

Lycanthropy and Free Will: The Female Werewolf in Cervantes' *Persiles*

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A demon can offer something new to the imagination.
---Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum*¹

Darling it is no joke, this is lycanthropy.
---Shakira song, "She Wolf"

Previous studies of the story told by Rutilio about his aerial journey and killing of the witch / female werewolf (*Persiles* I.8) have focused on recognized sources of Cervantes such as the *Jardín de flores curiosas* by Antonio de Torquemada (1570) or the *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* by Olao Magno (1555)—in other words, intertexts which contain stories about werewolves. But one of the things which has not been explored sufficiently is the importance of the gender of this female werewolf and her possible relation to the *Malleus maleficarum* by Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger (1486-7), the most significant European text promoting the witch-hunt. This interpretation offers the advantage of tracing connections with another Cervantine witch / enchantress, Cañizares in the *Coloquio de los perros*, a correspondence which helps us form a more coherent vision of the Cervantine corpus. Additionally, the return by Cervantes to this thematic material in the *Persiles* shows a recurring obsession with the perennial mystery of free will. Moreover, for postmodern cultural critics, this episode also presents an unparalleled opportunity to deconstruct the human / animal binary. Finally, reading this episode through this filter allows us to restore it to its original, larger context of skepticism and uncertainty as explicated by Jeremy Robbins:

[S]eventeenth-century Spanish culture was profoundly influenced by the crisis in knowledge which was a marked feature of the early modern period... [T]his intellectual crisis, which can be clearly traced to . . . the burgeoning of interest in scepticism, was the most significant formative influence on the direction taken by Spanish culture during the century. It led to . . . a culture of uncertainty taking hold of the artistic imagination. Intellectual uncertainties challenged many of the greatest artists and writers to explore the limits of human knowledge, and the problems and dilemmas that result from these, and in so doing to examine the complex relationship between reality and illusion, fact and fiction.²

Let us see how the themes of belief and knowledge—and the liminal space between those two intellectual categories—are developed in this episode.

The story in itself is undeniably mysterious. As Michael Armstrong-Roche notes, "Rutilio's story of the flying carpet and she-wolf is perhaps the most cited evidence for the novel's indulgence in romance fantasy" (Armstrong-Roche 81). William Childers too expresses puzzlement over what we are to make of these events:

¹ (Institoris and Sprenger 2:160)

² Jeremy Robbins, *The Challenges of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literature* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 9-10/

The fact that we have only Rutilio's word as evidence cast[s] doubt on the "veracity" (within the fiction) of these supernatural events; on the other hand, no other explanation is offered for how Rutilio arrived in Scandinavia, and he is undeniably *there* when he tells his story. (Childers 58-59)

Reynaldo Riva goes so far as to claim that Rutilio lied about the whole adventure, and that neither his nocturnal flight nor the alleged case of lycanthropy ever happened (Riva 345).³ In the course of the narration, Mauricio, Arnaldo and Rutilio engage in a fairly erudite exchange regarding wolf-men in England and Sicily, in which rational explanations for their appearance are offered by the judicial astrologer Mauricio. But Ignacio Padilla asks, as did Mauricio Molho before him, "¿no contraviene la aventura de los lobos locuaces la dogmática negativa del viejo Mauricio sobre la existencia de los licántropos?" (Padilla 328)⁴ So we see that Cervantes' own narrative doubles back on itself, in typical Cervantine fashion, producing a verdict which is noncommittal at best on the question of what happens when people think they see werewolves.

As Jeremy Robbins explains in *The Challenges of Uncertainty*,

The question of perception was ... intimately linked with that of deception: can we trust our senses and the information they provide, given that we know they do on occasions fool us? . . . Perceptual issues raised deeply provocative and alarming philosophical questions. . . . The result was what can justifiably be called a culture of doubt. This doubt took various forms depending on whether it found expression directly or indirectly and in works of moral philosophy, political theory, history or literature. However it tended to centre around certain key issues which included the following: (1) the status of the knowledge we possess—whether it is certain or provisional, reliable or unreliable; (2) the restrictions imposed on us by the type and degree of knowledge we can hope to obtain; (3) . . . the factors which cause us to misinterpret the information we receive from our senses (e.g. our irrational desires, the lies and deceptions of other people, our perspective on an event and the relativity of our view point, optical illusions etc.); and (4) the practical question of how we might circumvent these distorting factors which lead to error.⁵

Thus we see that the very indeterminacy of werewolves' ontological status played into Cervantes' active and deliberate participation in these broader cultural trends.

Literary antecedents for this episode are multiple and well-recognized. They include Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, and Petronius' *Satyricon*. The aerial journey as a mode of transport reminds Ernesto J. Gil López of the magic flying carpet in Arabian folklore such as the *Thousand and One Nights* (Gil López 428). But if we hope to shed new light on an old tale, it is to its theological contexts that we must turn.

³ "Rutilio no sólo mintió sobre su vuelo desde Italia a Noruega . . . sino también cuando relata el caso de licantropía . . . [E]stas 'aladas invenciones' son artificios que Cervantes dispuso para 'jugar' con el lector" (Riva 345). José Ignacio Díez Fernández and Luisa Fernanda Aguirre de Cárcer likewise ponder the apparent aphasia and ultimate undecidability of this episode:

La ortodoxia . . . se enfrenta al propio relato de modo contradictorio: ¿voló realmente y entonces el cristianismo se equivoca al juzgar las hechicerías o bien no voló y el relato es una patraña? . . . Más adelante (I, 18) se retoma la cuestión y de nuevo se racionaliza la imposible transformación de hombre en lobo, pero nada se dice sobre el vuelo. (Díez Fernández and Aguirre de Cárcer 55 n. 58)

⁴ Padilla cites Molho 26.

⁵ Robbins, *The Challenges of Uncertainty*, 25-26, 45.

With regard to the questionable legitimacy of the werewolf phenomenon, Ignacio Padilla declares confidently, “Cuando el autor escribe los episodios licantrópicos de *Persiles*, el *Canon Episcopi* había negado ya la realidad física de este tipo concreto de metamorfosis explicándola agustinianamente como producto de una ilusión de paternidad ciertamente diabólica” (Padilla 320). In other words, the pendulum had swung in the direction of rationalizing interpretations, in line with what Diana de Armas Wilson has termed the “medicalization of lycanthropy occurring in the late sixteenth century” (De Armas Wilson 163).⁶ So if actual metamorphoses were not thought to be possible, then how to explain persistent reports of such bizarre occurrences? Jeremy Robbins describes the cultural circumstances in which such reports circulated:

Judging people—and by extension things—is a process of constantly distrusting and evaluating *ser* and *parecer*. The necessary attitude is one of constant doubt The impression . . . is of a world so inconsistent, so deceptive, that the individual is faced with a constant interpretative crisis. This is complicated by the fact that we cannot necessarily even be certain of the very information provided by our own senses: our perceptual process conspires against us just like the reality we are seeking to decipher.⁷

One answer to the epistemological dilemma occasioned by these alleged phenomena may be found in demonological texts circulating throughout Europe, including Spain, at the time of the novel’s composition.

In the early 1980s Fred de Armas, in an article titled “Metamorphosis as Revolt,” linked this episode of the *Persiles* to the *Malleus maleficarum*, the late 15th-century Inquisitors’ manual called the Hammer of Witches. He identified two very brief passages in this earlier work as possible intertexts for Cervantes, both of them from the last part of Question 10, which is devoted specifically to werewolves (De Armas 302-3). But perhaps because no reliable scholarly edition with English translation was available yet—this only happened recently, with the two-volume publication by Cambridge University Press of Christopher Mackay’s masterful rendition, accompanied by copious footnotes—De Armas was forced to rely upon Montague Summers’ notoriously inaccurate abridged English version from 1928. We can only assume this is the reason why such an extraordinarily careful and erudite scholar as De Armas might have anticipated, but not exhausted, the much more extensive intertextual relationship I have noticed between these two works.

In order to trace these more elaborate parallels, it is necessary to start not at the end but instead at the beginning of the *Malleus maleficarum*’s Question 10: “Whether Sorceresses Work on Humans by Turning Them into the Shapes of Beasts through the Art of Conjuring” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:153-62). Institoris and Sprenger give a specific example of this happening: “for instance when a woman is seen as a beast” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:153). This happens to be the exact scenario we find in Cervantes’ *Persiles*. But there is more. The two Inquisitors describe “the Devil’s ability to deceive a man’s fantasy so that a real person is seen as an animal” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:155). They cite prior theologians’ view that

“certain criminal women, converting back to Satan and being led astray by the demons’ illusions and fantastical images, believe and proclaim that during the hours of the night

⁶ She cites as evidence the French physician Jean de Wier (1515-1588), who regarded lycanthropy as an actual disease (De Armas Wilson 163, n. 31).

⁷ Robbins, *Arts of Perception*, 125.

they ride on certain beasts with Diana, a goddess of the pagans, or with Herodias and with a countless multitude of women and pass over great stretches of the earth during the silence of the dead of night.” . . . [I]t is Satan himself who transforms himself into the appearances and resemblances of different persons, and by deluding in dreams the minds that he holds captive he takes them on journeys through all sorts of places off the beaten path. (Institoris and Sprenger 2:155-56)⁸

Sound familiar yet? To firm up even further what can only be seen as a rock-solid connection, consider these added details. Institoris and Sprenger go on to elaborate: “very often men who are not sorcerers are bodily transported over great stretches of earth against their will” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:156). This sounds like an apt description of Rutilio’s trip through the air from Italy to Norway. The Inquisitors then go on to articulate classical precursors for these transformations, such as the enchantress Circe in the *Odyssey* who changed Ulysses’ men into beasts. They include a careful caveat: “This was feigned with acts of illusion through conjuring rather than being brought to pass in reality, when she altered the fantasies of the men” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:156). It is fascinating to watch the gymnastic contortions the churchmen go through to provide a theologically correct explanation for a fictitious Greek myth.

This classical example, however, would *not* seem to fit precisely the genders of the characters in Cervantes’ story. But their next illustration offers an interesting twist: from the *Lives of the [Church] Fathers*, Institoris and Sprenger append a story of a young woman who

did not wish to comply with a young man who was importuning her for a base act . . . the young man was agitated as a result of this and had a certain Jew cast a spell of sorcery against her, and when this was done, the woman was changed into a filly. This change existed not in terms of reality but in terms of the trickery of a demon who changed the fantasy and the sense of perception of the woman herself and of those who looked at her, so that while really a woman, she was seen as a filly. (Institoris and Sprenger 2:156)

Now, changing the gender roles around a bit, this anecdote could serve as a fairly accurate description of Rutilio’s rejection of the witch’s amorous advances. But as the one who “importunes” Rutilio for a “base act,” why does *she* morph into an animal instead of him?

One answer to this quandary may be found in a subtle theological point raised by the two Inquisitors: the ability to see a person deceived by the Devil in their human versus animal form was used as a type of litmus test for holiness. In the example above, the upshot is that the woman who appeared in the shape of a filly

when she was brought to St. Macharius, the Devil could not work in such a way as to impose an illusion upon his senses as he had others’ because of Macharius’ holiness. For he saw her as a real woman and not as a filly, and eventually she was freed from that illusion through his prayers. (Institoris and Sprenger 2:156-57)

This important detail would explain why Cervantes needed his werewolf to be female: part of his point in constructing the episode as he did may have been to indict the dancing master Rutilio who had seduced his young female pupil on the grounds of moral depravity, using as a litmus test his

⁸ They cite Lord Antoninus, Part 1 of the *Summa* (Title 2, Ch. 6, paragraph 5).

inability to see the witch in human form.⁹ When Rutilio stabs the witch, he performs an act of exorcism of demonic forces which then subsequently allows him an opportunity for moral growth.¹⁰ His subsequent ability to see her hideous corpse in human form signals his own transformation / attainment of holiness through (ongoing) repentance for his sins.

The gender of Cervantes' werewolf may bear with it additional connotations, however, since *lupa* was the colloquial Italian term used to designate a prostitute. The specific context of sexuality is important: "Rutilio's story is a painful and imaginative projection of a man's degradation, and ultimate isolation, through lust" (De Armas Wilson 163).¹¹ Roger Boase refers to "the link between love-melancholy and lycanthropy, the transformation of the lover into a wolf, in classical authors, such as Pliny the Elder and Petronius, in Galician poets, such as Macías and Rodríguez del Padrón, and in the folkloric traditions underlying the *lai de Bisclavret* by Marie de France" (Boase 2:575, n. 138).¹² The medieval female mystic Hildegard von Bingen wrote that "The love of melancholics is hateful, twisted, and death-carrying, like that of voracious wolves" (quoted in Wack 146). Michael Armstrong-Roche offers a historically well-nuanced interpretation of this aspect of the story which takes into account creative recyclings of classical tradition as well as confusion over gender roles:

There is yet another way of reading Rutilio's tale that does not depend on accepting the novel's marvels at face value, trading the narrative's possible subtlety for its certain naïveté. The Roman witch's lycanthropic metamorphosis begs to be interpreted metaphorically as an ethical manifestation of the sorceress's and perhaps Rutilio's lustful character—an approach actually authorized by the Roman historian Livy, impeccable *auctoritas* by neo-Aristotelian standards. Livy's example is especially pertinent insofar as Rutilio and the witch are both Italian and engage in a small-scale reversal of the main-plot story by travelling from Rome to the North. In Book I of his history of Rome, Livy narrates the well-known Roman foundation story of the she-wolf ('lupa') who suckled the exposed infants Remus and Romulus (Liv.6-7). Nevertheless, he also reports the view of skeptics who believe that *lupa* refers not to a fabulous she-wolf, but to the meretricious wife of Faustulus, the shepherd who discovered the boys—lupine in the more scurrilous sense of prostitute or courtesan (hence the name *lupanar* for brothel) (Liv.7-8). (Armstrong-Roche 81)

This scholar also sees Cervantes' evocation of Livy as a foreshadowing of his own novel's end, where the pilgrims travelling to Rome will encounter a Roman prostitute named Hipólita: "if we are willing to follow this perhaps subliminal evocation of Livy in Rutilio's story of the lustful

⁹ Dominique Reyre, in an onomastic study appended to Jean-Marc Pelorson's *El desafío del Persiles*, confirms that Rutilio's name would square with this interpretation, particularly regarding the thematic importance of sight or the ability to see clearly. Her entry on Rutilio reads: "Del latín *rutilare*, 'brillar como el oro'. . . . Aquí Cervantes quiso denunciar con el nombre de su personaje las falsas apariencias que engañan, como en los refranes «No es oro todo lo que reluce»" (Pelorson and Reyre 124).

¹⁰ This reading contradicts earlier views by Forcione and De Armas that "The witch's death is not a signal for deliverance . . . since Rutilio [*sic*] goes to work for a goldsmith" (De Armas 301) and this choice of profession bore, at least potentially, infernal resonance. However, my argument here is not for any sort of 'complete' or 'total' exorcism, merely one that is partial, messy and incomplete.

¹¹ This interpretation echoes Alban Forcione's earlier one: "Here the sin is . . . lust, and his ordeals of expiation begin with imprisonment and a sentence of death" (Forcione, *Cervantes' Christian Romance*, 112).

¹² He refers to Alvar 89-205.

Roman sorceress as she-wolf, the novel indirectly reminds us that at the vanishing point of Rome's own mist-shrouded, legendary past there stands not only a fratricide, but also a lustful *meretrix*—preparing the Rome-bound Northern heroes for the wilful Roman courtesan Hipólita” (Armstrong-Roche 82). Lust becomes even more relevant¹³ when we consider still another aspect of the story, namely the potions the witch prepares to ‘cure’ the prison warden’s daughter.¹⁴ A similar substance appears in *El licenciado Vidriera*, where a Morisca *hechicera* prepares a love potion for Tomás Rodaja (Cervantes, *El licenciado Vidriera* 52), and in *El coloquio de los perros*, where the witch Cañizares anoints herself with an unguent to effect her transvection to the sabbat (Cervantes, *El coloquio de los perros* 343).

Key to contemporaneous debates over the use of such ointments was the question of whether they could force a person’s otherwise free will.¹⁵ In fact, the more we look at this story, the more obvious it seems that the whole thing is *about* free will. This is the narrative core of the episode. Jeremy Robbins highlights the importance of free will and human agency to epistemological debates that were happening around this time period:

Spanish scepticism is always a matter of *what* something is, not over *whether* or *that* it is. It is because Spanish scepticism fixes on the question of certainty, and moreover sees this as a practical rather than a philosophical problem, that moral, ascetic and political works relentlessly engage with the question of human agency, for the issue of how to obtain a reliable assessment of the world directly affects not simply the conception of self but of how the self can be an effective social, political and indeed spiritual agent.¹⁶

In offering this interpretation of free will as crucial to this episode, I disagree with Ignacio Padilla, who sees lycanthropy primarily in terms of divine punishment: “mientras la brujería era un *pecado* contra Dios, la licantrópía podía ser un *castigo* divino” (Padilla 322). Even if the condition of lycanthropy was inflicted by God as a punishment, in Cervantes’ version the metamorphosis is gradual enough that those affected seem not to lose all power of volition. Witness this learned disquisition from the mouth of one of Cervantes’ characters, Mauricio:

Hoy día sé yo que hay en la isla de Sicilia . . . gentes deste género, a quien los sicilianos llaman lobos menar, los cuales, antes que les dé tan pestífera enfermedad, **lo sienten**, y dicen a los que están junto a ellos que se aparten y huyan dellos, o que los aten o encierren, porque si no se guardan, los hacen pedazos a bocados y los desmenuzan, si pueden, con las uñas, dando terribles y espantosos ladridos. (Cervantes, *Persiles* 134)¹⁷

¹³ Luis Miguel Vicente García in fact sees lust as the one shared factor uniting all of Cervantes’ witch-figures: “brujas, hechiceras, magas y cortesanas, aunque con diferencias semánticas importantes, tienen en común el hecho de encarnar la lujuria extrema de Venus Pandemo” (Vicente García 385).

¹⁴ “con yerbas y palabras había de curar a una hija suya de una enfermedad que los médicos no acertaban a curarla” (Cervantes, *Persiles* 89).

¹⁵ Cervantes himself seems conflicted on this point, as Stephen Harrison has noticed: “Cenotia says magic potions are powerless to influence free-will (Bk. II, Ch. 8), yet her own are later seen to be effective on Antonio (Bk. II, Ch. 11). The enchantments of Julia are effective in Bk. IV, Ch. 8, and it is not until Ch. 10 that they are said to have depended on God’s will” (Harrison 48).

For further information on this topic see the section “Madmen and Magic Ointments” of Dennis Kratz’ article “*Fictus Lupus*: The Werewolf in Christian Thought” (Kratz 72-76).

¹⁶ Jeremy Robbins, *Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque, 1580-1720* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2007), 11.

¹⁷ Cervantes derives this information from Pliny, whom Mauricio mentions by name.

In other words, incipient werewolves feel their illness coming on and still have time to exercise free will in order to avoid harming others. Specific acts of free will are mentioned throughout the story, such as when Rutilio admits, “cerré los ojos y dejéme llevar de los diablos” (Cervantes, *Persiles* 90). With this detailed confession of a decision he made, he is not likely to get away with an excuse of “the devil made me do it.”

Debates over free will went to the heart of disputes about werewolfism: “A la idea de que el licántropo puede transformarse a voluntad mediante conjuros o hechizos, se opone siempre la de que el hombre-lobo no tiene ningún control sobre su metamorfosis y que se trata más bien de un involuntario regreso del hombre a sus orígenes bestiales” (Padilla 322-23). The challenge here is to “establecer si los licántropos son auténticos servidores de Satanás o simples víctimas de una enfermedad mental” (Padilla 323). Was werewolfism voluntary? It could be, at least in some iterations, such as “la creencia popular de que ciertos individuos podían adquirir a voluntad la fiereza homicida de una bestia con sólo ponerse un cinturón de pelo de lobo” (Padilla 322).¹⁸ But Cervantes’ attitude is more nuanced:

En ningún momento acusa Cervantes a las víctimas de la licantropía de haberse acarreado ese mal como castigo de una falta. Nunca los condena, si bien apenas los defiende. La exposición del autor sobre las metamorfosis licantrópicas es más bien informativa, aunque encierra una importante crítica a la superstición. . . . Cervantes transforma la metamorfosis humano-animal en uno de sus argumentos más sólidos para denunciar a los embaucadores y a quienes creen en ellos. Las fuerzas del Mal, parece decirnos con Erasmo, no alcanzan a perturbar el orden divino, sino sólo los sentidos. (Padilla 327)

Alban Forcione long ago recognized the relevance of contemporaneous debates about free will, specifically Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio* (1524) [*Discourse on Free Will*], for the Cañizares episode in *El coloquio de los perros* (Forcione, *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness* 80). I would argue that this episode of the *Persiles* is equally grounded in such debates. The two Inquisitors Institoris and Sprenger invoke this concept specifically in the relevant chapter of the *Malleus maleficarum*: “But because sin resides not in the imagination but in the will, a human cannot sin as a result of fantasies like this that are offered by the Devil and of various alterations, unless he agrees to the sin by his own will” (Institoris and Sprenger 2:157). The question, of course, is whether Rutilio assents to any sin or not—and this includes the further question of whether his murder of the she-wolf should be considered an exorcism or, instead, a homicide.¹⁹

As mentioned previously, one of the oddest things about this story is that the werewolf is female. As Barry Holstun López notes in his popularizing *Of Wolves and Men*, “It is rare that women become werewolves. When they do, it is almost always as a means to an end—to steal a child victim for a sabbat, for example” (López 229).²⁰ To make things even more complicated, as Diana de Armas Wilson notes, either the language in the story is imprecise, or else there is some

¹⁸ Kirby F. Smith confirms with multiple literary references that there exist in world literature traditions of both voluntary and involuntary werewolfism (Smith 5).

¹⁹ These two things are not necessarily incompatible, as I have demonstrated in the “Demon as Scapegoat” section of my book *Exorcism and Its Texts* (Kallendorf 140-48).

²⁰ As Catherine Karkov remarks about an earlier literary werewolf, with reference to Gerald of Wales’ *Topographia Hibernica* (1188): “Gerald’s story stands apart in its inclusion of a female as well as a male werewolf: werewolves in the Celtic, Germanic, and Classical traditions are almost all male, although there are more wolfish women in the Irish tradition than elsewhere” (Karkov 99).

confusion as to the wolf's gender.²¹ After Rutilio rejects the witch's sexual advances, she turns into a wolf, but the gender of this noun in the text is very definitely male: "una figura de **lobo**" (Cervantes, *Persiles* 91, emphasis mine). Later, however, he stabs the creature "a la que pensé ser **loba**" (Cervantes, *Persiles* 91, emphasis mine), with the noun now appearing in the feminine form. De Armas Wilson ventures an armchair psychoanalysis of the literary character Rutilio, drawing upon Freud's famous case study of the Wolfman:²²

In Rutilio's adult disorder, what becomes conscious to his readers and listeners, if not yet to himself, is fear not of the *lobo* but of the *loba*, the female wolf. Rutilio's wolfish, suffocating lust undergoes a striking gender change *in fieri*—from male to female wolf The projection of male lust onto the female, who is then "projected" as a demonic wolfwoman, has rarely been represented with such imaginative power [It is] the projection of a repentant Renaissance playboy who knows little or nothing about the women he seduces. (De Armas Wilson 164)

Be that as it may, I wish to argue—as others have before me—that this werewolf's gender is important also because we are meant to see in her an echo of Cervantes' most famous witch, Cañizares in *El coloquio de los perros*. Alban Forcione, Michael Armstrong-Roche and other scholars have made this connection explicit. In reference to Mauricio's disquisition on lycanthropy, Armstrong-Roche notes that "These are the kinds of rationalist explanations for the sorcerers' arts that readers of Cervantes recognize from the witch's tale in *El coloquio de los perros*" (Armstrong-Roche 80). Inverting the order of publication a bit, but going on the supposition that Cervantes continued to work on and revise several of his works simultaneously over the course of many years, Forcione notes that "the germs for the development of the figure of Cañizares are clearly present in the northern adventures of the *Persiles*, most specifically in Antonio's nocturnal encounter with the talking wolf and Rutilio's dark vigil over the metamorphosed corpse of the witch who had attempted to seduce him" (Forcione, *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness* 61). Although Rutilio's nocturnal vigil is over an actual cadaver, while Cañizares' body only resembles a corpse for the hours during which she goes into her unguent-induced trance, the effect in both stories is essentially the same: the narration comes to a halt as the reader witnesses a tableau scene where a witch lies stretched out on the ground as the narrator ponders a mysterious spectacle of evil.

It has been speculated that Cervantes might have heard of or even met real-life women accused of witchcraft: "Cervantes, recaudador de contribuciones, estuvo por Montilla en 1592. Allí oiría hablar de la célebre Camacha y tal vez conoció a la Cañizares o a alguien que se le pareciera" (Lanuza Arellano 25). Forcione also mentions Cervantes' residence in Montilla, "where, according to popular legend, a group of crones known as Las Camachas had existed and had, among other acts of evil, brought about the metamorphosis of a young noble into a horse" (Forcione, *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness* 68, n. 15).²³ Although it does not specifically

²¹ Writing in a different Cervantine context, Mauricio Molho suggests that this gender confusion may be both deliberate and appropriate: "la bisexualidad de los brujos no es sino un reflejo del hermafroditismo diabólico" (Molho 31).

²² In De Armas Wilson's reading, Freud construed the wolf as an "anxiety-animal" which served as a symbolic substitution for sexuality perceived as threatening (De Armas Wilson 164 n. 32).

²³ Forcione cites Agustín de Amezúa's edition of Cervantes' *El casamiento engañoso y el coloquio de los perros*, 168-76. For a study of the Inquisitorial proceedings against a witch known as La Camacha, see Huerga 453-62. There seem to have been at least two or three witches known as La Camacha de Montilla during the 16th century. Christian Andrés

mention werewolves, *El coloquio de los perros* does include other forms of zooanthropy in addition to the two boys who are changed into dogs. This gallery of animals appears as Cañizares describes the effects of the substance witches use to anoint their private parts: “acabadas de untar, a nuestro parecer, mudamos forma, y convertidas en gallos, lechuzas o cuervos, vamos al lugar donde nuestro dueño nos espera” (Cervantes, *El coloquio de los perros*, ed. Sieber, 342).

Ignacio Padilla compares the two episodes and concludes, “Mientras la metamorfosis perruna en la obra de Cervantes es menos un castigo irreparable que una penitencia necesaria para concluir ciertos ritos iniciáticos, sus metamorfosis licantrópicas son castigos definitivos, irreversibles” (Padilla 317). This is not entirely true, given that Rutilio’s girlfriend does recover human form once he stabs her, in keeping with werewolf tradition. Mauricio Molho is right to emphasize that in the fiction of Cervantes, a wolf is merely the more ferocious version of a dog.²⁴ In the *Persiles*, wolves possess the ability to speak, just like the two dogs in *El coloquio de los perros*. But despite the two stories’ obvious similarities, there are also important differences. Ironically, given its dark setting of *las tierras septentrionales*,²⁵ the *Persiles* episode ultimately contains more hope for redemption.

It might be argued that in Rutilio’s tale there appear glimmering echoes of sanctity, such as the biblical account in *Acts of the Apostles* when St. Peter breaks out of jail while Roman guards are sleeping. Rutilio’s jailbreak scene reads thus:

Esperé la noche, y en la mitad de su silencio [la bruja] llegó a mí, y me dijo que asiese de la punta de una caña que me puso en la mano, diciéndome la siguiese. Turbéme algún tanto. Pero como el interés era tan grande, moví los pies para seguirla, y hallélos sin grillos y sin

offers the following clarification: “Es de notar que si hubo dos Camachas de Montilla (por lo menos) en el siglo XVI, una sola fue condenada por la Inquisición de Córdoba, en 1572, y fue la que pasó por haber convertido en caballo a Don Alonso de Aguilar, hijo de los marqueses de Riego” (Andrés, “Fantasías brujeriles” 531). In a different article, he asserts that there were not two, but three such women: “bajo la figura novelística de la Camacha de Montilla, en el *Coloquio de los perros*, se puede pensar por lo menos en tres mujeres reales del siglo XVI” (Andrés, “Erotismo brujo y hechicería urbana” 165). He further clarifies that the most famous of Las Camachas was a certain Leonor Rodríguez (Andrés, “Fantasías brujeriles” 531) who was illiterate (Andrés, “Erotismo brujo” 165).

²⁴ “La mutación licantrópica produce lobos en el septentrión, y perros en tierras meridionales” (Molho 26). Ignacio Padilla discusses some further resonances of the wolf: although divinized by Romans and Egyptians, and revered also by Germanic tribes, the Judeo-Christian tradition (stemming from an agrarian, pastoral society) demonizes wolves as the foremost predators of sheep. In the parable of the Good Shepherd the wolf appears as a metaphor for Satan—who is also an accomplished practitioner of zooanthropy, beginning with his metamorphosis into a snake in the Garden of Eden. In traditional iconography of the Seven Deadly Sins, the wolf was emblematic of Avarice. In Dante’s *Inferno*, a wolf obstructs the poet’s path to the underworld. Saints were reported to have been warned of diabolical temptation by the sound of a wolf’s howl (Padilla, 318-19).

²⁵ Alban Forcione’s emphasis on symbolic geography is crucial to his overall thesis of movement in the work from North to South, tragedy to comedy, dark to light:

The symbolic use of the northern landscape was enabled by the current association of the geographically real lands of the north with darkness and obscurity. For their association with demonic forces, see Antonio de Torquemada: “. . . en esta tierra parece que el demonio está más suelto y tiene mayor libertad que en otras partes, y así, quieren decir algunos que es la principal habitación de los demonios . . . de aquellos partes ha de venir el Anticristo.” (Forcione, *Cervantes’ Christian Romance*, 113 n. 2; he cites Castro 184-86, Spitzer 316-17, and Torquemada, ed. Amezúa, 288)

More recently, Ignacio Padilla has made some similar connections: “el lobo y el licántropo figuran en la obra cervantina como habitantes e incluso como emblema de aquellas tierras remotas en las que rigen la desesperación, la marginación del mensaje cristiano y la barbarie que viene aparejada a la negación de la Buena Nueva” (Padilla 323).

cadena, y las puertas de toda la prisión de par en par abiertas, y los prisioneros y guardas en profundísimo sueño sepultados. (Cervantes, *Persiles* 90)

Compare how the Vulgate details Saint Peter's nocturnal escape:

Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shined in the room. And he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said to him: Gird thyself and put on thy sandals. And he did so. And he said to him: Cast thy garment about thee and follow me. And going out, he followed him. And he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel: but thought he saw a vision. And passing through the first and the second ward, they came to the iron gate that leadeth to the city, which of itself opened to them. And going out, they passed on through one street. And immediately the angel departed from him. (Acts 12:6-10)

The disturbing similarities between these two passages²⁶—i.e., the witch would seem to fill the rôle reserved for an angel sent from heaven as divine deliverer in the New Testament account—might place in doubt our neat and tidy, black-and-white vision of the witch as incarnation of pure evil. Indeed, Rutilio even refers to her as an “angel” in the text: “Túvela, no por hechicera, sino por ángel que enviaba el cielo para mi remedio” (Cervantes, *Persiles* 90).

Another saintly echo for this episode might be heard from the legend of Saint Raymond of Peñafort, who allegedly took a six-hour sea journey on his cloak:

San Ramón de Peñafort, de la Orden de Predicadores, estando en la isla de Mallorca con el Rey don Jaime el Conquistador . . . viendo que no quería el Rey dexar una amiga que tenía, se resolvió de pasar a Barcelona, su patria. . . . Fuese al puerto de la ciudad, y viendo que aderezaban un navío para pasar a Barcelona, rogó a los marineros que le recibiesen a él y a su compañero, porque querían pasar a tierra firme. Respondieron los marineros: Padre no podemos servirlos, porque so pena de muerte nos ha mandado el Rey que no os pasemos. . . . Hechas estas diligencias (que es razón se hagan antes de hacer milagros) y visto que no había remedio de salir de la isla con navíos, fuese a una peñas del puerto, y allegando hasta donde alindaban con las olas, quitóse la capa, muy breada y calafateada con fe, la cual tendida sobre las inconstantes olas con gran constancia, tomó el báculo en la mano, y santiguándose con la señal de la cruz, se embarcó en su capa como si fuera navío. Hizo del báculo árbol y de la media capa velas. Y, antes de darlas al aire, llamó a su compañero, que miraba atónito lo que el Santo hacía. El cual, no fiando tanto de la capa, como era razón,

²⁶ Independently of this research, Fred de Armas came to the conclusion that this passage in the *Persiles* might be related to St. Peter's escape from prison as recounted in Acts 12 and that Cervantes' knowledge of this passage may have been mediated by the painting “The Liberation of Saint Peter” (1514) by Renaissance artist Raphael for the Stanze di Raffaello in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican (this theory of De Armas' has not been published but was announced in a plenary lecture, “A Windowless World: The Vanishing Architectures of *Persiles*, Books I-II,” which he delivered in Tromsø, Norway at the conference “Cervantes en el Septentrion” on 27 June 2017). I find this theory to be persuasive, particularly given Cervantes' first-hand knowledge of Raphael's art which De Armas already established in *Cervantes, Raphael and the Classics*.

dudó y no quiso embarcarse con San Ramón, y así quedó aislado. Sopló el viento, y dentro seis horas se apeó en la arena de Barcelona. (Verdú 151-52)²⁷

Rutilio's journey on the witch's cape might be aerial instead of aqueous, but other than that, the parallels are striking:

Tendió en el suelo mi guiadora un manto, y mandóme que pusiese los pies en él. . . . [P]use los pies en la mitad del manto, y ella ni más ni menos, murmurando unas razones que yo no pude entender, y el manto comenzó a levantarse en el aire, y yo comencé a temer poderosamente, y en mi corazón no tuvo santo la letanía a quien no llamase en mi ayuda. . . . [A]l parecer, cuatro horas o poco más había volado, cuando me hallé al crepúsculo del día en una tierra no conocida. (Cervantes, *Persiles* 90)

José Luis Lanuza remarks that a similar ambiguity between saint and sinner might be true of Cañizares in *El coloquio de los perros*, who hides her office as a witch behind a façade of charity and devotion. In the tableau scene where she lies comatose on the ground, bystanders from the hospital argue about whether she might actually be experiencing saintly ecstasy: “La gente discute. Unos la creen arrobada de santidad, otros enajenada de brujería” (Lanuza Arellano 27). In “Between Ecstasy and Exorcism,” Alison Weber has demonstrated that the same ontological ambiguity shrouded real-life early modern people, even such revered figures as Saint Teresa of Ávila (Weber 221-34). This radical uncertainty has been characterized most aptly by Jeremy Robbins:

[P]otential deception of the senses has been seen to be both a major preoccupation of the period and consequently a major argument in favour of sceptical withholding of assent. . . . The Baroque developed three closely connected notions that helped make the early eighteenth century receptive to the empiricism and experimentalism of the new science. These were the pragmatism typical of political realists such as Saavedra; the notion of utility as expressed by both Gracián . . . and López de Vega . . .; and . . . the perceptual scrutiny fostered by the fusion of Neostoicism and scepticism, both of which stressed the need for close observation and withholding of judgement. All helped reshape cultural and intellectual expectations of what knowledge was and how it might best be obtained in the securest form possible. These three frequently interconnected ideas formed the core of epistemological attitudes as developed by the fusion of Neostoicism and scepticism in response to the erosion of certainty as an achievable—and necessary—component of knowledge.²⁸

It is impossible to determine whether Cañizares is a saint or a sinner—and that is precisely the point. Thus we see that the story of Rutilio, likewise—even before his moment of anagnorisis—already contains within it the seeds of sanctity (or at least salvation). These flickers of holiness contribute to the complexity of Cervantes' characters and belie attempts to pigeonhole these witch figures as uniformly, absolutely malevolent.²⁹

²⁷ This account by Blas Verdú was first published in Barcelona in 1605.

²⁸ Robbins, *Arts of Perception*, 250-51.

²⁹ This point has been made most forcefully by Tobias Foster Gittes in an article titled “Cañizares' Textual Auto-da-fé: Inquisitorial Dogs and Martyred Witches in Cervantes's *Novela y coloquio que pasó entre Cipiión y Berganza*,” in

Before closing, we should mention one further twist to this episode, namely that later on, after Rutilio finds himself the sole survivor of a shipwreck (*Persiles* I.9), he comes to a barbarous isle where he is destined to spend three years doing penance for his sins. The first thing he notices about this new place is a corpse hanging from a tree. The whole thing of course gives him the creeps but, since beggars cannot be choosers, he “borrows” the animal skins worn by the cadaver and decides that his best strategy is to feign an inability to hear and speak:

descolgué al bárbaro del árbol, y habiéndome desnudado de todos mis vestidos, que enterré en la arena, me vestí de los suyos, que me vinieron bien, pues no tenían otra hechura que ser de pieles de animales, no cosidos, ni cortados a medida, sino ceñidos poer el cuerpo, como lo habeis visto. Para disimular la lengua, y que por ella no fuese conocido por extranjero, me fingí mudo y sordo, y con esta industria me entré por la isla adentro. (Cervantes, *Persiles* 94).

This passage has been explicated most convincingly by Alban Forcione:

His donning the dress of animal skins which clothes the cadaver and his decision to feign deafness and muteness symbolize the descent to bestiality inherent in his sin. We need not recall the words of the dog Berganza describing speech as a divine gift, which human beings alone among God’s creatures enjoy, to see in Rutilio’s decision the conditions of a dreadful penance. (Forcione, *Cervantes’ Christian Romance* 114)

To Rutilio’s self-imposed excommunication, resulting in a human being who does not talk, would have to be juxtaposed the character Antonio’s encounter with a talking wolf in *Persiles* I.5 (Cervantes, *Persiles* 77), which once more places in jeopardy our customarily neat distinctions between man and animal.

In fact, their radical indeterminacy might be the most unsettling thing about werewolves.³⁰ Werewolfism may not be apparent to the naked eye, as in “la creencia popular . . . que la piel lobuna del licántropo crecía hacia adentro, lo cual explicaba que los hombres-lobo presentasen menos un aspecto lobuno que una conducta de género animal” (Padilla 322). This idea that

which he makes the fairly outrageous (and, to many eyes, perverse) but provocative claim that the witch Cañizares, far from being the villain in the story, should instead be read as the work’s ethical hero:

Such striking modesty, coupled with the selfless good will and faith discussed earlier has . . . the effect of raising her to an ethical plane superior to that of any of the other characters portrayed in the *Coloquio*. . . . Cañizares’s own declaration of faith in God’s goodness . . . insistence on God’s absolute power . . . and conviction that, as God is sinless, we are the sole authors of our suffering . . . confirm her piety and unprecedented . . . resolution to assume moral responsibility for her actions. (Gittes 374)

He goes so far as to compare the mistreatment of her body to the martyrdom endured by Christian saints (Gittes 372). This interpretation forms a direct attack on Forcione’s previous reading and is specifically formulated as such (Gittes 372 n. 25, n. 26). A less extreme view, which nonetheless recognizes a certain complexity in Cañizares’ characterization, is offered by Edward C. Riley: “su bruja discreta Cañizares, se da cuenta de lo entreverados que están el mal y el bien” (Riley 94).

³⁰ As Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre describes this uncanniness, “the werewolf functions symbolically as an ‘anti-Prometheus’; it constantly threatens the ontological status of being human” (Jacques-Lefèvre 195). She also affirms the creature’s liminal status with her observation that a werewolf technically cannot be considered either human or bestial, given that the condition can be undone or reversed (Jacques-Lefèvre 196).

werewolves' fur actually grows on the inside—an extreme example of the Baroque *topos* of the upside-down world, which in this case turns itself inside-out—produces an uncanny sensation, as the saying goes, of not being comfortable in our own 'skins.'³¹ Never just an unfortunate coincidence, werewolfism inherently bore moral overtones. In the words of Ignacio Padilla with regard to Cervantes, “nuestro autor acude al licántropo para plantear el problema del Mal como una degradación de la persona, como la pérdida de la humanidad a favor de la emergencia de nuestra contenida animalidad” (Padilla 321). Man degenerates into animal, and animal is decidedly bad. Or is it?

Jacques Derrida's *The Beast & the Sovereign* is shot through with references specifically to werewolves derived in part from sources as varied as philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Derrida cites a telling passage from Rousseau's *Confessions* in which he describes himself wandering from one country inn to the next, so unkempt that he might have passed for a werewolf. Derrida goes on to invoke Lacan's explication of the Latin phrase *homo homini lupus* (loosely, man behaves like a wolf towards his fellow man) in *Écrits*, only to make his own pronouncement in this regard: “The law (*nomos*) is always determined from the place of some wolf” (Derrida 96). He continues:

This paradoxical question of what is proper to man also ran through everything we said and quoted (a great number of genecological texts on the lycanthrope, especially in the figure of the werewolf). . . . I would like to emphasize the way in which the werewolf, the “outlaw” as the English translation of Rousseau's *Confessions* has it . . . the wolf-man as werewolf is identified not only as asocial, outside-the-political-law . . . but outside-the-theological-and-religious law, as a miscreant, basically as an atheist. The werewolf or outlaw is, then, “without faith or law”. . . . [T]he same *Confessions* present the wolf, or the werewolf, as someone who basically does not recognize the sovereignty of God, neither religious law nor the church, especially the Christian church, and so is “without faith or law.” (Derrida 98-99)

This might seem like a resounding condemnation. But the whole gist of Derrida's argument as he develops it in two volumes of *The Beast & the Sovereign* is to, in essence, reverse this historical demonization of the werewolf: to deconstruct the human vs. animal dichotomy and show how human beings manifest animalistic traits and vice versa. This theoretical trend has continued in recent years with Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal*, especially as it relates to the concept of *bare life* (Agamben, *The Open* 15, 38).³² Apart from literary theory and cultural studies, this discourse permeates also the realm of sociobiology. According to Robert Wright, in *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*, scientists have found evidence of such phenomena as reciprocal altruism and what is called *non-zero-sumness* in animal behavior,

³¹ Kirby F. Smith confirms that a related concept to that of the werewolf is the idea of the *versipellis*, or creature whose skin is reversible: “when the werewolf is in the human form, his skin . . . is merely a wolf-skin worn wrong side out. When he becomes a wolf he simply turns it over and wears it hairy side out, with the resulting change in form” (Smith 9). This belief provided a convenient excuse for persecution of ‘werewolves’ who showed no visible outward symptoms of their condition, such as an alleged *versipellis* in Padua who was burned alive by his executioners after they determined that his fur grew on the inside (Jacques-Lefèvre 196; she cites Jacob Fincel, *Wunderzeichen: Warhafftige Beschreibung und gründlich Verzeichnis schrecklicher Wunderzeichen und Geschichten* [Frankfurt am Main, 1556-57]).

³² Agamben deploys the specific example of the werewolf as an illustration of his ideas in the French translation he made of his own *Homo sacer* (Agamben, *Homo sacer* 116ff).

whereas previously these were thought to be exclusively human traits (Wright 193). Werewolves, by their very nature, destabilize the human vs. animal dichotomy and show us that in the end, these distinctions might be somewhat arbitrary. The supposedly hard-and-fast boundaries between species could be blurrier than we want to admit.

So where does all this leave us vis-à-vis Cervantes and the *Persiles*? To once again cite Baroque philosophical theorist Jeremy Robbins,

[T]he Spanish Baroque is marked by a profound sense of individuals exploring, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes enthusiastically, their rapidly changing world and the possibilities and challenges this offered. The picture that emerges is of a culture vigorously engaged in questioning its own assumptions and beliefs, and striving to make the individual reader and spectator engage too in actively exploring and questioning his or her received ideas and ideals. This engagement of reader with text, of viewer with canvas, is what makes Baroque literature and art so vibrant. This is what gives it its characteristic sense of questioning the boundaries of behaviour, belief, and representation, and of blurring the normally clear-cut and rigidly demarcated divisions between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction.³³

José Luis Lanuza Arellano may be right to observe, “Cervantes no perdió la ocasión de mostrarse un poco nigromante en el *Persiles*” (Lanuza Arellano 30). If not an outright necromancer, then at least a participant in the séance. . . . Novelist Ignacio Padilla’s commentary on this episode emphasizes “el patente interés de Cervantes por la inestabilidad de lo real” (Padilla 319).³⁴ As our epigraph from the *Malleus maleficarum* intimates, the lure of the diabolical could reside simply in the fact that it provided that ineffable spark which is the germ for literary creation. And a Christianized version of the Neo-Aristotelian legitimate marvellous³⁵ provided easy ‘cover’ for an author curious about such forbidden knowledge (Shattuck). After all, a literary technique like perspectivism offered the perfect way out.³⁶ The character Mauricio in the *Persiles* explains that the force of enchanters’ spells “nos hace ver una cosa por otra” (Cervantes, *Persiles* 135), a line Amy Williamsen glosses as “reminiscent of Don Quixote’s attribution of his misperceptions to enchanters’ spells” (Williamsen 137).³⁷ Is it a barber’s basin or the helmet of Mambrino? Is it a witch or a werewolf? Male or female? Demonic figure or angelic deliverer? Incarnation of pure evil or holy saint? The only possible definitive answer must lie in the eye of the beholder. As has

³³ Robbins, *The Challenges of Uncertainty*, 10-11.

³⁴ He goes on to say, “las metamorfosis humano-animales . . . hacen de su obra un auténtico carnaval de negaciones ontológicas. [Enfatizan] [l]o engañoso, lo inestable y lo efímero de la realidad” (Padilla 319).

³⁵ On the Christian legitimate marvellous see Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the ‘Persiles’* 169-86; and Kallendorf 184-99. On Christian beliefs regarding werewolves see Kratz 57-80. Even the more drastic view that God really did permit transformations of human beings into animals could be found to have a biblical basis: in the Old Testament book of Daniel, the King Nebuchadnezzar seems to have suffered a type of zooanthropomorphic transformation into an ox (Daniel 4:30). This, however, was not the traditional position taken by the Church, which categorically denied the actual, physical existence of werewolves (Kratz 62).

³⁶ As Carroll B. Johnson concludes in “Of Witches and Bitches” regarding the radical ambiguity he sees surrounding the figure of the witch Cañizares in *El coloquio de los perros*: “We are left, as usual, where Cervantes so often leaves us, with nagging unresolved (and probably unresolvable) questions of ambiguity and multiple perspectives, and unresolvable dialectic of competing voices” (Johnson 22).

³⁷ Christian Andrés relates this phenomenon of seeing one thing for another to a concept known as *tropelía*, a technical term which Cervantes himself uses (Andrés, “Erotismo brujeril” 167). Anthony Cárdenas-Rotunno clarifies further that *tropelía* is not a real change, only an apparent one effected through trickery (Cárdenas-Rotunno 302).

been illustrated by this case from Cervantes, Baroque “arts of perception” will always leave us squirming uncomfortably in that liminal space between belief and knowledge.

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