

Ortel Banedre and the Challenge to Consciousness in the *Persiles*

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That *Persiles* and *Sigismunda* are not characters in the novel which proclaims their names in its title is our first indication that the *Persiles* is above all concerned with the nature of truth and fiction. For it is the pseudonyms of Periandro and Auristela which remain engraved in our minds after we leave the novelistic world and to which we constantly refer when writing essays on the *Persiles*. This realization suggests the unreliability of appearances in the novel and forces us to look beneath external signs, such as names and descriptions, as we try to make our way through the confusing world of the *Persiles*. The story of Ortel Banedre occurs at the point in the novel where Periandro and his companions reach Spain and prompts a discussion of the Spanish obsession with “honra.” Banedre’s story reveals not only the layers of false appearance surrounding his character, but also suggests the problematic nature of relationships between parents and children, husband and wife, character and author, and character and reader. I therefore believe that the story deserves more critical attention than has previously been directed.¹ I propose that Banedre’s story also reveals the importance of individual human experience in the novel as a genre. Following the Renaissance movement toward validation of each person’s experience, the story of Ortel Banedre (like the entire *Persiles*) presents the reader with the opportunity to use his or her own experience as a measuring stick against which s/he can judge for himself the truth behind what is told.

The diversity and richness of individual characters’ lives in the story show quite clearly how the novel as a genre stresses the individual’s experience as unique and fascinating material for literature. Cervantes shows that truth and fiction approach each other when we realize that the most outlandish creations in literature need not appear any more fantastic than people and situations in life.² Banedre in effect challenges us to distrust everything he tells us about himself and to engage ourselves in the process of active reading. When we accept his invitation to become careful readers, we discover that the novelistic world of the *Persiles* is true to our own: a seemingly endless parade of impostors who hide behind the guise of language.

Ortel Banedre’s story can be divided into three parts, each in a different narrative voice.³ The first part of the story is Banedre’s autobiographical narration of his adventures in Portugal and Spain. He meets Periandro and his companions on the road to Madrid and tells them how he murdered a young man, don Duarte, in Lisbon, unknowingly took refuge in the house of the dead man’s mother, doña Guiomar de Sosa, was led to safety by the generous lady, and then how he met a girl named Luisa at an inn in Talavera, married her and was then outraged when Luisa and Alonso, her old boyfriend, took off two weeks later. Banedre declares his intention to regain his lost honor by killing Luisa and Alonso, but Periandro stops him and convinces him that revenge is not Christian behavior. The first part of the story ends with Banedre’s decision not to seek bloody revenge and to return to Poland. The second part of the story is a letter from Bartolomé, the muleteer who has become Luisa’s new boyfriend, in which he recounts how Banedre came across them in Rome, started beating Bartolomé up, and brought upon his own death when Luisa stabbed him.⁴

The third part of the story is a remark from the author of the novel, who attempts to explain Banedre’s behavior as divine will, not his intentions.⁵ Thus, the story is told in three installments, each providing a different perspective on the issues raised. By perspectivizing the story of Ortel Banedre, Cervantes suggests the need for several different approaches in an examination of Banedre’s dishonor. The story further reveals the impossibility of defining absolutely relationships between values such as honor and revenge (in life) and truth and fiction (in literature). I propose to expose the inconsistencies in Banedre’s story and to show Cervantes’ insistence that we use our own judgment in evaluating what is presented to us as truthful. The story of Ortel Banedre, like the entire *Persiles*, reveals the Renaissance preoccupation with verisimilitude in literature. The most important precept of neo-Aristotelian literary theory was the insistence that literature be verisimilar, that is, true to life.⁶

Ortel Banedre is a narrator who ostensibly follows this precept. He tells his story in the preterite tense, not the historical present, in order to give the illusion of grounding his narration in historical actuality.⁷ He then openly declares that his story is true: "...me sucedió un caso, que, si le creyéredes, haréis mucho, y si no, no importa nada, puesto que la verdad ha de tener siempre su asiento, aunque sea en sí misma."⁸ Banedre is in effect challenging his audience to question the verisimilitude of his narration by presenting the audience with two options structured around his use of the word "si": to judge the narration either as real or fictitious. If the audience believes him, they will have to make a large effort ("si le creyéredes, haréis mucho"). If, on the other hand, they do not believe him, he arrogantly claims that it does not matter, because the truth behind his narration is an inscrutable and objective value that exists outside of human attempts at verification ("puesto que la verdad ha de tener siempre su asiento, aunque sea en sí misma").

Here Cervantes questions the neo-Aristotelian precept of verisimilitude by acknowledging the reader's right to a personal interpretation of literature. Indeed, Periandro tells Banedre to tell whatever he chooses ("Contad, señor, lo que quisiéredes..."), to which Banedre responds that he will present the whole story for the audience's evaluation ("...usando desa buena licencia, no me quedará cosa en el tintero que no la ponga en la plana de vuestro juicio" [322-323]). Banedre imposes knowledge on his audience in his first words to Periandro and his companions ("Yo, señores, aunque no queráis saberlo, quiero que sepáis que soy extranjero..."[316]). Thus, the reader is forced to participate in the story, whether he or she likes it or not. Banedre ironically points out his own lack of judgment immediately after inviting the audience to use their judgment ("Con todo el [juicio] que entonces tenía, que no debía ser mucho..."[p. 323]). By drawing attention to his own poor judgment, Banedre stresses the need for someone to use good judgment, and as we have seen, he obliges the reader to fulfill the critical function in the story.

Cervantes undermines the verisimilitude of Banedre's story by basing it on another piece of fiction: a novella by Giraldi Cintio (*Gli Ecatommiti*, VI, vi).⁹ The Italian story takes place in Fondi, where an anonymous man murders Scipione, the beloved son of Livia, a noble lady who later hides the murderer from the authorities, gives him her son's name, and adopts him as a replacement for the original Scipione. Cervantes' version points out both the inverisimilar nature of Livia's sense of duty and Banedre's reluctance to accept responsibility for his own actions through the use of the word "cortesía." First, let us examine doña Guiomar's conduct in the story. Giraldi's tale stresses the inviolability of moral commitment ("cortesía") and portrays Livia as a noble Christian lady of unequivocal exemplarity who knows how to keep her promise to hide her son's murderer even though she feels a desire for revenge ("...la fede che ella data gli avea di servarlo come figliuolo, la induceva ad avere pietà del giovane, e le desteva nell'animo desiderio de servarlo").¹⁰

In his version, Cervantes questions the judgment behind Livia's generous behavior ("cortesía). Doña Guiomar, like Livia, admits a strange man to her bedroom, knowing by his own confession that he is a murderer. Yet she expresses no concern for her own life and does not seem to realize that she is circumventing justice by concealing Banedre from the authorities. Like Livia, she feels a sense of duty ("cortesía") to someone she does not know (she calls him "Hombre, quienquiera que seas" [319]), and she refuses to see his face as he leaves her bedroom, although she already has seen him when he first came to her! Doña Guiomar's insistence that Banedre cover his face so that she will not recognize him is not true to life, and her foolish behavior reminds us of the traditional conduct required by "verisimilar" literature. She fails to notice Banedre's bloody sword and even gives him one hundred gold "escudos" to help him out! She shows great virtue by rising above retributive justice, but places the issue of "cortesía"--- the inviolability of commitment--- in question. Cervantes suggests that a promise made without knowledge of circumstance reflects poor judgment, but he does not suggest that her behavior is inverisimilar, for bad judgment is certainly a part of all people's lives.

Finally, we cannot overlook the problematic relationship between doña Guiomar and her son. In the Italian novella, Scipione is an exemplary son ("tutto gentile e cortese"). However, when doña Guiomar learns of her son's death, her anguish appears staged. She immediately orders that his body be removed from her sight (she wants to forget that she has already seen Banedre's face) and that he be buried at once. She exclaims that she always thought his arrogance would be the cause of his death. Does she really love her son? Banedre tells us that he spends the rest of that night "ponderando el valeroso y nunca visto ánimo cristiano y admirable proceder de doña Guiomar de Sosa, que así supe se llamaba mi bienhechora" (320). The words "nunca visto" suggest literally that her wondrous Christian behavior has never been seen --- that it is not true to life.

After suggesting both that doña Guiomar's exemplary behavior is not possible and that the whole narration may be fictitious, Banedre immediately proceeds to create an illusion of verisimilitude by naming his benefactress. In his adaptation of Giraldis's novella, Cervantes suggests that fiction which passes itself off as verisimilar (Giraldis's novella) is only fooling itself. The reader must use his or her own judgment and experience to evaluate whether or not a story is true.

Cervantes also stresses Banedre's moral culpability, although both the author and the narrator attempt to blame external agents for Banedre's mishaps. We are first introduced to Banedre when he removes his hat to greet Periandro and his companions and falls from his horse ("...al quitarles el sombrero para saludarles y hacerles cortesía, habiendo puesto la cabalgadura, como después pareció, la mano en un hoyo, dió consigo y con su dueño al través una gran caída" [315]). The performance of accepted social practices (even the simple act of removing one's hat when greeting strangers) can be dangerous if not supported by full attention to circumstance. Thus, from our first glimpse of Banedre, the author suggests that Banedre's overly zealous compliance with "cortesía" causes him to fall from his horse, even though blame is ostensibly shifted away from Banedre and placed on the horse ("...habiendo puesto la cabalgadura, como después pareció, la mano en un hoyo, dió consigo y con su dueño al través una gran caída"). By using the phrase "como después pareció", the author asserts his control over both his narrator and his audience and would have us blindly believe the reasons he produces for his character's behavior. Banedre himself tries to make us believe it was fate, not his own inattentiveness, that caused him to fall from his horse: "Quizá, señores peregrinos, ha permitido la suerte que yo haya caído en este llano para poder levantarme de los riesgos donde la imaginación me tiene puesta el alma" (316).

Banedre even blames fate for "leading the point of his sword" when he kills don Duarte. Banedre then blames fate for leading him to the inn in Talavera where he meets Luisa: "...pero ya mi suerte, cansada de llevar la nave de mi ventura con próspero viento por el mar de la vida humana, quiso que diese en un bajío que la destrozase toda, y así, hizo que, en llegando una noche a Talavera...me apeé en un mesón..." (320-321). Finally, Banedre claims that fate has arranged for Luisa and Alonso to be imprisoned in Madrid and that anonymous people in Madrid have told him to go there and avenge his honor by killing Luisa and Alonso: "...he sido avisado que vaya a ponerles la demanda y a seguir mi justicia" (324). Banedre, like the murderer in Giraldis's tale, shows no remorse for his murder, for after safely returning to his room, Banedre spends the rest of the night thanking God and doña Guiomar for their mercy in helping him elude the Portuguese authorities. Although Banedre manages to escape the law in Lisbon, Cervantes refuses to let him off morally. Banedre must accept responsibility for his own life and learn to disregard dangerous social opinions about what he should do, as exemplified by the anonymous people in Madrid who advise him to kill in revenge. In effect, Cervantes turns the idea of "cortesía" inside out (or rather, outside in) by refocusing our attention from the external social meanings of duty and politeness to the internal psychology of the individual character.

Cervantes not only attacks contemporary literary theory (as embodied in the artificial "cortesía" of Giraldis's novella) but also uses the word "cortesía" as a point of departure for an assault on bad reading habits. The engagement of the reader in Banedre's story is shown by Periandro's insistence that Banedre continue his narration: "...le dijo Periandro que prosiguiese en lo que decir quería, que todos le darían crédito, porque todos eran corteses y en las cosas del mundo experimentados" (316). Periandro tells Banedre to say what he wants and assures him that they will believe him. Periandro describes himself and his companions as "corteses", suggesting that they will politely believe Banedre's story because they subscribe to a set of ethical and literary principles organized around duty and propriety. But Periandro and his companions are more than polite readers, for Periandro further describes his group as "en las cosas del mundo experimentados", revealing his opinion of himself and his group as initiated in life.

Because of the ethical and literary implications of "cortesía", Periandro and his companions reflect a belief that if an author presents a story which claims to be verisimilar, the audience has the responsibility to believe him.¹¹ At the same time, an audience that is not naïve ("en las cosas del mundo experimentados") has the ability to reject Banedre's story as fictitious if it fails to ring true of their own experience. By now we can realize that Banedre's pompous claim about the absolute truth of his story is both immature and purposely misleading. Like Periandro and his companions, we are challenged by the narrator to set aside conventional responses to literature and use our own judgment in deciding whether Banedre's narration is verisimilar. The burden of interpretation, then, is placed squarely on each reader's approach to the narration.

We must come to terms with a narrator who derives power from his use of language and attempts to impose his view on us (exactly as I am in this essay attempting to convince you of the strength of my arguments). Language is the artist's most powerful tool and in the entire *Persiles* raises the question of verisimilitude in fiction. Ortel Banedre, as we have seen, claims to present a true account of his life, yet he challenges the reader to make up his or her own mind. The power of language to point out the ambiguities inherent in reality and fiction occurs at other moments in the *Persiles*. When Periandro tells Auristela his allegorical dream of virtue and vice, she is not sure if his narration is real or imaginary because he has told it so well (244). Mauricio has difficulty believing Periandro when Cratilo's horse jumps from a cliff without breaking at least "three or four legs," and he complains that Periandro is presuming too much on his audience's "cortesía" in expecting them to believe a marvelous event ("tan desaforado salto" [266]). But they believe Periandro even when he tells them something marvelous ("desaforado") because they trust him: "...pero el crédito que todos tenían de Periandro les hizo no pasar adelante con la duda del no creerle: que, así como es pena del mentiroso, que cuando diga verdad no se le crea, así es gloria del bien acreditado el ser creído cuando diga mentira" (266-267).

Periandro as a powerful and beautiful hero (man of actions) is an equally impressive narrator (man of words), and he can basically make his audience believe whatever he says. Like Periandro, Banedre finds power in artistic freedom. And this is exactly what Periandro tells Banedre to do in his narration: "Contad, señor, lo que quisiéredes y con las menudencias que quisiéredes...contad de Alonso y de Martina, acocead a vuestro gusto a Luisa, casalda o no la caséis, séase ella libre y desenvuelta como un cernícalo..." (322-323). Banedre has the artistic freedom to say whatever he wants---to kick Luisa as much as he desires, or to say he married Luisa or not. Periandro in effect first tells Banedre to disregard theoretical restrictions on the subject of verisimilitude ("Contad, señor, lo que quisiéredes...") and then to ignore the potential censure of moralistic readers who might take objection to his portrayal of sensuality, which Periandro justifies as a legitimate literary topic by couching his advice to Banedre in the sensual imagery of food (variety is described as a plate of salad next to a pheasant on a banquet table; appropriate language is "la salsa de los cuentos") and by telling Banedre that the qualities of a well-told story will override any objections to his inclusion of Luisa's mischievous boldness ("...que el toque no está en sus desenvolturas, sino en sus sucesos..."[323]). After listening to Periandro's advice, Banedre vows to use creative license ("Digo, pues, señores...que usando desa buena licencia..."), further undermining his transparent attempts to tell the absolute truth, and forcing the reader to acknowledge both the insufficiency of that version of the truth and, by extension, the relative irrelevance of verifiable truths to literature. The narrator works with an uninhibited sense of power over both characters and readers, and the only check to his unbridled fantasy is the judgment of the wise reader---not the dutiful, convention-bound, and passive readers of "cortesía", but rather the independent, experienced, and active participants in literature whom Periandro describes as "en las cosas del mundo experimentados."

I regard the story of Ortel Banedre as a lesson in the techniques of close textual analysis.¹² First let us expose the various disguises assumed by the narrator in order to uncover the problematic relationships he tries to hide. Banedre, as I have pointed out, is an autobiographical narrator who tells his story in the first-person, by definition a subjective narrative voice which allows the narrator to present himself as he pleases. Banedre does exactly that when he demonstrates his power to reveal only certain details about himself. We see Ortel Banedre as an unstable narrator from the first time he enters the novel, when he falls from his horse---a fall suggestive both of his ethical fall from honor and of his literary instability as a narrator.¹³ Will he rigorously uphold the truth, or will he falter in his account and introduce spurious details? Could he even manage to invent the whole story? He fails to tell us his name, revealing only that he is Polish. As an outsider, Banedre must be viewed suspiciously, for he comes from a frontier of the civilized world and can say things that are unverifiable. Banedre is a stranger in a strange land, and his disorientation is intensified as he wanders at night through the narrow streets of Lisbon, confused and frightened after having killed a man. After doña Guiomar helps him escape the Portuguese authorities, Banedre goes off to the Indies for fifteen years --- like Poland, an exotic and distant land where he claims "...me han sucedido cosas de que quizá pudieran hacer una gustosa y verdadera historia" (320). Of course, we have no way of verifying these things, and his claim that he could make a pleasing, yet true, story of his experiences in the New World is mystified by the fact that he never does relate these things. The instability surrounding Banedre's role as narrator is heightened once more by the situating of his adventure in Lisbon, not Fondi as in the Italian source. Portugal was annexed by Spain in 1580, only one generation before the publication of the *Persiles* in 1617.

Thus, a Spanish audience of the early seventeenth century would have probably considered Portugal as a curious and somewhat exotic portion of their empire, and could have shared Banedre's sense of confusion in the dark, narrow streets of Lisbon.¹⁴ Banedre's initial appearance as a fallen man, his self-presentation as a nameless outsider from a far-off land, his murder of don Duarte, his confusion as a man of lost direction in the dark and narrow streets of Lisbon, the mysterious hiatus of fifteen years' experiences in the New World, and the deliberate change of scene from Giraldi's relatively familiar Renaissance Italy to the relatively unknown Lisbon produce a compounded effect which suggests Banedre's unreliability as a narrator.

Banedre attempts to mislead the reader into believing him by creating a verisimilar frame for his narration. He explains why he speaks Spanish so well ("muchacho salí de mi tierra...serví a españoles, y aprendí la lengua castellana de la manera que veis que la hablo" [316]). He explains what he was doing in Portugal ("llevado del general deseo que todos tienen de ver tierras, vine a Portugal a ver la gran ciudad de Lisboa") and more specifically, what he was doing on that eventful first night in Lisbon ("por mejorar de posada, que no me había parecido bien una"). He also uses specific references to the physical location of his adventure (the dark and narrow streets of Lisbon) and to the chronological sequence of events (the first night in Lisbon follows an exact order of event after event) in order to create the illusion of a real human experience grounded in a precise moment in space and time.

He reports the Portuguese word for streets ("*ruas*, como ellos las llaman") in order to give the appearance of a real observation on how the Portuguese spoke while he was in Lisbon. Furthermore, he acts as if he were trying to remember exact details of this experience. After the Portuguese authorities leave doña Guiomar's bedroom, he says that she lifted the tapestry that had concealed him, "...y a lo que pienso, me puso las manos sobre el corazón" (319, emphasis added).¹⁵ He thinks that doña Guiomar put her hands over his heart, but his memory may not be totally faithful. He then names doña Guiomar at the end of the episode, claiming that he learned her name only after she helped him to safety. By naming her, he invests her with an apparently real identity and presence in the story. Banedre soon after invests Luisa with a similar illusion of reality by stating that when he first sees her, he has the impression that she is sixteen years old, but he then adds that he later learned her true age of twenty-two (321). As one further example, we might recall Banedre's promise to Periandro that he will tell the whole story ("...no me quedará cosa en el tintero que no la ponga en la plana de vuestro juicio." In its repeated challenge to the reader to arrive at his or her own interpretation of the story, Banedre's comment also implies the existence of a whole, real, and finished episode.

Banedre constructs a verisimilar frame both to mislead the reader about the verisimilitude of his narration and to challenge him or her to tackle the ambiguities implicit in his narration. The final step in the construction of a verisimilar frame takes place when we learn the name of our Polish narrator at the end of his narration. The revelation of Banedre's name comes after Banedre has listened to Periandro's Christian advice not to seek bloody revenge and has become a reformed Christian, vowing to live apart from Luisa and return to Poland. The nameless and fallen man from a distant region of the civilized world appears to have gained self-knowledge through his dialogue with Periandro, and the disclosure of his name at the end of the narration suggests a development in Banedre's character which, as we will see, is questioned in the last two parts of the story. The author interjects himself into the story: "...díjoles su nombre, que se llamaba Ortel Banedre, que respondía en castellano Martín Banedre" (326). The translation of his first name from Polish to Spanish presupposes the existence of the proper name "Ortel" in Polish and invests the character of Banedre with a verifiable identity.

We realize, however, that the author is undercutting Banedre's narrative reliability when we actively participate in the story and discover through investigation that neither his first nor last name bears the slightest resemblance to a real Polish name and that the translation is a hoax.¹⁶ Of course, Banedre may really be Polish and merely hiding behind a pseudonym. At any rate, the fact that the name he gives us is not what he claims it is leads us to doubt the truthfulness of his whole story. Banedre is an impostor, and like the nameless author and translator of the *Persiles* and Cide Hamete Benengeli in the *Quijote*, he represents the narrative elusiveness and indefinability which he boastfully claims to silence with the power of absolute truth. As we discover that Banedre is an impostor who attempts to seduce us into believing his narration, we uncover more examples of his insincere behavior. Banedre is proud of his ability to dissimulate the truth.

When he leaves doña Guiomar's house in Lisbon, he acts as if nothing had happened, although he has committed a murder and been concealed from the authorities ("...reconocí mi posada, y me entré en ella, como si por mí no hubiera pasado ni próspero suceso ni adverso" [319]). Because Banedre acts as if nothing had happened, we must wonder if indeed nothing happened. By forcing us to question his reliability as a narrator, he makes us wonder if the whole story might be an invention.¹⁷

Banedre similarly assumes an insincere posture when he fails to provide evidence for the pure intentions he claims to have: "¡Oh fuerzas poderosas de amor, digo, inconsiderado, presuroso y lascivo y mal intencionado, y con cuánta facilidad atropellas disinnios buenos, intentos castos, proposiciones discretas!" (321). Quite to the contrary, Banedre's behavior shows an aversion to discretion and a marked propensity towards folly. In Lisbon, he shows the folly of rash anger by killing doña Guiomar's son.¹⁸ In Talavera, he shows the folly of "loco amor" by lusting after a barmaid.¹⁹ When he first sees Luisa, he decides that he must possess her and fantasizes about building a life with her: "Hice mil disignios, fabriqué mil torres de viento, caséme, tuve hijos y di dos higas al qué dirán..."(323). He abandons his plan to go home and intends to stay in Talavera, "casado con la diosa Venus." Like don Quijote (who turns the peasant Aldonza Lorenzo into the noble lady Dulcinea), Ortel Banedre creates love out of fantasy and turns a serving-wench into Venus, the goddess of love. He even believes that she smells like a flowering field in the month of May, whose scent reminds him of the aromas of Araby (321). Again, we are reminded of don Quijote, who turns the stale kitchen smells of Maritornes into sweet aroma. Besides validating the individual's perception of the world through his or her own senses, Cervantes is showing the folly of Banedre's monomaniacal obsession with Luisa ("Y atropellando por todo género de inconvenientes, determiné de hablar a su padre, pidiéndosela por mujer" [323]).

Banedre in effect turns the sacred nature of marriage into a selfish satisfaction of physical desire. He is willing to ignore her dowry as well, and contents himself with her physical beauty: "...yo no reparaba en dote, pues con sola la hermosura de su hija me tenía por pagado, contento y satisfecho deste concierto" (323). Banedre's language reflects the commercial nature of his marriage transaction ("pagado", "concierto"), and Luisa's father forgets the "tratos" already begun between him and Alonso's father when Banedre comes up with a better offer. Banedre is in effect buying a wife with the riches he mysteriously has acquired in the Indies, and Luisa's father sells his daughter to the higher bidder. Two weeks later, when Luisa and Alonso run off together, Banedre wants to commit suicide, the foolish and un-Catholic way of dealing with despair of Grisóstomo (in the *Quijote*) and of Melibea (in the *Celestina*): "Hízome el agravio acudir a la venganza, pero no hallé en quién tomarla sino en mí propio, que con un lazo estuve mil veces para ahorcarme" (324). And Banedre shows once more the folly of rash anger when he fails to control himself and starts beating up Bartolomé in Rome. Banedre shows no understanding of fundamental social and religious tenets, for he murders a man, lusts after and buys a woman in marriage, and is on the verge of ending his own life as an evasion of the moral responsibility for his actions.

Even his language reveals a foolish and immature way of looking at life. When he expresses his desire for revenge, he uses an exaggerated simile: "que mi honra ha de andar sobre su delito como el aceite sobre el agua" (324). First, the association of honor with oil, and crime with water, is an untraditional way of describing dishonor, and undercuts the exaggerated importance of "honra" in Spanish society. Second, the simile represents a simplistic attitude toward "honra", by suggesting that honor and dishonor can be as clearly defined as oil floating on water. Thus, Banedre is an insincere and shallow man, for he shows no real understanding of justice and religion. He commits murder, in violation of man-made and divine law. He lusts after and buys a wife, mocking the sacred nature of marriage. And we see through the one-sidedness of his figurative language and discover that even his literary power is misleading and illusory.

The author further undermines Banedre's credibility when he uses equivocal diction to describe Banedre's narration. Here we witness the emergence of an intertextual dialogue between the normative voice of the author (Cervantes) and the unreliable voice of the autobiographical narrator (Banedre). If the dialogue between Periandro and Banedre reveals the awesome power of the artist to make his audience believe what he says is true, then the dialogue between Cervantes and Banedre undermines this linguistic power through the use of equivocal diction. Cervantes tells us that Banedre's account of himself is "la improvisa y concertada narración del caído caminante" (316).

The equivocal sense of the adjectives “improvisa” (“unforeseen”, because Periandro and his companions were not expecting to meet Banedre; but also “improvised”, suggesting the theatrical and fictitious nature of the supposedly true account) and “concertada” (“agreed upon”, because Periandro convinces Banedre to continue his story; but also “contrived” or “designed”, suggesting that Banedre has invented his story) reveals the ambiguous nature of truth and fiction in Banedre’s narration. Indeed, these adjectives appear more apt to describe an artistic performance than a true autobiographical narration. Another example is the use of the word “donaire” to describe Banedre’s narration: “[Ortel Banedre] volvió las riendas hacia Talavera, dejando a todos admirados de sus sucesos y del buen donaire con que los había contado” (326). Periandro and his companions are amazed (“admirados”) by Banedre’s narration, revealing the enormous power of his language to make events seem real. By telling us that Banedre uses “buen donaire” in his story, Cervantes suggests both a “graceful” and a “witty” self-presentation.

If the account Banedre gives us is true (as he claims it is), then the first meaning of “donaire” as “graceful delivery” need not appear inconsistent with his claim of verisimilitude. However, the second meaning of “donaire” as “witty discourse” suggests that he may not only gracefully be recounting his life’s story, but also creating (or even recreating) witty and imaginative adventures. At this point, we realize that Cervantes the artist is discussing the problem of verisimilitude in fiction with Cervantes the literary theoretician, personified by Ortel Banedre as narrator.¹⁹ Cervantes knows that Ortel Banedre’s story cannot be true (as the narrator claims) because it is based on another piece of fiction, Giraldi’s novella. Yet, Cervantes creates a narrator who first boldly asserts the truth behind what he says and then undermines his own credibility by revealing inconsistencies in his character. Cervantes, through his use of equivocal diction, enters the story in order to point out the disturbing ambiguities that his narrator would like to conceal.

Banedre concludes his narration after being reformed by Periandro’s Christian advice. As we have observed, Banedre’s fall from his horse suggests his moral and narrative instability. According to the usual honor code, Banedre should kill his wife, and in many cases her lover also, in order to regain his honor.²⁰ Banedre insists on the seriousness of his fall despite his audience’s recognition that his fall is not as grave as it appears, and Periandro at first tells Banedre to go on with his trip, without knowing of Banedre’s plan for revenge. Indeed, Banedre insists on remounting his horse (“Y diciendo esto se iba a levantar muy ligero, para volver a subir y a seguir su viaje...” [324]) until Periandro stops him after having heard Banedre’s narration and changed his initial reaction to Banedre. Banedre’s narration in effect modifies Periandro’s opinion of him. The power of one character’s life story to influence and alter another character’s perception of him demonstrates the importance which Cervantes, in the tradition of Renaissance Christian humanism, places on individual human experience. Periandro proceeds to convince Banedre that there is another way of dealing with lost honor. By acting rashly (and this is certainly Banedre’s main character flaw), he will extend his dishonor, because the more people who find out, the more intense his shame. Instead, he should realize that murder will not clean his reputation (“...como si pudiera su sangre limpiar, como vos decís, vuestra honra” [325]). Periandro in effect is telling a man who, as we have seen, ignores basic laws of justice and religion, to adopt an Erasman attitude toward Christianity.

Banedre recognizes Periandro’s divine inspiration (“un ángel te ha movido la lengua” [326]) and no longer attempts to remount his horse by himself (recall his previous words, “Ya estoy mejor de mi caída. No hay sino ponerme a caballo...” [324]). He now asks Periandro to help him get back on his horse, to which Antonio el padre eagerly responds, “Eso haremos todos de muy buena gana” (326), and Banedre hugs everyone before resuming his journey. Periandro and his companions are a Christian community who show Banedre a new way to look at his life from the inside, not from the outside. Cervantes applies the belief in the validity of individual experience to the literary realm of the novel, a process revealed in the dialogue between Periandro and Banedre, in which each character changes the other’s perception of him. After listening to Banedre’s story, Periandro changes his initial reaction to the stranger and in turn convinces Banedre to change his perception of honor and revenge. After listening to Periandro’s advice, Banedre changes his plan to go to Madrid and instead claims that he will return by sea to his homeland, wherever that may be.²¹

Banedre’s plan to return to his homeland ostensibly proves his sincerity in adopting Periandro’s Christian advice, but actually it reveals an unusual and mysterious itinerary. When he returns from the Indies, he decides to return to Poland (his professed homeland) but first wants to see Spain, where he meets Luisa in Talavera.

After meeting Periandro's community, Banedre still says that he intends to return to Poland, but claims he must first return to Talavera and tie up his affairs (he certainly cannot keep his wife tied up there!), and then proceed back to Lisbon, from where he intends to sail to Poland. Why does Banedre choose to retrace his steps instead of joining the Christian community of Periandro and his companions as they travel eastward across Spain and France to Rome? Here we must explain the function of the grotesque pilgrim whom Periandro and his companions meet at the beginning of Part III, chapter 6, just before they meet Banedre. The grotesque pilgrim warns against insincere pilgrims ("malos peregrinos") who fake religious behavior to commercially exploit naïve people. However, she herself shows no true understanding of the religious meaning of a pilgrimage, for she travels from one religious festival to another in an outward display of religious observance. But the grotesque pilgrim does more than point out Erasman attitudes on the insincerity of religious rituals and observance. She is a mysterious character who points out the fictional qualities of life and prepares us to distrust Banedre, who will very soon be introduced in the novel. She is neither old nor young ("...la edad, al parecer, salía de los términos de la mocedad y tocaba en las márgenes de la vejez" [313]) and thus represents the hazy territory between youth and old age, and by extension, between reality and fiction.^{21.5}

She is headed for a religious celebration in the Sierra Morena, familiar to a reader of the Quixote as a place of insincere penitence, where Don Quixote's tearful manifestations of courtly love, in contrast to the problems of Cardenio, Luscinda, Dorotea, and Fernando, are motivated by his desire to conform to chivalric conventions. Cervantes draws upon our knowledge of the fictional world of the Sierra Morena in the Quixote to make us immediately more aware of the implications aroused by the grotesque pilgrim's destination in the Persiles, but the technique works only if we actively engage ourselves in literature and provide the link between our reading of the Quixote and our reading of the Persiles. The imaginative association between the two works is strengthened when we compare the grotesque pilgrim's rosary, whose beads are said to be larger than balls with which children play, with the rosary that Don Quixote makes out of his shirttails in the Sierra Morena (I: 319-320). In these instances, the grotesque pilgrim and Don Quixote both make a joke of religious ceremony and, in doing so, expose the shallowness of their own compliance with ceremony. It is possible that the grotesque pilgrim, because she appears to be an insincere character who also points out the impossibility of drawing clear lines between truth and fiction, sets up the context for Banedre's appearance, at which point she leaves the story. She reenters when Banedre disappears, and it is she, not Banedre, who accompanies Periandro and his companions towards Madrid.

Her phantom-like presence generally reminds us to look at Banedre with suspicion, and specifically suggests the insincerity of his avowed religious reformation by emphasizing his decision to go backward, not forward. Thus, Banedre's ascending movement as he remounts his horse is apparently countered by his regressive movement as he chooses to leave Periandro's group and backtrack to Talavera and Lisbon, places where he has already committed grave errors of judgment. His voluntary exclusion from his new friends at the end of his narration seems to make him as much an outsider as at the beginning. a place familiar to readers of the Quijote as a locus of possibly fictitious events. Cervantes draws upon our knowledge of the novelistic world of the Sierra Morena in the Quijote to make us immediately more aware of the implications aroused by the grotesque pilgrim's destination in the Persiles. The technique works only if we actively engage ourselves in literature and provide the link between our reading of the Quijote and our reading of the Persiles.²² Furthermore, the pilgrim wishes she could describe the festival, but she has only seen it portrayed in a painting in the royal gallery in Madrid.

From one art form (the painting) she proceeds to create a new art form (her imagined description of what the place must look like).²³ Could Banedre perhaps be creating his narration on the basis of other stories he has heard or other situations he has seen? The grotesque pilgrim warns us to examine carefully people we meet to determine if they are really who they claim and if what they say is true. Like Banedre, she is a possibly insincere character, and Cervantes uses one insincere character to point out suspicious behavior in another. Therefore the reader is forced to use his or her own judgment in approaching the story. The grotesque pilgrim sets up the context for Banedre's appearance, at which point she leaves the story. She reenters when Banedre disappears, and it is she, not Banedre, who accompanies Periandro and his companions towards Madrid. The grotesque pilgrim is a phantom-like presence that generally reminds us to look at Banedre with suspicion, and specifically suggests the insincerity of his avowed religious reformation by emphasizing his decision to go backward, not forward.²⁴

Thus, Banedre's ascending movement as he remounts his horse is countered by his regressive movement as he chooses to leave Periandro's group and backtrack to Talavera and Lisbon, places where he has already committed grave errors of judgment. His voluntary exclusion from his new friends at the end of his narration makes him as much an outsider as at the beginning.

Thus, the disturbing questions about credibility and sincerity, both in life and literature, are not resolved when Banedre's narration ends in Part III, chapter 7. His story resumes in Part IV, chapter 5, when Bartolomé, the muleteer who has become Luisa's new boyfriend, writes a letter in which he relates the violent events leading to Banedre's death (432-434). Alonso, Luisa's original boyfriend, tries to seduce her in Bartolomé's presence, and Bartolomé defends his honor by beating Alonso to death. As Luisa and Bartolomé are fleeing the scene, Banedre arrives and starts beating up Bartolomé. Luisa, ostensibly in self-defense, draws a knife (Bartolomé informs us that she always carries two with her!) and proceeds to stab her husband ("...y llegándose a él bonitamente se le clavó por los riñones, haciéndole tales heridas que no tuvieran necesidad de maestro"

[433]). The humorous tone underlying the reporting of one lover's brutal beating of his competitor and a wife's stabbing her husband is consistent with the picaresque character of its writer, Bartolomé. He goes so far as to claim that Luisa would prefer to be hanged in Spain, where a properly large audience could witness her execution. The darkly comic tone of the letter is incongruous with the subject of death and attempts to refocus our attention on the fact that the low characters, Luisa and Bartolomé, are in prison in Rome and are seeking the help of their high and influential friends to secure their release. The letter likewise attempts to divert our attention from the seriousness of Banedre's unexpected and unexplained peripeteia as he seemingly ignores or forgets Periandro's advice not to seek revenge. We must assume that Banedre has abandoned his plan to return by sea to his homeland, for he comes across Luisa and Bartolomé in Rome, of all places, and cannot resist the urge to express his anger. The letter attempts to convince us of the historical actuality of the events it describes, but we have no way to draw definite conclusions about why Banedre dies. The letter is a narrative trick designed to reduce the ambiguity surrounding Banedre's death to a factual summary.

We also observe Periandro and Antonio's mysterious lack of concern when they learn of Banedre's death. The author tells us that they are amused, yet concerned by the letter: "En extremo dió la carta gusto a los dos que la habían leído, y en extremo les fatigó su aflicción" (434). Both Periandro and Antonio have shown great interest in helping Banedre gain a more Christian outlook on revenge: Periandro's words convince Banedre to rethink his plan, and it is Antonio who tells Banedre that the entire community will eagerly help him get back on his horse ("Eso haremos todos de muy buena gana" [326]). Both men, however, are amused by the letter and are concerned only by the plight of Luisa and Bartolomé, not by the death of the man whom they helped reform. Indeed, they immediately set about to free the murdering couple from prison! Again, the effect of the letter is to divert our attention from an examination of the reasons behind Banedre's violent death and refocus our interest (like the interest of Periandro and Antonio) on Bartolomé and Luisa's imprisonment: "...pues estamos en tierra ajena, presos en la cárcel, comidos de chinches y de otros animalitos inmundos..." (434).

As Bartolomé's letter attempts to silence our uneasiness over Banedre's death, an intrusion of the author next occurs to explain away the ambiguity (Part IV, chapter 8). Cervantes uses the authority of his normative voice to inform us that it was destiny, not Banedre's moral weakness, that brought him to Rome: "Antes de llegar a su patria halló en Roma a quien no traía intención de buscar, acordándose de los consejos que en España le había dado Periandro; pero no pudo estorbar su destino, aunque no le fabricó por su voluntad" (451). By this point in the novel, Banedre is a dead man, and the explanation of his presence in Rome at the time of his death is intentionally underscored by the more dramatic news that Luisa and Bartolomé have been married.²⁵

We cannot, however, overlook that throughout his narration Banedre attempts to blame fate exclusively for his problems. He first blames fate for his fall from his horse ("Quizá, señores peregrinos, ha permitido la suerte que yo haya caído en este llano..." [p. 316]), a claim supported by the narrator of the *Persiles*, who authoritatively implies that the horse's fault was later verified; "...habiendo puesto la cabalgadura, como después pareció, la mano en un hoyo, dió consigo y con su dueño al través una gran caída" (p. 315; emphasis added). Banedre then blames not only fate, but the dark night in Lisbon as well for "leading the point of his sword" when he kills doña Guiomar's son (p. 316).

He refuses to acknowledge fully his responsibility for the murder when he tells doña Guiomar that he believes he has just killed a man, "...más por su desgracia y su soberbia que por mi culpa" (p. 317), and later that night he shows no remorse for his crime, simply thanking God and doña Guiomar for their mercy in helping him escape. When he leaves for the Indies, he entrusts himself to the route of the ship ("...siguiendo el camino que se deseaba" [p. 320]), and develops the metaphor of his life as a ship steered by chance when he blames fate once again for leading him to the inn in Talavera ("...pero ya mi suerte, cansada de llevar la nave de mi ventura con próspero viento por el mar de la vida humana, quiso que diese en un bajío que la destrozase toda, y ansí, hizo que, en llegando una noche a Talavera...me apeé en un mesón...") [pp. 320-321; emphasis added].

Banedre finally claims that fate has arranged for Luisa and Alonso to be imprisoned in Madrid ("...la suerte...ha ordenado que mis enemigos hayan parecido presos en la cárcel de Madrid..." [p. 324]) and that he has no choice but to go there and avenge his honor, using the passive voice ("...de donde he sido avisado que vaya a ponerles la demanda y a seguir mi justicia..." [emphasis added]) to shift responsibility for his bloody plan onto his anonymous advisers. Banedre's self-presentation as a victim of fate cannot excuse his own poor judgment throughout his story, nor can the narrator's omniscient explanation of his death as inescapable destiny ("...pero no pudo estorbar su destino, aunque no le fabricó por su voluntad") make us forget how often Banedre shows us that he brings on his own problems by acting unwisely. The narrator's comment at first glance satisfies our desire to know why Banedre unexpectedly appears in Rome ("...y a él le trujo su destino a venire peregrino a Roma"), but like the function of the grotesque pilgrim and Bartolomé's letter, it raises more questions than it seems to answer. It is up to us, as good readers, to provide the less conclusive but perhaps more balanced perspective demanded by this complicated play of narrative voices, and to learn the lesson apparently never learnt by Banedre: that fate may sometimes influence the way things turn out, but cannot be made to assume sole responsibility for an individual's behavior.

Again, we must not pass over the problems suggested by Cervantes as he tries simply to absolve Banedre from responsibility in his death. The importance of interior human experience in the novel is revealed when Cervantes brings up a dead character in a type of post-mortem psychological examination. The results of this investigation suggest Cervantes' sympathy with Luisa, for the story of Ortel Banedre reverses the traditional plot of revenge plays by having the wife murder her husband instead of having the husband murder his adultress wife. Luisa escapes moral censure, perhaps because she is allowed no freedom of choice in marrying Banedre and allegedly kills him in self-defense.²⁶ Bartolomé too escapes moral censure for killing Alonso, perhaps because of his picaresque role in the novel. (Nor is either criticized for stealing: Luisa steals Banedre's jewels when she runs off with Alonso, and Bartolomé steals some baggage and mules when he and Luisa abandon Periandro's group.) Indeed, Luisa and Bartolomé are freed from prison through the efforts of Periandro and his companions.

Thus, Luisa's act of murder appears to be a revenge which Banedre has deserved by failing to observe Periandro's injunction against revenge. Cervantes suggests that honor and revenge, like truth and fiction, cannot be neatly defined for all occasions, but rather these values are ever-changing reflections of particular situations and circumstances. What appears correct or true at one time or in one place or from one perspective may not appear so at another time or in another place or from another perspective. The movement from "cortesía" to "experiencia" opens an immense variety of human experience in literature, and leads us from the stasis of type character and conventional response to the flow of individuality and interpretation insisted upon by the narrator's challenge to his audience. As we have seen, we do not really know who Banedre is, where he is from, or where he is going. He refuses to be pinned down at one point in time and space or to be viewed from only one perspective. We must therefore dismiss the author's attempt to shift blame away from Banedre's character onto the inscrutability of divine will because we have been challenged to discover too many inconsistencies in Banedre's story to content ourselves with facile conclusions.

I began my discussion of the story of Ortel Banedre by dividing the story into three parts, each voiced by a different narrative technique (the autobiographical narration of the episodes in Lisbon and Talavera, Bartolomé's letter as a documentary report of Banedre's death in Rome, and the authorial explanation of why Banedre died.) I have also suggested that the deliberate perspectivization of the story reveals the need for several approaches to values in life (such as honor and revenge) and in literature (such as truth and fiction). I now propose that Cervantes adds to the perspectivization process another technique--- delayed information.

Banedre's narration ends on page 326; Bartolomé's letter appears on page 432, over a hundred pages later; and the author brings up the dead character of Ortel Banedre on page 451, almost thirty pages after the letter. The neo-Aristotelian belief in the use of delayed information to create suspense fails to explain why Cervantes uses this process because there is no suspense in the story of Ortel Banedre. I earlier showed how Banedre presents his story as if it were a finished whole by using the preterite tense instead of the historical present and by creating a verisimilar frame for his narration, techniques which try to convince us of the historical actuality of his story and which ultimately refocus our interest from the external action (suspense) to the characters' behavior and motivation (the stuff of the novel). Banedre leaves no room for suspense, clearly stating his intention to return to his homeland. His death is a *peripeteia*, a surprise twist which we have not even been led to suspect.²⁷

I propose two explanations for the use of delayed information in Banedre's story. The first hypothesis shows how Cervantes produces reminders of life when a dark tone predominates and reminders of death when a light tone prevails. (Recall the presence of death and marriage in Bartolomé's letter.) Thus, Ortel Banedre sees the light in doña Guiomar's house as he flees through the dark, narrow streets of a strange city after having killed her son.²⁸ Conversely, we learn of Banedre's death just four days after Periandro and his companions arrive in Rome, the holy city and happy destination of the pilgrims.²⁹ By juxtaposing hope and despair, and death and life, Cervantes suggests that to view one part of the cycle without the other is not true to life.

This interpretation certainly explains in part why Cervantes chooses to reveal Banedre's death later in the novel, when a more festive mood predominates. My second hypothesis deals with the question of verisimilitude in the learning process. Cervantes suggests that we do not learn every detail of a story or a life at one time (or even at one place), but rather over an extended period of time and space, involving different stages of consciousness. We recall Banedre's arrogant assumption that truth is an absolute value, and his use of a simplistic and immature simile in an attempt to reduce ambiguous concepts and feelings to clear, concise definitions. Cervantes stresses the need for a perspectivized examination of the fictional qualities of life and literature. Therefore, Banedre's self-presentation must be accompanied by the additional perspectives of Bartolomé's letter and the author's explanation. A single perspective on anything (and least of all, on truth) is unreliable, insufficient, and unsatisfying.

What, then, is the cumulative effect of these various perspectives? I believe that just as Cervantes suggests that one perspective is limited, he also suggests that several perspectives cannot lead to a definitive statement on the nature of values. As we have seen, Cervantes emphasizes individual human experience as interesting and valuable material for literature. It follows, then, that no single experience can hold true for all individuals. Cervantes rejects a monolithic approach to truth, which Banedre presents as one great absolute value, in favor of a perspectivized examination based on the multiplicity and diversity of human experience. Thus, the relationships between the characters in Banedre's story reveal the unusual and problematic nature of real human relationships. Parents and children are not idealized type figures, as in Giraldi's novella, but rather reveal the complexities of real human beings. Recall how doña Guiomar's love for her own son is questioned, as is the conduct of Luisa's father when he sells his daughter to the higher bidder. In effect, her father shows no regard for her feelings because this would validate her individual human experience. Banedre, too, raises questions about his own behavior. We have seen the essential instability in his character, and he shows his selfish nature when he interferes in the relationship between Luisa and Alonso, not to protect her from an abusive man, but to satisfy his own lust. And his death ultimately suggests the insincerity of his stance as a reformed Christian.

The problems suggested by the characters in Banedre's story are unsolvable precisely because they reflect the limitless variety of human life. We cannot explain away Banedre's death merely as the effect of divine power, for his is not a simple story of a man's good intentions overruled by inscrutable destiny. Cervantes not only attacks the question of verisimilitude in fiction, but also the question of fictional behavior in supposedly true-to-life situations. He shows how "cortesía" can lead to (or even insist upon) bad judgment in doña Guiomar's foolish sense of duty. Artifice and acculturation can mislead us, but instinct and intuition can free us from the fictional qualities of our lives and point us towards a more acute consciousness of our humanity. Cervantes nonetheless realizes that human instinct (like all things) is not always proper, for Banedre's story shows that lust, anger, murder, and revenge can be socially and ethically wrong. Thus, we have seen that Luisa and Bartolomé's murders are passed off as somewhat justifiable revenge, but that Banedre's natural impulse to beat up his wife's lover when he chances upon them in Rome leads to his own death because he cannot control himself.³⁰

Cervantes is in effect problematizing Christian humanist thinking by emphasizing the need for a careful and perspectivized examination of instinct.

From other paper: An essay that concentrates on one episode of a long book may easily degenerate into an analysis of character and theme. Banedre himself, however, suggests the futility of trying to decide why he does what he does (or even if he really does what he says he does) by teaching us to mistrust anyone or anything that claims to express absolute truth. Therefore, the tension between free will and fate in Banedre's story should not be the focus on our inquiry, since we never in any positive sense decide whether he suddenly appears in Rome because he decided to ignore Periandro's advice or because his destiny simply led him there. Unsolvable, too, are the questions Banedre raises by choosing to leave Periandro's group and go back to Talavera and Lisbon. Because Banedre's rash anger (his murder to doña Guiomar's son, his battery of Bartolomé) suggests that he is not a bad man, but just too weak to resist his impulses, those readers seeking a moral in his story could present his relationship with Luisa as an exemplum of *loco amor*: "¡Oh fuerzas poderosas de amor, de amor, digo, inconsiderado, presuroso y lascivo y mal intencionado, y con cuánta facilidad atropellas disinios buenos, intentos castos, proposiciones discretas!" (p. 321) Such readers might even claim that Ortel Banedre's story suggests the conflict in every human being between instinct and reason, and that his characterization as an outsider represents the uncertainty and indefinability of human experience, in short, what it means to be human. They might not be wrong, but by attempting to reduce his story to one or two tidy themes, they would have missed the point that Banedre stresses throughout his story---that all absolute definitions are unreliable and inadequate.

I believe that it is more productive to explain how Banedre's story is told and how it affects us as readers than to judge his character per se. In this essay, I have emphasized that Banedre's story depends on the reader's willingness to use his own judgment in evaluating what is told to him. From Banedre's initial insistence that we join his audience ("...aunque no queráis saberlo, quiero que sepáis..."), we are caught up in a process of examining our reactions to his story. He claims that it is true, yet we know that it is based on another piece of fiction. He wants us to believe him, yet his words and actions suggest that he is an unreliable narrator. The frequency and audacity with which he undermines his own credibility make us wonder if he does indeed want us to believe him. For it seems possible that his story, like so much of Cervantes' fiction, is designed to make us question our very understanding of the way literature works. Fiction is fiction, isn't it? Truth is truth, or is it? We understand that Banedre cannot tell us the whole truth, but to think we can control him is an illusion. It is he who exerts power over us, for even after engaging us in his story, he denies us the satisfaction of making and trusting reductive definitions of life and literature. His story offers us suggestions, not conclusions; perspectives, not truths; possibilities, not promises, for a freer and more honest sense of fiction.

Among the many roles of Ortel Banedre that we have uncovered --- narrator, murderer, fool, reformed Christian, and dead man --- the most transcendental is his role as a teacher, for he teaches us how to be good readers and challenges us to enter his story and discuss the potential significance of its inconsistencies and ambiguities. He eludes our grasp because we cannot fully comprehend him, any more than we can hope to fully comprehend ourselves or any human being, or work of art. We cannot control him because he, like all people, has secrets and is mysterious by nature. It is he who exerts power over us, because even after having engaged us in his story, he denies us a reductive definition of life and literature. Ortel Banedre's most profound lesson teaches us that literature should display the richness and complexity of life without imposing artificial and constricting definitions, and that thinking about literature should suggest a few possible answers, and leave us with a few more questions.

Notes

¹ Critical reaction to the story of Ortel Banedre is limited and centers almost exclusively on the topos of honor and revenge. The exception is Alban Forcione, who briefly discusses the story as a repetition of the cyclical pattern of fall and ascent in the *Persiles* (*Cervantes' Christian Romance* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972], 96; 128-130). Marcel Bataillon sees Banedre's death as punishment for abandoning Periandro's Christian advice (*Erasmus y España* [Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966], 782). Joaquín Casaldueiro in *Sentido y forma de "Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda"* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1947) attempts to find a unity throughout the *Persiles*, despite a tendency to resort to plot recapitulation and generalizations unsupported by convincing examples (Casaldueiro calls Banedre "el pobre polaco" [252] and believes that he dies "...porque no siempre es posible vencer a la lascivia, a veces es la lascivia la que destruye al hombre" [202]).

² In the short story “Juan Darién”, Horacio Quiroga tells of a tiger who becomes a boy and is raised in human society, only to be cruelly rejected when his true animal nature is discovered. Like Cervantes three centuries earlier, Quiroga is aware of the enormous possibilities in life: “El inspector sabía que en el mundo hay cosas mucho más extrañas que las que nadie puede inventar...” (Cuentos completos [Montevideo: Ediciones de la Plaza, 1978], 511). Juan Darién, like Don Quijote, is caged and beaten because he refuses to be classified as a unidimensional person. Another example of life’s “stranger-than-life” possibilities is the remarkable, although obviously not impossible, linguistic power of Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov --- non-native speakers of English who managed to write literary masterpieces in the English language.

³ My tripartite division of the story is based on the adoption of a different narrative voice in each section, and differs from Casaldueiro’s bipartite division based on episode. Casaldueiro limits himself to a chronological structuring of the story, claiming that the first part is the Portuguese adventure and the second is Banedre’s marriage to Luisa and subsequent encounters with Periandro and his companions. He considers Banedre’s death as a type of coda to the main parts of the story (Sentido y forma, 191-202; 252-253).

⁴ Banedre as the creator of his own hell reminds us of Carrizales in El celoso extremeño and of Anselmo in the novella of El curioso impertinente (Don Quijote, I, 33-35).

⁵ Forcione observes that although Cervantes sets up an anonymous fictional author and translator at the beginning of Book II, he abandons this “functional device almost immediately following its introduction” (Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles” [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970], 266). Therefore, I use the word “author” in this essay to refer to the implied author, Cervantes.

⁶ Forcione in Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles” discusses the rediscovery of Aristotle’s Poetics in the Renaissance and the attempt of Renaissance writers to reposition Aristotle’s ideas in their own works. In Cervantes’ Christian Romance he sees differences between the Quijote and the Persiles: “The fact is that the Persiles and the Quijote are about as different as two works of literature could possibly be....The ambiguities of experience which fascinated Cervantes from the first paragraph of the Quijote to its conclusion are nowhere to be found in the Persiles” (149). Certainly the generic forms of novel and romance are entwined in both works of fiction by Cervantes, and one of the goals of this study is to point out the ambiguous and unresolved nature of fiction in the Persiles.

⁷ See Stephen Gilman’s discussion of time in the Quijote (Galdós and the Art of the European Novel: 1867-1887 [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981], 230-231).

⁸ Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, ed. Juan Bautista Avalla-Arce (Madrid: Castalia, 1969), 316. Subsequent page references to the Persiles are to this edition.

⁹ Cervantes’ reworking of his Italian source has important implications which most critics have ignored. Schevill and Bonilla consider Banedre’s story as an “imitación cervantina” of Giraldi’s novella: “Los dos cuentos son casi idénticos hasta el fin; y la diferencia esencial consiste en que, en el relato italiano, la madre acepta al asesino por hijo, en lugar del muerto. Innecesario es advertir que Cervantes ha mejorado mucho el cuento, siendo aquí el estilo más digno, la narración más rápida, y el tono más noble (Rodolfo Schevill and Adolfo Bonilla, eds. Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda [Madrid: Bernardo Rodríguez, 1914], II, 303). María Rosa Lida de Malkiel claims that both Giraldi’s and Cervantes’ versions were inspired by a well-known folktale and that Banedre’s story also reveals certain details of the famous medieval legend of Trajan and the widow, also used by Dante (El cuento popular y otros ensayos [Buenos Aires: Losada, 1976], 50). These critics list several other adaptations of the story: Schevill and Bonilla find dramatic reworkings in Alarcón’s Ganar amigos, Calderón’s Mejor está que estaba, Francisco de Rojas’ Obligados y ofendidos, and Victor Hugo’s Hernani (304); Lida de Malkiel finds versions of the story in Fernán Caballero and Ricardo Palma (50). While conscientiously tracing these influences, Schevill-Bonilla and Lida de Malkiel neglect to analyze why and how Cervantes works with his source. Forcione points out that “it is instructive to compare the versions; for the differences between them reveal how Cervantes creatively assimilated literary sources to his major theme and structure” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 130). He proceeds to summarize the most interesting differences, noting that Giraldi’s tale focuses on the mother, while Cervantes’ story focuses on the murderer Banedre.

¹⁰ Giovambattista Giraldi Cintio, Gli Ecatommiti (Florence: Borghi, 1834)VI, vi, 302.

¹¹ In Giraldi’s tale, politeness is a virtue displayed by the characters’ behavior, but in Cervantes’ story it also becomes a measure of the audience’s willingness to suspend disbelief and accept as true what is told to them. No character in the Persiles clarifies the idea of the polite audience better than Periandro, who, like Banedre, is a narrator concerned above all with presenting his story as true. The most striking example of Periandro’s ability to invoke his audience’s “cortesía” occurs when he tells his allegorical dream of virtue and vice in Book II, chapter 15. In the middle of his dream narration, Periandro tells his audience that they have not seen anything yet, “...porque, a lo que resta por decir, falta entendimiento que lo perciba y aun cortesías que lo crean” (242; emphasis added). Yet soon after suggesting that even the most polite audience might find his story implausible, Periandro does indeed succeed in making his audience believe his fiction: Constanza claims that she wanted to ask Auristela where she had been before her appearance in the allegorical masque, and Auristela herself, wooed by Periandro’s enchanting storytelling, is not sure if his narration is real or imaginary, and wonders if she has really participated as the figure of Chastity (244). Periandro makes not only Auristela believe in the possibility of her participation in fiction, but he even believes in his own fiction, asking his friends Carino and Solercio if they, too, have seen their wives accompanying Asuristela.

Their laughter at his simple question gently wakes him from the dreamlike power of his own fiction and forces him to acknowledge the fictional nature of his narration (“Rieronse de mi pregunta y obligáronme y aun forzáronme a que les contase mi sueño” [245]). Their laughter also reveals to the reader the fact that this book, try as it might to pretend to be the truth, is fiction; the reader witnesses first the act of fiction when Periandro tells his dream and then the exposing of that dream narration as nothing more or nothing less than what it really is---fiction.

¹² Gilman writes: “...the reading of the Quijote constitutes for the reading public and the characters a post-graduate course in distinguishing what is fictional from what is real. It is nothing less than a marvelous workbook or exercise book, which trains the reader in the perception of the fictional, that is, the fake, the put-on, the obsolete, the social, both in its demands and its pretenses, in a word, all that is not true to life in the profoundest sense of the expression” (Galdós and the Art of the European Novel, 234).

¹³ Gilman discusses the numerous allegorical falls in the Celestina (“La Celestina”: Arte y Estructura [Madrid: Taurus, 1974], 381-399). It is also useful to recall the allegorical fall from the horse in Calderón’s La vida es sueño and the triumphant entry of Rosaura atop her white horse later in the play.

¹⁴ The annexation of Portugal in 1580 gave Spain new commercial opportunities and also expanded Spain’s interest in the exotic aspect of new parts of the world. J.H. Elliott writes: “The union of Portugal with the Spanish Crown gave Philip a new Atlantic seaboard, a fleet to help protect it, and a second empire which stretched from Africa to Brazil, and from Calicut to the Moluccas....Essentially the Portuguese empire of the sixteenth century was an Asian empire, with Brazil as little more than a stepping-stone to a wealthy East”(Imperial Spain [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964], 264). The historical exposure to strange parts of America and Asia runs parallel with the open attitudes of Cervantes to Moorish culture in the story of the Captive in the Quijote and in the comedies Los baños de Argel and El trato de Argel, and to the interest in foreign lands evidenced by the Northern location for the first part of the Persiles.

¹⁵ Forcione writes: “Here the enclosing space, characteristic of the center of the labyrinths through which the many characters of the Persiles must make their way---the tree trunk, the cave, the small boat, the ship-leviathan, the small cart, and the prison---is recreated in a hollow recess in the wall of a room covered by a tapestry...” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 129).

¹⁶ I am grateful to Professor David Frick of the Slavic Department at the University of California at Berkeley for confirming my suspicion. The word “ortel” in Old Polish meant “judgment” (cf. German “Urteil”) and was used to describe the judgments passed down on difficult Polish cases referred to the higher authority of the medieval court in Magdeburg. If Ortel Banedre’s first name were really “Martín” in Spanish, it would have to be “Marcin” in Polish. One could of course note the allegorical suggestiveness of a character named “Judgment”. See J. Morawski, “Espagne et Pologne,” Revue de Littérature Comparée 16 (1936), 231; and W.F. Reddaway et al., eds., The Cambridge History of Poland (New York, 1978), 133.

¹⁷ The episode of the false captives in Book III, chapter 10, shows that stories of adventures in far-off lands cannot easily be verified. This episode revolves around two students who learn stories of imprisonment in Algiers in order to make money off ingenuous listeners. By their own confession, their sources may have likewise learned their information from other dubious sources (“...acertaron a pasar por allí unos cautivos, que también lo debían ser falsos, como nosotros ahora...” [347]). The almost certain possibility that the sources are second- (or third- or fourth-) hand retellings of other possibly fictitious stories creates a cloudy atmosphere in which the distinction between truth and fiction becomes hopelessly blurred. In Viaje de Turquía, Pedro de Urdemalas describes a situation and admits that he, too, may be inventing his story like others. Besides the literary suggestiveness of one fiction engendering more fictions, the problem of dishonest pilgrims hoping to make a commercial success of their imaginative powers appears to be historical.

¹⁸ Forcione writes: “The dead man is described by his mother as a man of anger and arrogance and represents to Ortel what the wolves represent to Antonio, the bestial condition to which he himself has fallen” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 129).

¹⁹ Like Banedre, the Archpriest in the Libro de buen amor is an unreliable narrator whose words on religion sound false and hypocritical. Recall how the Archpriest undermines his own credibility and dignity by chasing after women and marrying a nun!

¹⁹ Forcione writes of “an inner dialogue within the narrator” (Cervantes, Aristotle, and the “Persiles”, 185).

²⁰ Forcione observes that “...Cervantes’ Christianity is not of the militant type celebrated in the Spanish drama of his contemporaries....The emphasis on St. Paul at the conclusion of the Persiles and the conciliatory attitude toward Protestantism visible throughout the work are, to my mind, important indications that the impact of Erasmus on Cervantes’ religious development survives in his final and most orthodox work” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 103). For the influence of Erasmus and St. Paul on Cervantes’ religious ideas, Forcione suggests Marcel Bataillon, Erasmus y España (Mexico, 1966), 777-801; Américo Castro, El pensamiento de Cervantes (Madrid, 1925), Ch. VI, and Cervantes y los casticismos españoles (Madrid, 1974), 101-106. For a discussion of the contemporary codes of honor being criticized in the Persiles see Américo Castro, De la edad conflictiva (Madrid; 1976), Ch. I; P.N. Dunn, “Honour and the Christian Background in Calderón,” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies 37:2 (April 1960), 75-105; and C.A. Jones, “ ‘Honor’ in Spanish Golden-Age Drama: Its Relation to Real Life and Morals,” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies 35 (1958), 199-210.

²¹ Cervantes uses the human senses of sound and sight to interiorize experience, because he recognizes that we learn much about our world through hearing and seeing. Periandro and his companions listen to Banedre's story, and as I have pointed out, both Periandro and Banedre change their reactions to each other. Periandro calls Banedre "ciego de cólera" and then forces him to listen by seizing his arm. Doña Guiomar claims that her son was "la luz de mis ojos", implying that Banedre has stolen the light from her eyes by murdering her son. She tries to shut out death by trying to forget that she has already seen Banedre's face and by ordering that her son's cadaver be removed from her sight immediately after it is brought to her bedroom. Martina tells Banedre that Luisa will satisfy her own pleasure, even if her eyes are cut out, but he fails to heed her warning. Indeed, Banedre is lost at night in the foreign city of Lisbon, and his physical inability to see suggests his lack of moral vision. Cervantes uses a character who cannot see well and whose first word to his audience is "quizá" to point out every person's confusion as he or she approaches truth and fiction. As we have seen, Banedre uses a simile based on external relationships (water and oil) as he tries to avoid responsibility for his own life. The interiorization of experience acquires a literary dimension when Cervantes uses human senses to suggest his characters' internal complexities. See Gilman's chapter titled "The Art of Listening" (Ch. IX) in Galdós and the Art of the European Novel.

21.5 Her nose is grotesquely flat, her eyes pop out of her face, and her clothing is ragged, yet little else can be said about her with certainty, for she is described by a series of amphibolies that perplexingly denies definitive statements about her. She sits in a little meadow, either because the spot pleases her or because she is tired; she is neither young nor old, but apparently represents the hazy territory of middle age; it cannot be distinguished if her cape is decorated with goatskin leather or with sheepskin; and her belt seems more like a ship's cable than a pilgrim's sash (p. 313). The intentional narrative imprecision surrounding her recalls the picayune quibbling of Cide Hamete Benegeli in the Quixote (is it goatskin or sheepskin? Was Don Quixote in a "bosque" or a "floresta" or an "encinar" or a "selva"? (II:104)), and here, too, frustrates our need for a reliable sort of fiction.

22 Intertextuality is an allusive device that can function on varying levels of correspondence. The ability of the reader to recall ways of reading from the Quijote provides a richer way of reading the Persiles. Sometimes the links are more concrete. Gilman explains how Galdós, in Fortunata y Jacinta, presents characters already familiar to readers of his other novels in order to make his readers immediately more at ease in the new novel. Galdós presents four characters in the opening paragraph of Fortunata y Jacinta (Jacinto María Villalonga, Joaquinito Pez, Alejandro Miquis, and Zalamero) who are also characters in other novels by Galdós (La desheredada, El doctor Centeno, and Lo prohibido). Gilman writes; "And if some members of that public felt hesitant to take the plunge into the ocean of the new, four-volume novel, they might well have been enticed into so doing by vivid memories of these four in La desheredada, El doctor Centeno, and Lo prohibido. As Galdós surely intended, the reader's encounter with lives not too long ago relived in print is comparable to recognizing familiar faces while standing uncertainly on the threshold of an enormous and forbidding social gathering. Critics of Balzac are unquestionably right in insisting on the contribution of reappearing characters to our belief in fictional worlds, to the growth of Paris as a 'true' milieu through one novel after another. In addition, however, mentioned so abruptly at the outset, the familiar four names help to put us at ease in the face of the vast accumulation of human experience that awaits us. If these old friends of ours are also the friends of Juanito Santa Cruz, we already feel comfortable as we enter his world" (Galdós and the Art of the European Novel, 133).

²³ The grotesque pilgrim's description of the festival from a painting is similar to the episode of the false captives, in that it shows how fiction creates one fiction after another. Other examples occur in the Persiles. The canvas painted with the characters' adventures spurs new retellings of their episodes. We learn that a young poet wants to write a comedy after having memorized the painted canvas (452). And the dispute over Auristela's portrait points out how the artistic representation of her beauty makes men fall in love with the portrait, not her.

²⁴ Martina, Luisa's friend at the inn in Talavera, is a similar mysterious character who interests us but about whom we really know very little. She tells Banedre that her mother never allowed her to set foot in a public inn, and when Banedre asks her to explain her ironic presence at the inn in Talavera, she postpones the subject ("Hay mucho que decir en eso... si el tiempo lo pidiera o el dolor que traigo en el alma lo permitiera" [322]). Casaldueño notes her mysterious presence in the novel ("...desaparece esta figura, una de tantas como el Barroco---Cervantes---necesita hacer entrar en la composición de una obra" [Sentido y forma, 197]) but fails to point out her specific function in the novel as an indicator of Luisa's selfish character and of Banedre's foolishness in marrying her.

25 Note the structure of the paragraph, where marriage and death coexist in a single sentence ("...pues se habían casado: que la muerte del polaco...") reminiscent of the sentence earlier in the Persiles stating that a child's baptism, a marriage, and a funeral all occurred in one family on one day in the same church (411). The simultaneous presence of death and marriage in this sentence illustrates Forcione's observation that reminders of death in the second part of the Persiles "are more forceful when the dominance of the triumphant moment of the cycle is unexpectedly countered by the emergence of one of the motifs accompanying the lower moment" (Cervantes' Christian Romance, 147).

²⁶ Self-defense and freedom of choice are actions which reflect the assertion of the self, and show the Erasmian preference for instinct over acculturation.

²⁷ By not revealing the true names and identities of Persiles and Sigismunda until the end of the novel, Cervantes appears to be following the neo-Aristotelian principle of delayed information in order to create suspense. In effect, Cervantes is undermining suspense by intentionally dropping clues to their true identities throughout the novel.

²⁸ Forcione writes: “Ortel Banedre’s flight through menacing space toward a distant light recreates the heroes’ flight on the island of the barbarians to the illuminated refuge of Antonio, their flight from the blazing kingdom of Policarpo toward the lighthouse of the Island of the Hermits, Feliciano’s flight through the forest toward the fires of the shepherds’ camp, Antonio’s lonely voyage beneath the dim stars of the northern skies, and Periandro’s gaze toward the light of heaven following his ascent from the dungeon” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 129).

²⁹ Forcione explains the traditional significance of Rome “...not only as the center of the world but also as the simulacrum of the city of God (at one point in the Persiles Cervantes writes: “Roma es el cielo de la tierra” [192])” (Cervantes’ Christian Romance, 35.)

³⁰ At other points in the Persiles Cervantes does provide examples of the exemplary behavior that Banedre fails to show. Periandro’s men refuse Sulpicia’s gifts in favor of the honor of serving her well (II, 14), although the verisimilitude of their selflessness is undercut when they soon after accept her gifts. When Auristela arrives in Rome, she is so popular that she must ride in a closed carriage in order to avoid throngs of admirers. Again, a marvelous event seems inverisimilar until we think of the overnight heroes we herald in ticker-tape parades and the political and entertainment celebrities who, like Auristela, must ride for their own safety in blackened limousines.

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