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Nero's Golden House: Italian Art and the Grotesque in *Don Quijote*, Part II[1]

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hroughout his literary works, Cervantes repeatedly represents a desire for Italy. This desire often takes the form of evocations and descriptions of the art and architecture of the Italian peninsula. In many cases, these moments carry a second, deeper, and more concealed aspiration, that of recapturing the ancient world. These two yearnings coexist with many of the textual images, since a number of the Italian frescoes and edifices described in the works either belong to the classical world or in some way evoke antiquity.[2] First, in this es-

[1] A plenary address at the annual meeting of the Cervantes Society of America, December 27, 2002, under the title "Quixotic Frescoes: Cervantes and Italian Art." The illustrations in this article will be available in color (five of them) on the Cervantes Society Web site, <http://www.h-net.org/~cervantes/csa/bcsas04.htm>.

[2] I have used this same wording before since it encapsulates my vision of Cervantes. See, for example "Ekphrasis and Eros" 33.

say, I would like to discuss an ekphrastic passage from the beginning of Part Two of *Don Quijote*; then I will show how antique and Renaissance art authorizes Cervantes' transformation of harmonious beauty and allegorized grandeur into quirky and grotesque flights of fantasy.

In the tenth chapter of Part Two, Sancho, unable to fulfill don

Figure 1. Sandro Botticelli. *Spring.* Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.)

Quijote's command to find Dulcinea in El Toboso, comes up with his own *engaño*, identifying three peasant women as Princess Dulcinea and her ladies in waiting. Not only does Sancho envision a chivalric scene; also, aided by the narrator, he sets in motion an action which utilizes all the major figures depicted by Sandro Botticelli in his mysterious painting of the *Primavera* (Figure 1).[3] Discussing Botticelli's mysteries, Edgar Wind asserts that: "the crux of any interpretation of the *Primavera* is to explain the

[3] For a detailed analysis of the relationship between the *Primavera*, Renaissance Humanism, and this passage from *Don Quijote* see De Armas, "The Eloquence of Mercury." See also George Camamis, who has argued that Cervantes also alludes to the *Primavera* in *La Galatea* and in "La gitanilla."

part played by Mercury" (121). In Cervantes' novel, it is Sancho who plays this part, becoming the messenger who brings Dulcinea/Venus to Don Quijote. He also brings to the reader the mysterious message of Botticelli, as his actions unleash a dramatic ekphrasis of the *Primavera*. Don Quijote had sent Sancho to observe carefully Dulcinea's actions and movements, since these would reveal her attitude towards knight: "son certísimos correos que traen las nuevas de lo que allá en lo interior del alma pasa" (II, 10; 104). Acknowledging his role as messenger, Sancho cites a *romance* of Bernardo del Carpio which begins: "Mensajero sois, amigo" (II, 10; 106). Sancho thus becomes that mysterious deity in Botticelli's painting. But Mercury's message is not one that Don Quijote can comprehend. For the squire tells Don Quijote that three peasant women riding donkeys are actually the Princess Dulcinea and her attendants. Sancho's trick fits in very well with Mercury's role as a trickster. This was a common attribute of the god. His trickery was exploited from the time of the *Homeric Hymns* to early modern Spain, where Pérez de Moya asserts: "Y porque la sabiduría y la astucia puede dañar mucho a los otros, por esto dixeron ser dios o maestro de los ladrones y engañadores" (538).

But Sancho is much more than a trickster. This new Mercury eloquently describes his discoveries in poetic fashion: "Sus doncellas y ella toda son una ascua de oro, todo mazorcas de perlas, todas son diamantes, todas rubíes, todas telas de brocado" (II, 10; 108). The brocade or rich design woven into the cloth of the imagined ladies is also found in the dresses of the dancing Graces of Botticelli. As for the pearls, diamonds, and rubies, they may be discovered in the jewels worn by the two Graces that face the spectator. The mercurial eloquence of Sancho[4] goes on to describe their hair: "los cabellos sueltos por las espaldas, que son otros tantos rayos de sol que andan jugando con el viento" (II, 10; 108). The golden hair of the three imagined ladies derives from Botticelli's three Graces. As for the wind, it blows from the extreme right of the painting, where Zephyrus, the god of the west wind,

[4] "Creyeron que era Mercurio dios de la elocuencia" (Pérez de Moya 538).

touches Chloris, thus recalling Sancho's eloquent comparison of the golden hair with the rays of the sun playing with the wind. The three graces are the companions of Venus. It is she who rules over the Primavera and her flowers, the creatures of the goddess Flora, recalling the scent of noble ladies like Dulcinea, who, according to Don Quijote "andan siempre entre ámbares y entre flores" (II, 10; 112). From the background forest, to the aroma of flowers; from Zephyrus' gentle wind to the ornaments of the graces, the whole scene partakes of the mysterious and idealized beauty of Botticelli's painting. And yet, Don Quijote can not see this, even as Sancho is inspired by the eloquence of Mercury. The allure of classical culture and Renaissance painting cannot force Don Quijote to recognize the mysteries of Dulcinea.[5]

Although Dulcinea is represented as Venus, the fertility of the *primavera*, Don Quijote, while constantly surrounded by green in this second part of the novel,[6] will never glimpse her bountiful and beautiful presence. Hounded by Sansón Carrasco and manipulated by Ginés de Pasamonte, he seems to have little room to exercise his imagination, to return to the classical Dulcinea. And the reader, although glimpsing at antique beauty, is also faced with the disjunction between classical figures and their Cervantine counterparts (Figure 2). Mercury, the lithe and speedy god, has been transformed into a phlegmatic and rotund Sancho; Venus is a rather unattractive peasant woman; Flora can be linked

[5] Don Quijote's only solution to his inability to see is to claim that she is enchanted. Has the mercurial aspect of Sancho blocked his master's amorous pursuits? In a thorough study of Mercutio as Mercury in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Joseph A. Porter asserts that this god "represents forces inimical to… love" (14). Turning to classical antiquity, he shows how Mercury constantly prods different heroes to abandon their infatuations with enchanting women such as Calypso, Circe, or Dido (20). It is thus not out of the question to wonder if Sancho's mercurial trick does not hide a deeper motivation, to prevent his hero from engaging in an affair with Dulcinea.

[6] Augustin Redondo has emphasized the relationship between green and madness: "el color amarillo y el verde son tonalidades características de la locura" (227). This critic, of course, notes the complexities of the symbolic green. It is also the color of hope and the generative powers of nature. Consequently this color was often related to erotic love, as Vernon A. Chamberlin (29–37) and Jack Weiner (49) have shown.

to prostitution; while the dancing and graceful graces are three women prancing on donkeys.

The text addresses the aesthetics of disjunction through notions of the grotesque. In order to understand the aesthetic signif-

Figure 2. Gustave Doré. *The Enchantment of Dulcinea.*

icance of Dulcinea's enchantment and its relation to Renaissance art and to classical models it is necessary to look at several episodes in the novel. Although a number of critics, including Eduardo Urbina, Henry Sullivan, and John Weiger, have discussed grotesque elements in *Don Quijote*,[7] they have not done so through the lens of Renaissance artistic discoveries.[8] Cervantes

[7] Comparing Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe to descriptions in the Cave of Montesinos, John Weiger concludes: "What in the poem is metaphor becomes in the Cave grotesque literal enactment" (60). He also notes the "grotesque description of Montesinos' rosary" as well as other aspects of the adventure (96). Percas de Ponseti calls the appearance of Dulcinea "grotesque" ("La cueva de Montesinos" 379), and Sullivan makes the grotesque a key element in his book on *Don Quijote* Part II.

[8] Sullivan points to the Renaissance origins of the term: "Grotesques were

clearly points to the Renaissance view of the grotesque in at least three moments of Part Two, where caves or cave-like openings become important motifs. As with other moments in the novel, the classical background of these catabases (journeys to the underworld often undertaken to acquire knowledge)[9] is mediated through Italian Renaissance art. I would argue that these caves in Cervantes' novel recall the rediscovery of Nero's Golden House by Renaissance artists at the end of the fifteenth century.[10]

After the fire that destroyed parts of Rome, Nero decided to appropriate some 125 acres to build a sumptuous palace and gardens, together with a lake that, according to Suetonius, resembled the sea. It was said that all parts of the palace were covered with gold. Since the building became "an embarrassment to subsequent emperors" (Hall 1), it was abandoned or at least used sparingly.[11] Finally, the fire of 104 led Trajan to destroy the Golden Palace and build baths in its place. Halls that were not used were filled with rubble. In the 1480's areas of the palace were rediscovered underground, as humanists picking through the rubble of ancient ruins came across openings that led them to amazing rooms, labeled caverns or *grotte*, with perfectly preserved decorations. As more entrances were unearthed and more underground rooms were revealed, a procession of famous writers and painters came to observe, copy, and plunder. Giorgio Vasari explains that the works they found "were called grotesques from having been discovered in the underground grottoes—executed with so much design, with fantasies so varied and so bizarre" (2: 489).[12]

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rediscovered in modern times during the Renaissance in Italy, in the course of excavations of the Domus Aurea, or vast palace ordered built by Nero" (61). However, he does not connect Nero's palace to Cervantes' aesthetics.

[9] Henry Sullivan aptly summarizes the seven main points of contact between Aeneas' catabasis in the *Aeneid* and Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, as pinpointed by Percas de Ponseti (Sullivan 32–33). See also McGaha and Weiger.

[10] Some Renaissance artists actually thought this was Titus's palace.

[11] Vespasian decided to build the Colosseum where the lake had been, and his son Titus used some of the structures to construct his baths.

[12] Bakhtin argues that Vasari pronounces a negative judgement on the

Indeed, this type of decoration soon became famous throughout Europe. In Spain, grotesques can be detected in decorations "which bordered the paintings in the vault and appeared between the cornice frescoes" in the library at the Escorial.[13] The term soon became well-known in the Iberian peninsula, not only to students of the arts such as Antonio Palomino, but also to the educated layman.[14] Sebastián de Covarrubias defines it in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*.[15] Indeed, in *Casa de locos de amor*, a text that was for a long time attributed to Francisco de Quevedo, we discover the term in a description of this madhouse.[16]

Thus, while discussing Cervantes' use of the grotesque, I will not consider modern theories on the subject from Mikhail Bakhtin to Wolfgang Kayser.[17] I will center my analysis on the gro-

grotesque, using Vitruvius (33). This is not always the case in his *Lives*, where he often praises artists such as Giovanni da Udine and Raphael for their use of the grotesque. Benvenuto Cellini offers an explanation of the grotesque similar to the one found in Vasari: "This name has been given them in modern times from their having been found by students in certain underground caves in Rome, which in ancient times were used as dwelling-rooms, bath-houses, studies, halls, and so forth" (63).

[13] According to Barbara von Barghahn, these grotesques may have been designed by Bartolomeo Carducho. Numerous critics also claim that he was responsible for the paintings in the library "below the cornice which correspond to the Liberal Arts represented in the vault" (Barghahn 364 n. 4). The paintings of the Liberal Arts were probably executed by Pellegrino Tibaldi.

[14] The term *brutesco* can be found in Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa's *Plaza universal de ciencias y artes* and in Francisco de Cascales' *Discursos de Murcia y su reino*. Lope de Rueda, in his "Paso de la gitana y Gargullo," from his *Comedia Medora*, has Gargullo imagine all the things he will obtain with the treasures he thinks he has stolen from a gypsy: "Lo primero que hare sera hazer unas casas en lo major d'esta ciudad; hazellas he pintar por de fuera y por de dentro al brutesco y al romano" (252).

[15] "Este género de pintura se haze con unos compartimentos, listones y follajes, figuras de medio sierpes, medio hombres, syrenas, sphinges, minotauros" (661).

[16] "Mas a esta sazón vi en medio del prado un maravilloso edificio, con una gran portada de fábrica dórica y de excelente artífice labrada… Estaban mil triumfos de amor imaginados, de medio relieve, que juntamente con muy graciosos brutescos hacían historia y ornato, y representaban misterio" (305).

[17] Bakhtin asserts that: "The initial meaning of the term was in the begin-

tesque in antique and Italian art. When Cervantes first inserts the term grotesque in his novel, he links it to a descent underground, thus pointing to the discovery of the *Domus Aurea* and other such ruins. In Chapter 50 of Part One, the knight offers a vision of the delights of chivalric reading[18] as he evokes a scene where the hero must descend to the depths of a lake, fighting innumerable monsters. Once there, he finds himself in a beautiful sunlit meadow with the chirping of birds, and the sound of a fresh stream. Although this is clearly a scene taken from the romances of chivalry, the text also points to a more recondite model. The *Domus Aurea* was said to be covered with gold and the hero of this adventure, as he looks beyond the valley, sees a palace "cuyas murallas son de macizo oro" (I, 50; 585). Two fountains come into view: "acullá vee una artificiosa fuente de jaspe variado y de liso mármol compuesta; acá vee otra a lo brutesco adornada, adonde las menudas conchas de las almenas con las torcidas casas blancas y amarillas del caracol, puestas con orden desordenada, mezclados entre ellas pedazos de cristal luciente de contrahechas esmeraldas, hacen una variada labor de manera que el arte, imitando a la naturaleza, parece que allí la vence" (I, 50; 584–85). We thus see the opposition of styles: while one fountain is simple and elegant, exuding Renaissance harmony, the other is decorated "a lo brutesco." By placing them side by side, the knight may be commenting on the Canon of Toledo's vision of ordered art versus the romances of chivalry, "que los componen con tantos miembros, que más parece que llevan intención a formar una quimera o un monstruo que a hacer una figura proporcionada" (I, 47; 565).

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ning extremely narrow, describing the rediscovered form of Roman ornament. But in reality this form was but a fragment of the immense world of grotesque imagery which existed throughout all the stages of antiquity and continued to exist in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (32). This essay attempts to contain the term in its Renaissance meaning.

[18] Edward Dudley explains: "In fact this conflict of hermeneutic horizons creates the 'unreadableness' that becomes a notable genre feature of Romance and contributes to the mixture of mystery and pleasure purveyed to the reader. It is just this kind of pleasure that Don Quixote invokes in his discussion with the canon of Toledo as the basis for his valorization of the *libros de caballería[s]*" (130).

To the perfectly proportioned work, Don Quijote juxtaposes the joyful and fantastic vision of chivalry.[19]

Gombrich explains that the grotesque, in the early Renaissance, was de-centered: "In contrast to the stateroom, a corridor, and specially a garden loggia, did not have to stand on dignity. Here the amusing grotesque was allowed to run riot and artists were not only permitted but even enjoined by Renaissance authors such as Vasari to let themselves go and display their caprice and inventiveness in these 'paintings without rule'" (20). Cervantes places the grotesque fountain in a most appropriate setting, the garden, a place where such fanciful creations were allowed to proliferate. The fountain, then, typifies don Quijote's own artistic perceptions. Here, the imagination reigns supreme, and as Gombrich asserts, it enjoys "the play of forms and the dreamlike inconsequence of meanings it engendered" (20). The fountain's adornments clearly exemplify the grotesque. The first objects mentioned are "menudas conchas." These marine shells are often present in both grotesque classical and Renaissance art. They can be located, for example, in the most famous instance of the grotesque in Renaissance Rome, Raphael's *loggia* at the Vatican. Although the frescoes here are called "Raphael's Bible" since they depict scenes from Genesis to the New Testament, they are surrounded by amazing grotesque decorations, some prepared by Raphael and others by his disciple Giovanni da Udine. In the eighth bay of Raphael's Loggia, for example shells appear underneath fantastic nude bodies. From one such shell emerges at the very bottom a winged female figure. The connection between a shell and the female body was common in antiquity since, as W. S. Heckscher asserts, "the *concha marina* was the traditional and original attribute of Aphrodite" (148); it thus became both an image of the womb and of woman's genitalia. As "a purely erotic symbol" its *locus classicus* is found in Plautus. The erotics of Venus's shell is also found in St. Augustine and in Boccaccio's

[19] For Casalduero, what we have here is a theory of the baroque: "En esta descripción queda incluida la visión barroca del mundo. El color deslumbrante, el gozo de la materia, de las formas, pertenecen al Barroco." This "orden desordenada" means that art vanquishes nature (196).

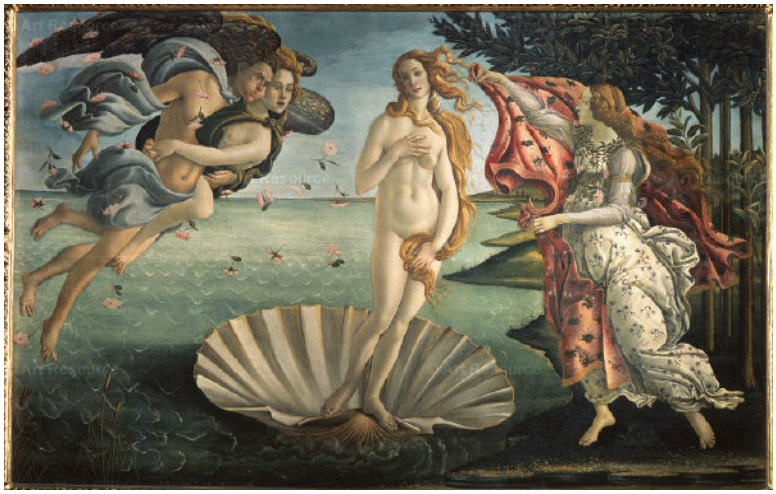

Figure 3. Sandro Botticelli. *The Birth of Venus.* Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.)

Genealogia deorum (Heckscher 150). It is thus not surprising that Botticelli's Venus comes to land on a shell. *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 3) is in many ways an archeological attempt at recapturing the lost *Aphrodite Anadyomene* of Apelles. Pliny tells us that the painting "suffered from age and rot," and thus Nero decided to discard it for a newer work by Dorotheus (xxxv.91). It is curious, then, that Renaissance artists copied newly discovered shells from Nero's Golden House and also attempted to re-envision Venus and her shell, from a painting discarded by Nero.[20] Very much like ancient art and antique grotesques, the Cervantine shells serve as prelude for the erotic. Don Quijote, in his chivalric fantasy, imagines, in a passage taken from Boccaccio,[21] how a bevy of maidens take the Knight of the Lake into a castle where they make him disrobe and bathe him "con templadas aguas, y

[20] In Plautus' *Rudens* a slave speaks of the shells of two pursued maidens.

[21] For Donald McGrady, this passage derives from Boccaccio, while Percas de Ponseti compares the castle with the one of the ballad of Rosaflorida (*Cervantes y su concepto del arte* 2: 464–66).

luego untarle todo con olorosos ungüentos" (I, 50; 585).

The second element found in the fountain decorations are the "casas blancas y amarillas del caracol" (I, 50; 584). The move from the *concha* to the snail shell in Cervantes' text also indicates a repetitive symbolic pattern. As Mircea Eliade has shown: "Oysters, sea-shells, the snail and the pearl figure constantly in aquatic cosmology as well as in sexual symbolism" (125). The antique grotesque abounded in sensual forms as it sought to represent unrestrained fantasy, which was often erotic in nature. Consequently, the snail appears in both antique and Renaissance grotesque—it should come as no surprise that it is found throughout Raphael's *loggia*.[22] Cardinal Bibbiena's famous *stufetta* or bathroom at the Vatican, decorated in 1515 by Raphael and Giovanni da Udine, foregrounds the link between shells and *eros*. Here "Cupids in shells are pulled by snails" (Jones and Penny 193).

Having ascertained that Cervantes was aware of the Renaissance conception of the grotesque, we can now turn to Part Two of the novel. Shortly after the enchantment of Dulcinea, Don Quijote is faced with the Knight of the Mirrors, the disguised Sansón Carrasco. He has brought with him a squire, who frightens Sancho: "Mas apenas dio lugar la claridad del día para ver y diferenciar las cosas, cuando la primera que se ofreció a los ojos de Sancho Panza fue la nariz del escudero del Bosque, que era tan grande que casi le hacía sombra a todo el cuerpo" (II, 14; 140). For Salvador Fajardo, "the nose concentrates in its grotesque and fearsome shape all the references to the topic of lying that run

[22] In Raphael's loggia, there is a snail shell in the first bay, under Bacchus (Nesselrath 53). And in the ninth bay, at the base of a grotesque, there is also the shell of a snail, an image which is repeated six times. The snail is always shaped in the form of a spiral, that is, a figure that always curves around a center, always increasing in size. Like a grotesque fantasy, the spiral keeps producing new curves into infinity. The grotesque is that infinite play of forms that metamorphoses itself from snail to flower to tree to human torso. The chivalric, then, is this fantastic play where reality keeps changing and metamorphosing itself into something else. Windmills can be giants and inns can easily be castles in a dream of wish-fulfillment. If these figures can coexist in Nero's golden house along with heroic and lyric murals, then, don Quijote's adventures can weave their infinite web of fantasies amidst dassical forms.

through the beginning of part II" (203). This critic utilizes the Bakhtinian conception of the grotesque as a carnivalesque reversal of hierarchies where misrule and deception are the rule. But the grotesque in this episode also reflects the artistic notions of the Renaissance.[23] The squire's nose is described in terms of a vegetable: "Cuéntase, en efecto, que era de demasiada grandeza, corva en la mitad y toda llena de verrugas, de color amoratado, como de berenjena" (II, 14; 140). This grotesque link between body parts and the vegetable world flourished in Italian art through the works of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Cervantes may have come to know his works and that of his imitators during his visit(s) to Milan.[24] Not only would his overall fame have attracted Cervantes, but also his service to the Hapsburgs. He worked for successive emperors in Prague. In fact, Rudolph II sent Arcimboldo's painting *The Hunter* as a present to Philip II—a work which would have been exhibited at Spanish palaces in Cervantes' lifetime (Levisi 221).[25] His paintings are a natural development of what appears in the *Domus Aurea*, where humans, nymphs, and satyrs grow arboreal extensions. In Arcimboldo's paintings, the vegetable world does not extend outward from human anatomies but constitutes the physical body.[26] The fantasies of the clas-

[23] Bakhtin actually points to fantastic noses in his discussion of the grotesque. Citing Schneegans, he gives as example caricatures of Napoleon III "that lend the emperor's nose extraordinary dimensions, transforming it either into a pig's snout or a crow's beak (306).

[24] Cervantes seems to have visited Milan. In his *Novelas ejemplares* he tells of the Licenciado Vidriera's impressions of the city, while in the *Persiles y Sigismunda* he states that the pilgrims: "Estuvieron cuatro días en Milán, en los cuales comenzaron a ver sus grandezas, porque acabarlas de ver no dieran tiempo cuatro años" (III, 19; 402). Although Arcimboldo painted his most famous pictures in Prague while at the service of the emperors, there seem to have been copies in Milan. Cervantes, like Quevedo, may have seen these works or those of Arcimboldo's imitators in Italy (Levisi 222).

[25] Margarita Levisi explains that: "No hay noticias de este trabajo en los museos españoles, y esta obra, o una copia de la misma, volvió a aparecer más tarde en los depósitos imperiales en el Belvedere de Viena. En 1872 Francisco José donó el cuadro al Museo de Graz" (221).

[26] This is very much in tune with Bakhtin's vision of the grotesque, where: "the limits between the body and the world are weakened" (313).

Figure 4. Giuseppe Arcimboldo. *Summer.* Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.)

sical grotesque where one shape leads to the other culminate in Arcimboldo's many portraits where vegetables shape the features of an individual, as in the images of *Spring* and *Summer* (Figure

4). In both of these paintings a vegetable nose is particularly prominent. And these nasal protuberances include the "verrugas" described by Sancho. In *The Man and the Vegetables* (Figure 5), an even more grotesque face is formed from a series of vegeta-

Figure 5. Giuseppe Arcimboldo. *The Man and the Vegetables* (*The Vegetable Gardener*). Museo Civico, Cremona. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.)

bles. Although the large carrot that serves as nose has none of the squire's "verrugas," this painting can also be linked to Cervantes's text through trickery. When the work is turned upside down, the face disappears and the painting shows merely a dish of vegetables. As Giancarlo Maiorino asserts: "By exploiting duplicity and reversibility, the artist makes of the canvas at once a grotesque portrait and a still life" (34). In the novel, the grotesque is also related to trickery. The giant nose which frightens Sancho is a mere disguise, exposing the duplicity of those who wish to bring about don Quijote's downfall. The menacing squire is quickly transformed into a familiar sight (Sancho's neighbor Tomé Cecial) when the fake nasal adumbration comes off.

A similar transformation occurs with the Knight of the Mirrors. And it can again be related to Arcimboldo's reversible painting. Roland Barthes has explained that the figure in *The Man and the Vegetables* can be equated both with a cook and with a soldier. He has prepared an "insalata" or salad. A similar term, "celata," refers to helmet or *celada*, which explains why the cook has "the fierce expression of a copper-complexioned old soldier" (131). In Cervantes' novel, don Quijote cannot see his rival's countenance: "Don Quijote miró a su contenedor y hallole ya puesta calada la celada, de modo que no le pudo ver el rostro" (II, 14; 140). The quixotic world is turned upside down when the Knight of the Mirrors, without helmet, becomes Sansón Carrasco and when Sancho is faced with a neighbor. But Arcimboldo's mimetic paradox of a face constituted when vegetables are turned upside-down is further problematized in Cervantes since knight and squire cannot decipher if their enemies are truly familiar friends, or a simulacrum of these figures created by enchanters. While Sancho had disturbed don Quijote's world with the enchantment of Dulcinea, now Sansón Carrasco and his squire disturb Sancho's common-sense attitudes. The grotesque, in its proliferations of forms and fantasies, has forever confounded the two characters.[27] Don Quijote and his squire will become cave adventurers,

[27] But even from the beginnings of the novel, the knight may have had a certain affinity with the grotesque. Carlos Brito Díaz has compared Arcimboldo's portrait of *The Librarian* with that of our knight. While Arcimboldo composes his

wondering into areas that recall visits to the *Domus Aurea* in Rome. While don Quijote will hint at a grotesque vision in the Cave of Montesinos, Sancho will confirm the presence of the grotesque during his fall into a *sima* (II, 55; 255).

Don Quijote as tourist, who comes to view the wonders of the Cave of Montesinos, resembles the many that went to Rome to descend into the grottoes of the *Domus Aurea*. Martin van Heemskerck, painter from Nuremberg, inscribed his name in the ancient Roman caves, and painted landscapes with ancient ruins, while the Portuguese Francisco de Holanda prepared a sketch in full color the ceiling of the *Volta dorata*, which is preserved at the Escorial. There are also graffiti from Spaniards in these palatial caves such as *Isidoro Velasquez* (Dacos 160), *Francescho Amad… espan(ol)*, *Pietro espanolo*, etc. (Dacos 145), some even dated in the 1570's when Cervantes was in Italy.[28]

A poem written about the descent into the grottoes tells us of the many perils that a visitor such as Miguel de Cervantes would face. The anonymous poem, *Antiquarie prospettiche romane* (*Roman Antiquities in Perspective*), possibly written by Bramante around 1500,[29] is dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci and describes many of Rome's antiquities for the benefit of tourists or pilgrims. Among them, is what would later be known as the *Domus Aurea*. In order to view the beautiful art therein, a suitable entrance to the "grotte" must be found. These openings would often be covered with rocks, ruins of art objects or vegetation. In Cervantes' novel, the knight also has to "cortar de aquellas malezas que a la boca de la cueva estaban" (II, 22; 209). In both texts, the visitor must face

figures using a number of books, "Don Quijote se homologa con la tradición literaria en virtud de su *textualización*" (45–46).

[28] In the list of signatures from these caves collected by Weege in the nineteenth-century and later by Nicole Dacos, a name which they read as Michiel appears at least twice. One such graffito is dated 1574, at a time when Cervantes was in Italy (Dacos 144). Is it at all possible that we have here a graffito from Miguel de Cervantes?

[29] Mr. Perspective in the poem longs to see Leonardo. He uses the term *bramo* to express this desire, and thus Rowland concludes it must be attributed to Bramante (107).

winged creatures of the night (Figure 6). The Spanish version speaks of "una infinidad de grandísimos cuervos y grajos" (II, 22; 209) and then asserts that these birds of night commingle with bats ("murciélagos"). The Italian text also evokes such creatures, mentioning owls ("barbagianni") and bats ("nottoline") (stanza 129). As Sancho and the humanist pull out don Quijote from his descent to Montesinos they ask him to tell "lo que en aquel infier-

Figure 6. Gustave Doré. *The Cave of Montesinos.*

no había visto" (II, 22; 210). Even though Renaissance humanists were extremely excited about the underground discoveries of Roman antiquities, certain moralists viewed the endeavor with

great suspicion. The Florentine Dominican Zanobi Acciaiuoli (d. 1519), for example, claimed that these archeologists would not find a golden world, but a site for "iron war and ruthless rapine" (Singer 81). This underground world of paganism was thought to be the realm of the devil.[30] Although don Quijote denies that he has visited a hellish place, his description is not particularly paradisiacal either. Merlin's enchantments together with grotesque elements described in his dreamlike adventure cast doubts as to whether he has visited a golden place or a demonic one. Pointing to Durandarte's "two-pound" heart which has been salted for preservation, to the strange appearance of Belerma, and to Dulcinea's monetary distress, Henry Sullivan concludes that: "the overall outer framework of the spelunking episode has a grotesque and incongruous air" (64).

These elements also point to the *Domus Aurea* and to the poem written that describes the journey to these underground rooms. Belerma's dreadful state, after having been enchanted for centuries, does not improve her original appearance, as the text relishes in a grotesque portrayal. The transference of grotesque characteristics from metamorphic monsters in the walls to humans began as early as 1500 with the appearance of the anonymous poem. Here, the visitors who must crawl along the dirt and become "more bizarre that the grottesche" (stanza 127; Rowland 106; Dacos 10). The figures in Montesinos' cave also seem to have a dusty, musty, and worn look. Even before don Quijote hears of Belerma, the knight faces Montesinos whose "gorra milanesa negra" would remind the reader that the city of Milan was a center for grotesque art during the sixteenth century.[31] This figure carries a rosary with beads so large as to resemble "medianas

[30] These assertions are found in his *Oratio in laudem Urbis Romae* (Rome, 1518). The demonic underground Rome, he adds, contrasts with the virtuous Christian Rome.

[31] Arcimboldo is perhaps the most famous grotesque artist from Milan. A number of other artists born in Milan participated in the Accademia della Val di Blenio: Giovanni Ambrogio Brambilla, Annibale Fontana, Camillo Landriani (Il Duchino), Aurelio Luni, etc. (Rabisch 337–41).

nueces" and "huevos medianos de avestruz" (II, 23; 212).[32] The slow metamorphosis of one object (in this case the rosary) into elements of nature, is typical of the antique grotesque. The Renaissance takes them up and includes them in portraits. Gregorio Comanini, for example, revels in descriptions of Arcimboldo's portraits with "stinging acorns" (Maiorino 81). And even though we may not find ostrich eggs in Arcimboldo, his portrait of *Air* exhibits many birds, from rooster to peacock.[33] The reference to the ostrich, though, may serve to recall the presence of these exotic birds in the gardens of Aranjuez (Clemencín 2: 424).

I have not discovered an enlarged heart among Renaissance grotesques, but Mercury points to another bodily organ, a phallus among vegetables, in the grotesque decorations made by Giovanni da Udine for Raphael's loggia of Cupid and Psyche at the Villa Farnesina in Rome (Jones and Penny 184–85, fig. 196). Indeed, the whole episode of the Cave of Montesinos exudes a kind of sexual aura reminiscent of many grotesque fantasies. When don Quijote sees Dulcinea and her attendants in the cave, they are "saltando y brincando como cabras" (II, 23; 220). For Javier Herrero, the goat "is a metaphorical vehicle for the sensual, pagan, in Christian terms, 'fallen' nature of women" (20). I would add that such creatures abound in the grotesque fantasies of classical and Renaissance art.[34] In Cervantes' novel, the erotic link between the maidens and the goats is further enhanced by the use of the verb *brincar*. Javier Herrero reminds us that this verb often means sexual intercourse.

Don Quijote' goddess, his Venus, has been made into an ugly and lascivious peasant. The somewhat concealed eros of the Dul-

[32] These grotesque comparisons certainly are part of the "función paródica del rosario" as discussed by Roberto Véguez (100).

[33] In his portrait symbolizing *Air*, for example, Arcimboldo includes geese, roosters, turkeys, a pheasant, a peacock, an eagle, and a duck's beak which forms the lower eyelid (Kriegerkorte 16).

[34] Giulio Romano foregrounds the sexual nature of the goat in a fresco at the Palazzo del Te. The lubricious air of the painting is scrutinized by Bette Talvachia: "The horns of a leering satyr who takes the form of a herm sculpture are grabbed by a bacchante whose left leg straddles the goat as she twists around to grab similarly the horn of the second creature under her domination" (34).

cinea episodes recalls a much more explicit Italian text which has been linked to the grotesque, Pietro Aretino's *Sei giornate*.[35] Studying this dialogue where an elder courtesan retells her life and exploits, Ingrid Rowland asserts: "Aretino's pornography has something of the same frenetic inventiveness as Giovanni da Udine's grotesques for Raphael's Logge Vaticane" (249). But there is something else she adds that more closely links Aretino, Cervantes, and the grotesque. The courtesan's narrative highlights "the contrast between the effete literary language of the courtiers and Nanna's own blunt obscenity" (Rowland 249). In Cervantes, the knight's elevated language when he first speaks to his princess in Chapter Ten, sharply contrasts with his the woman's appearance, her behavior, and her speech. Aretino and Cervantes thus bring together in a grotesque manner the elevated and the base. Arcimboldo had used this principle when he created human portraits from the vegetable and animal worlds. And there is just one more step from here to picturing grotesque gods. Perhaps the most noted example can be found in the artistic milieu of Milan, where Giovanni Ambrogio Brambilla (Figure 7) presents us with eight heads of Olympian deities, beginning with Narcissus and ending with Ganymede. The three women included—Venus, Juno, and Diana—are as deformed and ugly as don Quijote's divine Dulcinea and her attendants.[36]

This grotesque mode is sustained as don Quijote emerges from the Cave. As Henry Sullivan has argued, the grotesque purgatory of Part II of Cervantes' novel is framed by two catabases. It begins with the Cave of Montesinos and ends with Sancho falling into a pit (xii). In this section of the novel, don Quijote is faced with enigmatic women who grow beards[37] and two fountains

[35] Louis Imperiale has studied in lucid detail the Rome of Aretino and of the curiously similar Spanish work by Francisco Delicado, *La lozana andaluza*.

[36] This vision of the grotesque proliferates throughout Europe. In France, Paul Scarron, in his parody of Virgil, "stresses the trivial material bodily images. Hecuba washes diapers, and Dido is presented as a blunt-nosed African negress" (Bakhtin 304).

[37] "Y luego la Dolorida y las demás dueñas alzaron los antifaces con que cubiertas venían, y descubrieron los rostros, todos poblados de barbas, cuales rubias, cuales negras, cuales blancas y cuales albarrazadas" (II, 39; 337–38).

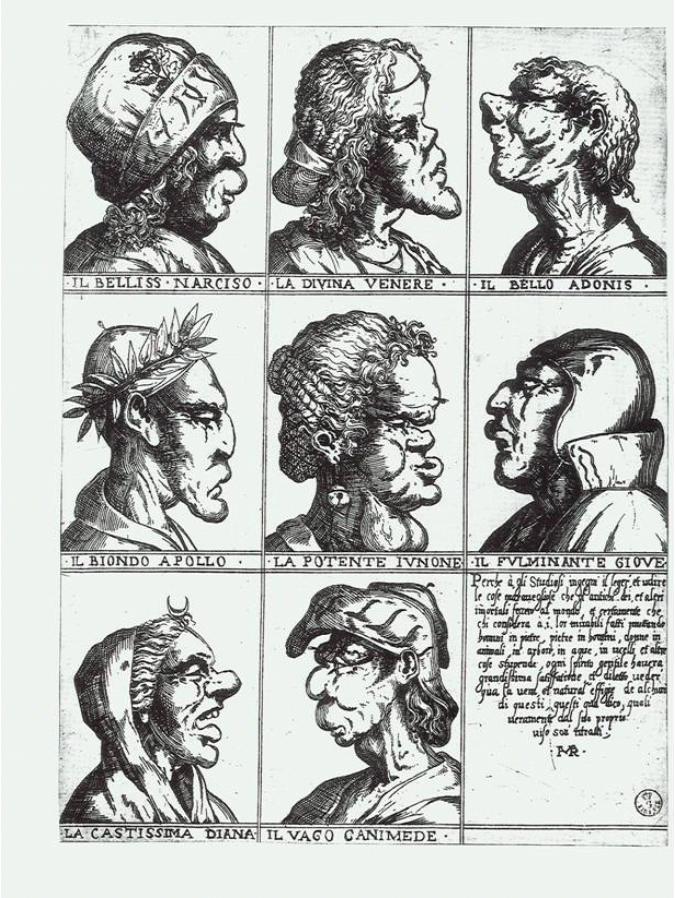

Figure 7. Giovanni Ambrogio Brambilla. *Eight Grotesque Heads of Olympian Deities*. "Il belliss. Narciso, La divina Venere, Il bello Adonis; Il biondo Apollo, La potente Iunone, Il fulminante Giove; La castissima Diana, Il vago Ganimede." Uffizi, Florence. (From Apa 172.)

which turns out to be open sores on the duchess' legs, replicating in grotesque fashion the classical and grotesque fountains of don

Quijote's dream in I, 50.[38] The main grotesque elements appear to come to an end with Sancho's fall thirty-two chapters after the initial catabasis. Abdicating the governorship, Sancho journeys back to don Quijote. Searching for a place to sleep, he deviates from the path and tumbles into a dark pit along with his donkey: "cayeron él y el rucio en una honda y escurísima sima que entre unos edificios muy antiguos estaba" (II, 55; 454–55). Such an entrance into an underground domain surrounded by ancient buildings clearly recalls visits to the subterranean palaces of Titus or Nero by humanist adventurers who stumbled upon them while exploring ancient Roman ruins.

Exploring the pit, Sancho discovers a narrow opening. Very much like humanist cave explorers, he enters this narrow passage to discover that it leads to a spacious underground room. In order to foreground the comparison between Sancho's seemingly simple pit and the *Domus Aurea* the text explains that the squire "comenzó a caminar por aquella gruta adelante, por ver si hallaba alguna salida por otra parte" (II, 55; 457). The word *gruta*, the very origins of the term grotesque, heightens our perception of the relationship between the double catabasis in Part II and the Renaissance explorations that led to the discovery of an artistic movement that shapes the images of Cervantes' novel. It is Sancho who highlights this art form in the second part of the novel by merging the vision of Dulcinea as Venus with that of a garlic-smelling peasant. As a comic Mercury, he introduces a new form of eloquence, the grotesque. Don Quijote authorizes this vision through enchantment and seeks to make it his own in the Cave of Montesinos, only to surrender to a nightmarish world. Not even by rescuing Sancho from a *gruta* can the grotesque be exorcized.[39]

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[38] Doña Rodríguez reveals to don Quijote her mistress's secret: "Pues sepa vuesa merced que lo puede agradecer, primero a Dios, y luego, a dos fuentes que tiene en las dos piernas, por donde se desagua todo el mal humor de quien dicen los médicos que está llena" (II, 48; 403).

[39] Numerous grotesque images will ensue, including trees that grow human feet (II, 60) and tears the size of nuts (II, 71). I am still attempting to understand why grotesque elements continue to appear even after Sancho's ascent from the *gruta*, an event that concludes the *catabasis* or purgatory begun with don Quijo-

The inscription is from Ovid, xv.234–35: "Tempus edax rerum tuque invidiosa vetustas õia [omnia] destruitis" ("O time, swallower of things, and you, envious old age, you have destroyed all"). Prince of Liechtenstein Collection, Vaduz. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.)

te's descent into the Cave of Montesinos.

Following in the footsteps of Arcimboldo, Raphael, Giovanni da Udine, Bartolomeo Carducho, and Giovanni Ambrogio Brambilla, Cervantes leads us into a world of metamorphic changes, visual abnormalities, erotic fantasies, disturbing manipulations, and an "alliance between the natural and the bizarre"[40] where Sancho's and don Quijote's imaginings unsuspectedly intertwine. This is the world of the grotesque in which the tortuous and erotic imaginings of a nocturnal world[41] seduce the characters into creating ever more deformed or exaggerated transformations. While Horace would condemn the grotesque as "a sick man's dream"[42] Cervantes problematizes this style by associating it with a crazed knight and his imitators. If Raphael can surround luminous Renaissance art with grotesque fancies, so can Cervantes evoke a luminous Dulcinea and a glorious knightly quest, while surrounding them with a dark yet humorous nightmare of salted hearts, ostrich beads, nasal warts, and bestial women from which don Quijote seems never to escape.

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[40] This alliance was proposed by Paolo Lomazzo in poems written in the grotesque mode (Maiorino 125).

[41] Maiorino explains that "Humanist ideology began to fold under the weight of monumental accomplishments…Those were testing times, and it was easier to hide in dreams and caves than to move outdoors into the daylight. The nocturnal provinces of art gained popularity. *Notturnismo* triumphed in the grottoes of the Boboli Gardens, and Agostino Veneto painted monstrous creatures in his *Trionfo notturno di Ecate*" (4).

[42] This statement is found at the inception of Horace's *Ars poetica*.

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