Don Quijote* posits an independent, private reader, suggesting an unprecedented freedom of interpretation as well as a potentially subversive subject:

... y tienes tu alma en tu cuerpo y tu libre albedrío como el más pintado, y estás en tu casa, donde eres señor della, como el rey de sus alcabalas, y sabes lo que comúnmente se dice, que debajo de mi manto, al rey mato. Todo lo cual te esenta y hace libre de todo respeto y obligación, y así, puedes decir de las historia todo aquello que te pareciere, sin temor que te calunien por el mal ni te premien por el bien que dijeres della. (I, Prólogo)

It is not only the *reception* that takes place in a private, solitary venue. Engendered by the author's "estéril y mal cultivado ingenio," the work itself is ". . . lleno de pensamientos varios y nunca imaginados de otro alguno, bien como quien se engendró en una cárcel, donde toda incomodidad tiene su asiento y donde todo triste ruido hace su habitación . . ." Misgivings regarding solitude emerge even as Cervantes celebrates the privacy of the reader. In addition to creativity unbridled by artistic tradition and social convention, the interior spaces signify confinement and isolation. The ambiguous, shifting images—prison cell/home—indicate the tenuous balance between originality, freedom and self-expression on the one hand; on the other, monstrosity, lunacy and solipsism.

The prologue to the *Novelas ejemplares* apparently signals a completely different (and more conventional) conception of leisure:

Heles dado el nombre de ejemplares, y si bien lo miras, no hay ninguna de quien no se pueda sacar algún ejemplo provechoso; y si no fuera por no alargar este sujeto, quizá te mostrara el sabroso y honesto fruto que se podría sacar así de todas juntas como de cada una de por sí. Mi intento ha sido poner en la plaza de nuestra república una mesa de trucos donde cada uno pueda llegar a entretenerse, sin daño de barras; digo, sin daño del alma ni el cuerpo, porque los ejercicios honestos y agradables antes aprovechan que dañan.<sup>5</sup>

If *Don Quijote* presents a leisure activity that is solitary, free and unpredictable, the *Novelas ejemplares* set forth a game that would, in the clear light of day, promote social cohesion through

the pleasurable interaction of citizens in the public sphere. It is, moreover, a realm of experience that has its natural place alongside more serious endeavors: “Sí que no siempre se está en los templos [. . .] no siempre se asiste a los negocios, por calificados que sean. Horas hay de recreación, donde el afligido espíritu descanse.” The question of leisure is closely related to the social vision depicted in the works. A major concern in our consideration of Cervantes and Montaigne is the extent to which the retreat into the internal, domestic space signals a loss of confidence in the public sphere. Both writers register the severe challenges posed to the humanist ideal of congenial social interaction, which balances individual freedom with consensual submission to rules and structure.

In “De l’institution des enfans,” Montaigne advocates the civic benefits of leisure in terms strikingly similar to those deployed by Cervantes in the *Novelas ejemplares*:

Les bonnes polices prennent soing d’assembler les citoyens et les r’allier, comme aux offices serieux de la devotion, aussi aux exercices et jeux; la société et amitié s’en augmente. Et puis on ne leur sçauroit conceder des passetemps plus reglez que ceux qui se font en presence d’un chacun et à la veüé mesme du magistrat. Et trouverois raisonnable que le magistrat et le prince à ses despens, en gratifiast quelquefois la commune, d’une affection et bonté comme paternelle; et qu’aux villes populeuses il y eust des lieux destinez et disposez pour ces spectacles, quelque divertissement de pires actions et occultes. (I: 26, p. 192).

With its promotion of the harmonizing effects of orderly public recreation, bestowed upon a grateful citizenry by benevolent authorities, this seems a decidedly conservative stance. The palliative quality of public leisure, offering an outlet that prevents “worse and hidden doings,” recalls some of the more severe Jesuit condemnations of private play, and anticipates Enlightenment prescriptions for placating the working class.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it appears a rather utilitarian and authoritarian vision of leisure. But if Cervantes’ conventional reference to orderly *eu-*

*trapelia* is complicated by the private and potentially subversive individual in the prologue of *Don Quijote* (not to mention by the individual *novelas*), Montaigne's notion of play contains a range of pedagogical, civic, epistemological and metaphysical implications.

We can contrast Montaigne's praise of public conformity above with his comments on the disordered authenticity of the private self. Just as Cervantes' image of the ideal reader fluctuates between the citizen in the plaza and the domestic individual, Montaigne's affectionate descriptions of his library tower promote the freedom rather than the dangers of privacy:

C'est là mon siege. J'essaie à m'en rendre la domination pure, et à soustraire ce seul coin à la communauté et conjugale, et filiale, et civile. Par tout ailleurs je n'ay qu'une auctorité verbale: en essence, confuse. Miserable à mon gré, qui n'a chez soy où estre à soy, où se faire particulièrement la cour, où se cacher! (III: 3, p. 249)

The regal associations and independence of the private individual affirmed in the prologue to *Don Quijote* ("debajo de mi manto, al rey mato") come to mind. Cervantes of course quickly tempers his affirmation with irony, as the first chapter presents a protagonist whose private reading leads to delusion. Montaigne, too, is aware of the unruly excess such freedom presents, and is careful to recommend countermeasures:

On a raison de donner à l'esprit humain les barrières les plus contraintes qu'on peut. En l'estude, comme au reste, il luy faut compter et reigler ses marches, il luy faut tailler par art les limites de sa chasse. On le bride et garrote de religions, de loix, de costumes, de science, de preceptes, de peines et recompenses mortelles et immortelles; encores voit-on que, par sa volubilité et dissolution, il eschappe à toutes ces liaisons. C'est un corps vain, qui n'a par où estre saisi et assené; un corps divers et difforme, auquel on ne peut assoir neud ni prise. (II: 12, p. 626)

Montaigne understands that the unfettered imagination can bring pleasure, but also derangement—an ambivalence that is a hallmark of the humanist tradition, from Horace through Er-

asmus and Robert Burton. What customs and precepts do for the public sphere we might say dialogue does for the private. As Rigolot has argued, absent his friend Etienne de La Boétie, Montaigne's dialogue takes an "inward turn," cultivating a "dialogic conscience, that is one which requires a complementary world view in constant response to that which denies it" (15). Dialogue thus liberates the mind while also reigning it in. As the consideration of alternative perspectives transcends the monologic view—one's own or that which is imposed from without—the "constant response" provides a constraint. It is this elastic thought, of a single mind capable of mediating its own functions, which has led some to consider Montaigne a proto-Cartesian figure.<sup>7</sup>

Montaigne repeatedly maintains that it is his own "pattern," or disposition, which makes him naturally inclined to dialogue. Sometimes he ironically refers to it as his particular defect or "softness." Of course, his anti-dogmatic stance is also the result of constantly mediating his experience of the world through a tremendous amount of erudition, of classical wisdom and a seemingly inexhaustible store of example and counter-example. The resultant *medocritas*, so well expressed in "De l'expérience," is that of a mind both critical and deferential, an individual who retains his autonomy while also integrating himself in society:

A ma foiblesse si souvent recogneüe je doibts l'inclination que j'ay à la modestie, à l'obeyssance des creances qui me sont prescrites, à une constante froideur et moderation d'opinions, et la hayne à cette arrogance importune et quereleuse, se croyant et fiant toute à soy, ennemye capitale de discipline et de verité. Oyez les regenter: les premieres sotises qu'ils mettent en avant, c'est au stile qu'on establit les religions et les loix. *Nil hoc est turpius quàm cognitioni et perceptioni assertionem approbationemque præcurrere.* (III: 13, 528).

It is not surprising that this same essay expresses some of his most explicit skepticism regarding exemplarity. Montaigne does

not reject the value of considering examples; rather, he is concerned with emphasizing that they can contain only a partial truth, and that the disorderly flow of lived reality cannot totally be contained within their rigid contours. In like manner, no law can precisely apply to individuals and their circumstances: “tout exemple cloche, et la relation qui se tire de l’expérience est toujours défaillante et imparfaite; on joint toutesfois les comparaisons par quelque coin. Ainsi servent les loix, et s’assortissent ainsin à chacun de nos affaires, par quelque interpretation detournée, contrainte et biaise” (522). Montaigne’s ethical ideal of accommodation and tempering imperatives is perfectly wedded to the digressive narrative structure of the essay. The “formless” and “groping” progress of his prose is the embodiment of an anti-dogmatic mind.

While some of the richest Cervantine examples of the concerns outlined above are found in *Don Quijote*, I have chosen here to focus primarily on *El coloquio de los perros*, as it provides a compact illustration of the ambiguities under consideration, and it is the *novela* that poses the greatest challenge to the prologue’s optimistic image of leisure and exemplarity. The tale, along with its “frame story,” *El casamiento engañoso*, presents an almost unremitting bleakness, in which social institutions thoroughly reflect human depravity. One is tempted to accept Hampton’s argument (based on his reading of *Don Quijote* rather than the *Novelas ejemplares*) that Cervantes depicts the death-throes of humanism and exemplarity. But I will argue for a tentative version of what Forcione describes as the “survival of the humanist vision.”<sup>9</sup>

## II. Dialogue and the Digressive Quest for Meaning in *El coloquio de los perros*

Berganza amigo [. . .] retirémonos a esta soledad y entre estas esteras, donde podremos gozar sin ser sentidos desta no vista merced que el cielo en un mismo punto a los dos nos ha hecho. (649)

Rather than the sun-bathed public enjoyment of the prologue's billiards table, the dog's colloquy is a hidden, nocturnal endeavor. The most sinister spatial associations will be concentrated on the witch, Cañizares, whose enclosed midnight "annointings" represent an inversion of ideal leisure. But the dark implications of the mastiffs' meeting are immediately tamed by their amiability and collaboration while setting the rules for their interaction. As the dogs express surprise at their ability to speak, and speculate on how this could be, explanations range from the eschatological-allegorical—talking dogs as a portent of impending doom—to the deductive: since dogs have long been held up as emblems of positive qualities (fidelity, friendship, memory), perhaps their linguistic proficiency is not so surprising. Unable to clarify the mystery, they agree upon a *modus operandi*:

Pero sea lo que fuere, nosotros hablamos, sea portento o no, que lo que el cielo tiene ordenado que suceda, no hay diligencia ni sabiduría humana que lo pueda prevenir, y, así, no hay para qué ponernos a disputar nosotros cómo o por qué hablamos [. . .] y no sabemos cuánto tiempo durará esta nuestra ventura, sepamos aprovecharnos della y hablemos toda esta noche, sin dar lugar al sueño que nos impida este gusto, de mí por largos tiempos deseado. (651–52)

Berganza concurs that they should waste no time enjoying their unexpected endowment, and anticipates the disordered form of his discourse: "Empero ahora, que tan sin pensarlo me veo enriquecido deste divino don de la habla, pienso gozarle y aprovecharme dél lo más que pudiere, dándome prisa a decir todo aquello que se me acordare, *aunque sea atropellada y con-*

*fusamente . . .*” (652, my italics). The dogs will, by necessity, practice what Montaigne himself preferred: the non-linear, digressive, chance-informed discourse of “parler prompt” (I: 10).<sup>10</sup>

As interlocutor, Cipi3n’s role is to keep the narrating Berganza on task: “escucha, y si te cansare lo que te fuere diciendo, o me reprehende o manda que calle.” The relationship between speaker and listener becomes increasingly dynamic, as Cipi3n often feels compelled to interrupt. Since Berganza is unable to refrain from criticizing the vices he has observed in the world around him, Cipi3n intervenes on grounds both moral and aesthetic:

C-¿Al murmurar llamas filosofar? ¡Así va ello! ¡Canoniza, canoniza, Berganza, a la maldita plaga de la murmuración y dale el nombre que quisieres, que ella dará a nosotros el de c3nicos, que quiere decir perros murmuradores. Y, por tu vida, que calles ya y sigas tu historia.

B- ¿C3mo la tengo de seguir si callo?

C- Quiero decir que la sigas de golpe, sin que la hagas que parezca pulpo, seg3n la vas a±adiendo colas. (676–77)

Not only does Cipi3n object to the mean-spiritedness and potential hypocrisy of satire; he abhors the resulting shapelessness of Berganza’s narrative, its tentacular digressions giving rise to the monstrous form of an octopus.

As we have seen, what Montaigne warns of as “un corps vain, qui n’a par o3 estre saisi et assen3” is not uniformly negative. We might compare Cipi3n with the primary “literary critic” in *Don Quijote*, the Canon of Toledo, who argues for verisimilitude and proportion, again to avoid the “formless body” of digressive, open-ended and fantastic narrative (I, 47–48). Despite the substantial authority of the Aristotelian tradition invoked by Cipi3n and the Canon, neither of Cervantes’ two masterpieces whole-heartedly conforms to such venerable precepts. Part of the seismic tremors that emanate from Cervantes throughout literary history is due to the way in which his nar-

ratives contain a dynamic similar to that of Montaigne's *Essais*, what Rigolot called "[r]eflexive operations . . . grafted onto the main logical thread of the discourse." The largely monologic genres of epic, pastoral, exemplary tale, give way to heteroglossia, generic cross-contamination (and fertilization), unexpected combinations and spontaneous shifts. One result, of course, is a hitherto unprecedented consciousness of the artificiality of artistic or conceptual constructions, and a novel interest in holding them up against the chaotic vitality of the quotidian. The ungraspable, formless body of the octopus (and the mind) simultaneously threatens meaning and holds out the possibility for renewed understanding and experience.

Berganza's autobiography proceeds in fits and starts, and the digressive exchanges between narrator and narratee are as compelling as the main story-line. Of particular interest is the dogs' discussion of hypocrisy and the limits of satire. Having found it difficult to refrain from criticizing, Berganza retracts a promise he has made to bite his own tongue every time he slanders:

Lo que yo dije no fue poner ley, sino prometer que me mordería la lengua cuando murmurase. Pero ahora no van las cosas por el tenor y rigor de las antiguas; hoy se hace una ley y mañana se rompe, *y quizá conviene que así sea . . .* (679, my italics)

Here we might recall Montaigne's critique of the rigidity of laws, the inability of any fixed precept to account for the complexity of a particular situation. There follows an ironic defense of duplicity, as Berganza notes that virtuous acts have greater impact in plain view of the public than in the dark corner of the hospital. But when Cipión points out that, were he human, he would be called a hypocrite, Berganza's justification seems persuasive: "No sé lo que entonces hiciera; esto sé que quiero hacer ahora, que es no morderme, quedándome tantas cosas por decir que no sé cómo ni cuándo podré acabarlas . . ." (680). Rather than fall on his own sword, Berganza wants to proceed with

his narrative, to take advantage of the opportunity they have been granted and not agonize over whether his conduct has been perfect. This is one of the many cases in which Cervantes illustrates the impoverishing effects of imperatives. Other instances, memorable for the extremity of their premises, include the playwright who cannot stage his performance without an exact hue of purple in the robes for his cardinals (*El coloquio de los perros*, 725), and the poet composing an epic exclusively in proparoxytone meter (“esdrújulamente”) and without verbs (731); Sancho’s pastoral narrative, which is predicated on don Quijote remembering precisely how many goats have been shuttled across the river (*Don Quijote* I, 20). A salient feature of Berganza’s refusal to observe similarly strict rules is the way in which narrative and ethical concerns are intertwined: were he to punish himself for every minor transgression, the very instrument of the telling (his tongue) would be rendered useless. Better to acknowledge shortcomings and continue narrating. Perhaps the imperfections themselves will be a source of insight and pleasure.

The moment of greatest confusion and potential narrative aporia comes when Berganza recounts his meeting with the witch, Cañizares, who claims the dogs are humans transformed at birth, and whose “oracle” would point to their future redemption. Claiming to convene with her devil and other witches in drug-induced transports, Cañizares represents an extreme of the disordered imagination. Unsure whether the orgiastic gatherings take place physically as well as mentally, she quixotically explains that “todo lo que nos pasa en la fantasía es tan intensamente que no hay diferenciarlo de cuando vamos real y verdaderamente” (707). Berganza’s contemplation of the hideously naked witch as she lies motionless in a claustrophobic cell is the nightmarish anticlimax of the story. Cañizares’ promise to return with information pertaining to the dogs’ redemption to human form evokes but ultimately travesties the romance motif of the hero’s underworld journey. Her activity involves the opposite

of dialogue, it is a solitary indulgence that leads to solipsism and alienation from human community. Overcome by fear and disgust, Berganza drags the grotesque body *out* into the open air of the courtyard, where he can more calmly reflect upon the mystery of her evil and her wisdom. As the witch finds herself, at daybreak, in public view in the courtyard, the entire scene collapses into farce and confusion, and Berganza flees.

At this point Cipi3n intervenes to discuss the meaning of the witch's oracle:

Volverán a su forma verdadera  
cuando vieren con presta diligencia  
derribar los soberbios levantados  
y alzar a los humildes abatidos  
por mano poderosa para hacello. (717)

As when the dogs initially try to make sense of their speech, a variety of exegetical techniques are applied. They think the words, which allude to Virgil and the Magnificat, are maybe an allegorical reference to Fortune's Wheel. But since the dogs have already observed the vicissitudes of fortune many times, Cipi3n offers the following possibilities:

. . . por do me doy a entender que no en el sentido aleg3rico sino en el literal, se han de tomar los versos de la Camacha; ni tampoco en 3ste se consiste nuestro remedio, pues muchas veces hemos visto lo que dicen y nos estamos tan perros como ves [. . .] Digo, pues, que el verdadero sentido es un juego de bolos, donde con presta diligencia derriban los que están en pie y vuelven a alzar los caídos y esto por la mano de quien lo puede hacer. Mira, pues, si en el discurso de nuestra vida habremos visto jugar a los bolos, y si hemos visto por esto haber vuelto a ser hombres, si es que lo somos. (717)

The constructive and pleasurable play of the Prologue, and the accompanying hope to find exemplary meaning in the oracle, have been reduced to a game of ninepins. The repetitive cycle of the ninepins suggests the futility of the dogs' situation, much

like the seemingly endless re-shuffling of the card deck expresses the hopeless resignation of the underworld captives in don Quijote's adventure in the Cueva de Montesinos (II, 22–23). But while both games emblemize a low point in hallucinatory, nightmarish narratives, in neither case does the stasis prevail. The quest for meaning may have lead to a dead end, but dialogue will present an alternate path.

### III. Play and the Exemplarity of Process

Given its peculiar structure, *El coloquio de los perros* is what we can call a story that proceeds by way of discussion. It contains what Huizinga identifies as a fundamental aspect of play, its “to and for movement.” Such a motion pervades the *Essais* of Montaigne, sometimes expressed in terms of productive *agon* (III: 8), often through literal image of games. In most cases, what is questioned is the static model of Example, associated with pedantry, book-learning, schools and the passive acceptance of authority. Instead he advocates lively conversation, the tavern, laughing self-deprecation along with satire. What emerges from Montaigne's notions of learning, conversation and reading is a modern, and in some ways more modest, exemplarity of process rather than product. While meaning is rarely fixed and knowledge is inconclusive, the *Essais* continuously model the workings of an agile and independent mind.

As mentioned above, Montaigne forms part of the humanist tradition of infusing pedagogy with pleasure.<sup>12</sup> The following description of Greek lessons with his father again links learning to play:

Nous pelotions nos declinaisons à la maniere de ceux qui, par certains jeux de tablier, apprennent l'Arithmétique et la Geometrie. Car, entre autres choses, il avoit esté conseillé de me faire goustier la science et le devoir par une volonté non forcée et de mon propre desir, et d'eslever mon ame en tout douceur et liberté, sans rigueur et contrainte. (I: 26, p. 188–89)

In addition to promoting its pedagogical function, Montaigne describes the ludic movement as a constituent aspect of authentic conversation:

La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l'escoute. Cettuy-cy se doit preparer à la recevoir selon le branle qu'elle prend. Comme entre ceux qui jouent à la paume, celui qui soustient se desmarche et s'apreste selon qu'il voit remuer celui qui luy jette le coup et selon la forme du coup. (III: 13, p. 543)

Both speaker and listener have active, creative roles, and bringing forth meaning is a collaborative if imprecise endeavor.

"De l'art de conferer" contains a comprehensive expression of the points of contact between Montaigne and Cervantes presently under consideration: satire of pedantry and general human folly, the chance-determined and "groping" nature of thought, the partiality of examples, the spirit of *serio ludere* and an examination of the relationship between external conformity and internal freedom. If Montaigne compares vigorous conversation to the tournament, and truth to the quarry of hunters, he is careful to emphasize the absence of dire consequence in the ideal *agon* of conversation.<sup>13</sup> In fact, although he claims to enjoy rough and boisterous opposition, it is the ordered, rule-bound structure of conversation that Montaigne seems most eager to preserve. Quint observes that such an ". . . order, like the larger social order for which it seems to serve as a model, becomes an end in itself. It depends on the rational capacities of the speakers to keep discussion on track and to the point, but even more on their mutual commitment to preserve the form of conversation over and above its matter and the positions they defend" (113). Montaigne returns to the image of the king to illustrate the crucial point that deference to authority and rules, while necessary and conducive to social stability, is not necessarily at odds with individual integrity: "Ce que j'adore moy-mesmes aus Roys, c'est la foule de leurs adorateurs. Toute inclination et

soumission leur est deuë, sauf celle de l'entendement. Ma raison n'est pas duite à se courber et flechir, ce son mes genoux" (III: 8, p. 371). Montaigne's defense of freedom of judgment and thought represents an integration of political obedience with inner autonomy. In light of France's destabilizing religious and class schisms, it represents a moderate alternative to rigid authoritarianism.<sup>14</sup> It is worth recalling the similar Cervantine statement that has also been taken out of context to suggest political subversion: "Debajo de mi manto, al rey mato" (*Don Quijote* I, Prólogo). The phrase encourages the reader to criticize Cervantes' fiction. Still, the question remains as to what extent our authors depict life in society as oppressive, thus necessitating the private refuge of their texts. In other words, is the independent reader meant as a corollary to the unruly subject?

We have observed how Cipión and Berganza illustrate that dialogue is imprecise, digressive, and does not always lead to clear resolution. Montaigne depicts this phenomenon within a single consciousness:

Maintes-fois (comme il m'advient de faire volontiers) ayant pris pour exercice et pour esbat à maintenir une contraire opinion à la mienne, mon esprit, s'appliquant et tournant de ce costé là, m'y attache si bien que je ne trouve plus la raison de premier advis, et m'en despars. (II: 12, p. 635)

As with the play of authentic conversation, the structure of thought is not so much dialectic as meandering process. And although his *Essais* are a monument of erudition, a testament to time spent alone with books, reading itself is for Montaigne a form of dialogue, a type of ideal recreation:

Et tous le jours m'amuse à lire en des autheurs, sans soin de leur science, y cherchant leur façon, non leur subject. Tout ainsi que je poursuy la communication de quelque esprit fameux, non pour qu'il m'enseigne, mais pour que je le cognoisse. (III: 8, p. 363)

Here the sense of playful competition—not to mention the didacticism of exemplarity—has been replaced entirely by a sense

of companionship. Companionship provides the amiable and spirited counterpoint that allows for true self-knowledge. The constant foregrounding of alternative points of view and, consequently, the limitations of one's own perspective, instill a humility that bodes well for the imperfect give-and-take of social interaction.

At the conclusion of *El coloquio de los perros*, the failure of Berganza's narrative to reveal the dogs' origins (and thus their fate) does not prevent them from proceeding with their dialogue. Like Montaigne, Cervantes understands *desengaño*, that, under close scrutiny things are not as substantial as we assume. "De l'experience" contains the following evocation of the "vanities" of Ecclesiastes:

Moy qui me vante d'ambrasser si curieusement les commoditez de la vie, et si particulièrement, n'y trouve quand j'y regarde ainsi finement, à peu près que du vent. Mais quoy, nous sommes par tout vent. Et le vent encore, plus sagement que nous, s'ayme à bruire, à s'agiter, et se contente en ses propres offices, sans desirer la stabilité, la solidité, qualitez non siennes. (III: 13, p. 566).

Montaigne recognizes the insubstantiality of his life. But rather than moralize, he accepts this fact of existence and, as it were, moves on. In like manner, the canine and human protagonists of *El coloquio de los perros* find in their disillusionment no reason to deny the enjoyment of their dialogue. As Berganza says,

... pero no por esto dejemos de gozar deste bien de la habla que tenemos y de excelencia tan grande de tener discurso humano todo el tiempo que pudiéramos, y, así, no te canse el oírme contar lo que me pasó . . . (718)

Here the optimistic ethos of the prologue's play reasserts itself. The dogs continue their tale, and, as daybreak puts a temporary end to their stories and the Ensign awakens from his nap, the author and reader from the frame tale agree that, despite not being able to verify the story's truth, their activity is worthwhile:

—Aunque este coloquio sea fingido y nunca haya pasado, pareceme que está tan bien compuesto que puede el señor alférez pasar adelante con el segundo.

—Con ese parecer —respondió el alférez—, me animaré y disponné a escribirle, sin ponerme más en disputas con vuesa merced si hablaron los perros o no.

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—Señor alférez, no volvamos más a esa disputa. Yo alcanzo el artificio del coloquio y la invención, y basta. Vámonos al Espolón a recrear los ojos del cuerpo, pues ya he recreado los del entendimiento.

—Vámonos —dijo el alférez.

Y con esto se fueron.

Instead of digging in their heels over whether or not such an event really could have taken place, the two friends affirm the value of their game, the imaginative participation in a fictional world. Much like Montaigne reads authors “cherchant leur façon, non leur subject,” Peralta drops his demand for factual truth, citing his appreciation of “el artificio del coloquio y la invención.” Also in the spirit of the Frenchman, they complement their mental recreation by going outside to refresh the body.

Pleasurable and instructive companionship, instrumental in the Ensign’s physical and moral convalescence, redeems the narrative space, and points to the possibility of community. Against a despairing backdrop of disease, predation and hypocrisy, Cervantes kindles a peculiar sort of optimism. When the two friends in the frame of *El coloquio de los perros*, agreeing on the virtue of the story despite the lack of resolution regarding its meaning or application, prepare to return to the world of human interaction (the Espolón), the reader must, in a sense, imitate them, for the story has ended. This is not the servile imitation of example, but rather a realization that our activity as readers has been parallel to that of the friends. We, too, have partaken not of a lesson, but an experience, not a product but a process. The dialogue of the two dogs, and then of the human companions, reverberates in the companionship of Cervantes’

mind and our own. It is possible that our moral sensibilities have developed; it is quite probable that our literary judgment has improved; it is nearly certain that the experience has given pleasure, which, as Montaigne affirms, is “des principales especes du profit” (III: 13, p. 544). As early modern Europe became increasingly conflictive and authoritarian, such sensibilities were overcome by dogmatic rhetoric and satirical extremes. But Montaigne and Cervantes left supreme models of nuanced thought and interchange that posterity has, to our benefit and peril, alternately adopted and ignored.

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## Notes

1. For an outline and discussion of intellectual affinities between Cervantes and Montaigne, see López Fanego.

2. Pertinent studies include Maravall, Elias, Cavillac. Forcione gives the following synthesis of the scope of the shift: "a spectacle of metaphysical and cosmic disorder that historians of the crisis of early modernity have commonly associated with the challenges of Copernicanism; of geographical disorder, with the voyages of discovery; of political disorder, with the rise of statism and the undeniable insights of Machiavellianism into the hard realities of human beings' behaviour in their community life; of religious disorder, with the Protestant Reformation and fragmentation of a unified Christendom and the renewed menaces from the alien world of Islam; and of anthropological disorder, with the increasing visibility of non-European societies and the relativist critiques of ethnocentricity by writers such as Montaigne" ("Cervantes' Night Errantry," 453).

3. For Spanish examples of more traditional dialogue, one might think of “Valdés” in Juan de Valdés’ *Diálogo de la lengua*, “Pinciano” in El Pinciano’s *Philosophía antigua poética*, or Laureano in Luque Fajardo’s *Fiel desengaño*.

4. Stierle places Cervantes at a sort of intermediate stage, below the full-blown perspectivism of Montaigne, whereas Hampton reads Cervantes as the more radical of the two in depicting exemplarity’s demise.

5. Of course, there is little critical consensus regarding the “tasty and honest fruit” contained in the *Novelas ejemplares*, and Cervantes’ coy refusal to elaborate in the above passage is symptomatic of the ironic, elusive nature of his exemplarity.

6. For a representative eighteenth-century view of the function of leisure, see Jovellanos, *Espectáculos y diversiones públicas* (1812). For a discussion of the relative progressiveness of Montaigne’s conservatism, based as it is on the desire to keep intact an order that can allow for the greatest degree of peace and freedom, see Quint, Ch. 4 (“The Ethics of Yielding”).

7. See, for example, Hampton, 155 (note 19), 186. Faced with an unprecedented freedom and also responsibility to make sense of a particularly self-conscious textual world, the solitary reader of *Don Quijote* is similarly oriented toward modernity.

8. For Montaigne’s complicated relationship to exemplarity, see Lyons, Ch. 3, and Hampton, Ch. 4.

9. See *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness*, Ch. 5.

10. Nerlich, who quotes from this essay (I:10), discusses the similarities in the discourse of the dogs and Montaigne (see especially 268–71).

11. “De l’experience” contains some of the best passages relating to Montaigne’s critique of exemplarity and Stoic rigidity: “il n’advindra pas pourtant que, des evenemens à venir, il s’en trouve aucun qui, en tout ce grand nombre de milliers d’evenemens choisis et enregistrez, en reconte un auquel il se puisse joindre et apparier si exactement, qu’il n’y reste quelque circonstance et diversité qui requiere diverse consideration de jugement. Il y a peu de relation de nos actions, qui sont en perpetuelle mutation, avec les loix fixes et immobiles.” (II: 13, p. 517).

12. For the preference of a pleasurable and ludic learning environment over the static conventions of memorization and book-learning, see Erasmus, *Colloquies*, and Vives, *Diálogos*, especially “Las leyes del juego.”

13. In this he is consonant with contemporary tracts on licit entertainment which stipulate that the activity not cause real damage to body or reputation. Cervantes tends to express the principle in the phrase “sin daño de barras,” o “sin daño de tercero.”

14. See Quint, especially his discussion of Montaigne’s critique of stoici-

sm, the rigid principals of which were in many ways parallel to aristocratic and religious zealotry: “His notion of self-mastery, the acknowledgment of one’s human weakness, is almost the opposite of the Stoic sage’s superhuman self-control; he rejects the Stoics’ treatment of the body, their condemnation of pity, above all those moments in Seneca where intransigent virtue appears to be aligned not with yielding but with resistance to power. But his thought retains enough Stoic elements, especially the tradeoff he proposes of outward compliance for inner sovereignty, to have affinities with the contemporary neostoicism of Lipsius that, Gerhard Ostreich has argued, was designed for the subject of the new absolutist state” (119–20).