



Heroics of Persuasion in *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*

CAROLYN LUKENS-OLSON



n many ways, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* is like any other Renaissance romance in the Byzantine style. The protagonists, a young man and woman in love, are on a lengthy and arduous journey that takes them through unknown and often hostile territories. Every stop along the way the two encounter others with whom they trade the stories of their plights. They meet dozens of characters with varying degrees of sympathy; some help the two along, others join them, and still others seriously threaten their safety. The couple, a future king and queen traveling incognito as Periandro and Auristela, confronts each hardship without the special protection and treatment usually enjoyed by royalty, and here *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* is more like a chivalric romance or *libro de caballerías*, for the work features the heroics of the character Persiles. Persiles's role is to protect Sigismunda, and he repeatedly puts his life in jeopardy to make sure that she arrives safely to her destination. On their long journey from the Arctic to Rome the two encounter danger after danger, including barbarians who nearly offer them

up in a sacrificial ritual, a lascivious king who plots to abduct Sigismunda, a witch who poisons her, and Turkish pirates who almost kill them during an attack. The couple and many other characters escape all perils thanks to Persiles's deeds. Therefore, while the story reads as a Greek romance built around the trials of the enamored Persiles and Sigismunda, it may also be regarded as a chivalric romance since it features the heroics of the protagonist Persiles.¹ It is the nature of Persiles's heroics that I wish to focus on in this essay.

Persiles's brand of heroics is different in kind from the typical heroics of chivalry because he does not carry a sword. In fact, Persiles is never reported to wound or kill anyone. What is his mode of defense then? Words. Persiles deals with his foes only through persuasion. In *Persiles y Sigismunda*, Cervantes reformulates the *modus operandi* of the chivalric hero, trading the characteristic sword-wielding hero for an eloquent and prudent orator. Therefore, we may regard Cervantes' final work as a remarkable sort of chivalric romance that poeticizes not the heroics of war, but the heroics of persuasion. *Persiles y Sigismunda* is a book about the role of speeches in the world; it illustrates the view, which was widely held by the ancients, that persuasion is more efficacious than coercion when it comes to moving people and looking after the human good. The hero Persiles fully embodies the practice of persuasion.

Such a radical twist on the chivalric hero is hinted at near the end of Part I of *Don Quijote* in the conversation between the Canon of Toledo and the priest. The former portrays an ideal protagonist for a chivalric romance: "un capitán valeroso con todas las partes que para ser tal se requieren, mostrándose prudente previniendo las astucias de sus enemigos, y elocuente orador persuadiendo o disuadiendo a sus soldados, maduro en el consejo, presto en lo determinado, tan valiente en el esperar como en el acometer" (I,

¹ Eisenberg points out that, in Cervantes' genre system, though all *libros de caballerías* are epics in prose, not all epics in prose are *libros de caballerías*. He quotes Alonso López Pinciano on the subcategories of heroic literature, which correspond to the themes of religion, love, or battle (63, n. 37). Love was the central theme of Byzantine romances, and battle that of the chivalric romances.

47; 554).² Critics cite this passage to prove that *Persiles y Sigismunda* is not a type of purified chivalric romance such as the canon and priest describe since there is no “capitán valeroso” or “elocuente orador” in the work.³ I wish to argue, however, that the hero *Persiles* is both.

The distinct nature of the heroics of *Persiles y Sigismunda*, where the hero never engages in actual fighting, has made it difficult to discern the book’s heroics. Diana de Armas Wilson writes, for example, that “Because no military battles occur in [*Persiles y Sigismunda*], there is no call for that ‘eloquent orator’ in the Canon’s formula—for the captain seen as valiant when ‘persuading or dissuading his soldiers’ or as bold when ‘making an attack’” (27). But the battlefield is not the only arena of conflict and heroic enterprise. Though *Persiles* is not a captain in the strict military sense because he does not lead troops of soldiers into battle, he is a leader in charge of guiding, safeguarding, and organizing groups of people through hostile territories and explosive conflicts, much like the cunning Odysseus. Furthermore, he successfully carries through his primary mission of delivering his charges with great risk to his own safety, which defines the duties of a captain. And though he is not fearless, he is brave.⁴

Elsewhere in the same discussion in *Don Quijote*, the canon and the priest denounce chivalric romances for being: “largos en las batallas, necios en las razones, disparatados en los viajes, y, finalmente, ajenos de todo discreto artificio, y por esto dignos de ser desterrados de la república cristiana” (I, 47; 554). Surviving through speech and not violence distances *Persiles y Sigismunda*

² Quotes from *Don Quijote* are taken from the edition of Allen.

³ See González Rovira (227–47) for the most recent and comprehensive account of the critical history of *Persiles y Sigismunda* as the work described in *Don Quijote*.

⁴ See Zimic and Williamsen for discussions of *Persiles*’s expressions of fear and his crying episodes as intentionally conspicuous flaws in his character. According to Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the virtue of courage does not mean being fearless; rather it is to be properly disposed towards one’s fear, to be able to master it when something good or noble is at stake (Book I, 9–12; 46–52). For a good discussion of the compatibility of the Greek heroic ideal and crying, see Chapter I of Lessing’s *Laocoön*. Romero also makes this point (162, n. 43).

from those chivalric romances “largos en las batallas” and “necios en las razones.” To the contrary, *Persiles y Sigismunda* is short on battles and long on speeches. Well over one third of *Persiles y Sigismunda* is composed of speeches; the rest of the work is narration. Such a preponderance of speeches is not uncommon in the Byzantine romance and works written in that tradition.⁵ The importance of speech in *Persiles y Sigismunda* is further evident in the fact that though the pilgrims cover lots of ground, Cervantes gives more stylistic attention to what happens between people (the speeches and their stories) than what happens to them (the action). Additionally, narrative descriptions of their journeys are relatively pithy and unelaborated in comparison to the characters’ speeches, which are detailed and often lengthy. Moreover, while the geographical details of the itinerary of the pilgrimage comprise the visual imagery of *Persiles y Sigismunda*, there is also a symbolic imagery accompanied by a choreography and corresponding lexicon, all directed at speech. In scene after scene, the characters are shown to gather around speakers, to listen with rapt attention, to hang on their words, to exhibit amazement, and to respond with tears and compassion. Finally, numerous references are made to speech and the voice in general, telling secrets, coaxing, babbling, shouting, whispering, murmuring, begging, promising, and more.⁶ In sum, speech is the central motif of *Persiles y Sigismunda*.

Is *Persiles*, then, an eloquent speaker? Though most critics of *Persiles y Sigismunda* do not see him as such, most characters do. Repeated expressions and descriptions of *admiratio* indicate the effects of *Persiles*’s words. If *admiratio* (amazement or astonish-

⁵ Hägg (294), for example, cites that nearly one half of Chariton’s *Chaereas* is taken up by direct speech, monologues and dialogues, and Mack notes a similar format to Robert Greene’s *Mamillia*, in which “The narrative is so often interspersed and augmented with speeches, soliloquies, letters and debates, and these texts are so much longer and more polished than the narrative that one reads the book more as an anthology of short texts than as a story” (119).

⁶ Wilson (190) notes that “The tongue would seem to be a programmatic feature of the *Persiles*...where everyone and everything seems to be speaking in tongues—where wolves speak (77), fame speaks (114), and even silence speaks (110); where they choose to play mute (94), and like double-edged swords (120), are muzzled (135) are tied by prisons (118), or are pierced by arrows (68).” Her page numbers refer to Avallé-Arce’s edition.

ment) is proof that the rhetorical conditions have been met and that the speaker's words have fully struck the imagination and understanding of the interlocutor(s),⁷ then the many cases of *admiratio* associated with Persiles's words indicate that he is effective, and effectively moving one's audience is the measure of eloquence. Sinforosa, for example, hangs on his words: "La que con más gusto escuchaba a Periandro [*alias* Persiles] era la bella Sinforosa, estando pendiente de sus palabras como con las cadenas que salían de la boca de Hércules" (II, 12; 353–54).⁸ In other cases, the narrator notes that "cada palabra que Periandro decía, así le regalaba el alma, que la sacaba de sí misma" (II, 14; 369) and "haciendo efeto en su alma las amorosas razones de Periandro, dio lugar a la verdad que en ellas venía encerrada" (II, 7; 317). Repeated reactions of wonderment certainly indicate that Persiles is a good speaker, but not until we know that he moves not just the imagination but also the action of people with his words can we liken him to the eloquent orator described by the canon, someone capable of persuading and dissuading when necessary.

⁷ There are dozens of examples of characters' reactions to speeches reported in *Persiles y Sigismunda*, including plenty of reactions to the words of other characters besides Persiles. This indicates that his technique extends to others, a relevant fact of the work. For example, in several instances the *admiratio* is associated with the words of Sigismunda, such as here: "Admirados quedaron todos de la respuesta de Auristela [*alias* Sigismunda], porque en ella se descubrió su corazón piadoso y su discreción admirable" (II, 7; 323). Other times it is associated with new characters the travelers come across, such as in these two cases: "Suspensos quedaron los peregrinos de la relación de la nueva, aunque vieja, peregrina, y casi les comenzó a bullir en el alma la gana de irse con ella a ver tantas maravillas" (III, 6; 490) and "Admirados quedaron...de la improvisa y concertada narración del caído caminante, y con gusto de escucharle le dijo Periandro que prosiguiese en lo que decir quería, que todos le echarían crédito, porque todos eran cortesesy en las cosas del mundo experimentados" (III, 6; 492). In fact, *admiratio* becomes such a common occurrence in the work that the narrator acknowledges this fact in a brief paragraph: "No habrá para qué preguntar si se admiraron o no los oyentes de la historia de Isabela, pues la historia misma se trae consigo la admiración, para ponerla en las almas de los que le escuchan" (III, 20; 626). Ultimately, the comments on *admiratio* are reduced to the form in which they come in the penultimate chapter of the last book, perhaps literally Cervantes' final statement on *admiratio*: "Si se admiró o no, a la buena consideración lo dejo" (IV, 12; 715).

⁸ Quotes from *Persiles y Sigismunda* are from the Romero edition.

In effect, the results of Persiles' speeches provide the most compelling evidence that he is an excellent orator. Over and over throughout the work, Persiles's words appeal to the best senses of his listeners, change their wills, and move them to do just acts. We see this pattern for the first time in Persiles's first speech, which comes in Chapter 1 of Book I. There, Persiles, who is being kept in a dark pit in which it appears he may perish, delivers the following speech of gratitude when one of his barbarian captors pulls him out:

Gracias os hago, ioh inmensos y piadosos cielos!, de que me habéis traído a morir adonde vuestra luz vea mi muerte, y no adonde estos oscuros calabozos, de donde agora salgo, de sombras caliginosas la cubran. Bien querría yo no morir desesperado, a lo menos porque soy cristiano, pero mis desdichas son tales que me llaman y casi fuerzan a desearlo. (I, 1; 119)

This speech initiates a distinguishing rhetorical technique of *Persiles y Sigismunda*, *descubrimiento*. *Descubrimiento* is provoking compassion and receiving consolation by sharing stories of personal trials. Done in the proper spirit, revealing oneself through stories is shown as a generous and liberal gesture. This is indicated in the following words of the character Rutilio and echoed in various forms throughout the book: "es alivio al que cuenta sus desventuras ver o oír que hay quien se duela dellas" (I, 7; 175). At the end of Persiles's first speech of *descubrimiento*, which establishes the importance of oratory early in the work, the narrator states that Persiles's captors do not speak Spanish and therefore do not understand his words. However, a Spaniard present among them is moved by the speech and directly responsible for saving Persiles's life. Had Persiles not spoken here, had he not impressed the Spaniard and invoked his sympathy, the Spaniard would not have stopped the captors from murdering the young prince in disguise. Furthermore, the speech indicates Persiles's eloquence in his mastery over the forms of rhetoric; it includes several standard features, including apostrophe, exclamation, epithets, antithesis, consonance, and alliteration, and its style corresponds to its appar-

ent intended listener, here the “high” or “sublime” style in invoking the heavens. *Persiles* also uses an appeal to ethos (“porque soy cristiano”) and includes several appeals to pathos.

The speeches of *descubrimiento*, which are nearly always instigated by *Persiles*, introduce the travelers to a wide variety of fascinating characters in equally numerous and complex situations, and the journey is marked by these encounters. In total, the pattern is repeated nearly forty times throughout the book. Most of these instances of speeches of *descubrimiento* begin *in medias res* and explain the current situation of the speaker and what brought him or her to that point. In several cases, the character is in the scene only long enough to give the speech; nothing is revealed about these characters other than that which they themselves tell in their stories.⁹

Somewhat later in the same chapter comes *Persiles*’s second speech, which is similar to the first both in effectiveness and in sophisticated implementation of rhetorical forms. He is pulled out of a raging sea and addresses these words to the captain of the boat that has rescued him:

Los piadosos cielos te paguen, piadoso señor, el bien que me has hecho, que mal se pueden llevar las tristezas del ánimo si no se esfuerzan los descaecimientos del cuerpo. Mis desdichas me tienen de manera que no te puedo hacer ninguna recompensa deste beneficio, si no es con el agradecimiento; y, si se sufre que uno pobre afligido pueda decir de sí mismo alguna alabanza, yo sé que en ser agradecido ninguno en el mundo me podrá llevar alguna ventaja. (I, 1; 122–23)

Here again are the standard rhetorical devices. Appeals to ethos and pathos such as those here abound in *Persiles y Sigismunda*. Every time the characters encounter a new group of people,

⁹ This is the case, for example, with Manuel de Sousa in I, 11, who remains in the story only long enough to sing a sonnet and to pass sufficient time with the pilgrims to tell his story. Upon concluding, he sighs and then drops dead. Similarly, in I, 20 two gentlemen appear suddenly, briefly tell the story that led to their duel, then fight to their deaths.

Persiles or someone else gives a speech of introduction to establish character and sympathy and therefore secures their safety. Here Persiles praises himself, though with requisite humility, to show that he is worthy of being rescued. Again, he is effective; the captain of this ship remains loyal to Persiles throughout the remainder of the story.

Another persuasive speech by Persiles, one that demonstrates his ability to use a wide variety of rhetorical methods to secure persuasion for good ends, is found in Chapter 7 of Book III where the pilgrims come across the enraged Ortel Banedre. When Persiles asks him what is wrong, Ortel reveals that he is on a murderous path to kill his cheating wife and her lover in Madrid where the two are being held. Ortel claims that no one can stop him. "A Madrid voy...y no me lleguen a los oídos ni ruegos de frailes, ni llantos de personas devotas, ni promesas de bien intencionadas corazones, ni dádivas de ricos, ni imperios ni mandamientos de grandes, ni toda la caterva que suele proceder a semejantes acciones, que mi honra ha de andar sobre su delito como el aceite sobre el agua" (III, 7; 502–03). Nonetheless, Persiles proposes to stop Ortel from carrying out this plan. His speech is a long one, but worth producing almost in its entirety in order to illustrate his gift with *ars dicendi*.

Vos, señor, ciego de vuestra cólera, no echáis de ver que vais a dilatar y a estender vuestra deshonra. Hasta agora no estáis más deshonorado de entre los que os conocen en Talavera, que deben de ser bien pocos, y agora vais a serlo de los que os conocerán en Madrid. Queréis ser como el labrador que crió la víbora serpiente en el seno todo el invierno y, por merced del cielo, cuando llegó el verano, donde ella pudiera aprovecharse de su ponzoña, no la halló, porque se había ido; el cual, sin agradecer esta merced al cielo, quiso ir a buscar y volverla a anidar en su casa y en su seno, no mirando ser suma prudencia no buscar el hombre lo que no le está bien hallar, y a lo que comúnmente se dice que, "al enemigo que huye, la puente de plata." Y el mayor que el hombre tiene suele decirse que es la mujer propia. Pero esto debe de ser en otras religiones

que en la cristiana, entre las cuales los matrimonios son una manera de concierto y conveniencia, como lo es el de alquilar una casa o otra alguna heredad; pero, en la religión católica, el casamiento es sacramento que sólo se desata con la muerte o con otras cosas que son más duras que la misma muerte, las cuales pueden escusar la cohabitación de los dos casos, pero no deshacer el nudo con que ligados fueron. ¿Qué pensáis que os sucederá cuando la justicia os entregue a vuestros enemigos, atados y rendidos, encima de un teatro público, a la vista de infinitas gentes, y a vos, blandiendo el cuchillo encima del cadahalso, amenazando el segarles las gargantas, como si pudiera su sangre limpiar, como vos decís, vuestra honra? ¿Qué os puede suceder, como digo, sino hacer más público vuestro agravio? Porque las venganzas castigan, pero no quitan las culpas; y las que en estos casos se cometen, como la enmienda no proceda de la voluntad, siempre se están en pie, y siempre están vivas en las memorias de las gentes, a lo menos en tanto que vive el agraviado. Así que, señor, volved en vos, y, dando lugar a la misericordia, no corráis tras la justicia. Y no os aconsejo por esto a que perdonéis a vuestra mujer, para volvella a vuestra casa, que a esto no hay ley que os obligue; lo que os aconsejo es que la dejéis, que es el mayor castigo que podréis darle. Vivid lejos della, y viviréis; lo que no haréis estando juntos, porque moriréis continuo.... Y, finalmente, quiero que consideréis que vais a hacer un pecado mortal en quitarles las vidas, que no se ha de cometer por todas las ganancias que la honra del mundo ofrezca (III, 7; 503–05).

One could say that *Persiles* uses a shotgun form of rhetoric here. Since *Persiles* does not know Ortel and, thus, do not know what moves him, he must resort to every persuasive mode he can summon. In fact, we can distinguish various means of persuasion in the speech: fable and popular sayings, logical argumentation, projection of future shame, *hypophora* (raising and answering rhetorical questions), and appeal to reason.

Persiles begins by warning Ortel that by trying to recuperate

his honor he will only stain it further, since killing the couple will spread the news of his cuckoldry as far away as Madrid. If Ortel is proud and acting to preserve his honor, as he says, then Persiles's point will dissuade him from his original plan. Persiles then tries another approach: he tells the fable of the man who raised a snake in his bosom, showing Ortel by example that he himself is culpable in part and should not be pursuing his runaway bride. If Ortel is at all reasonable, upon hearing this fable he will reconsider his wrath and his quest to find and kill his wife. Next, Persiles reminds Ortel that marriage is a sacrament and that he should treat his wife and their relationship accordingly, appealing to Ortel's piety.

Following that, Persiles changes his tone and paints a horrifying picture of Ortel's bloody vengeance scene. If Ortel is sensitive, the image of himself as bloodthirsty will put him off, and if fearful he will cringe at the idea of the irate mob seeking justice for his awful act. Persiles then returns to the theme of public honor—the one motivation Ortel has revealed—and suggests a relatively mild solution that he says will be the hardest punishment of all for the wife: to leave her. If Ortel is cruel, he will take interest in how to give his wife the worst punishment.

But Persiles does not stop there. He pleads for Ortel to be merciful and not exact justice and then ends the speech by appealing to the fact that murder is a mortal sin and must not be committed for any worldly gains. Again, if Ortel is pious, he will be moved by the appeals to religion regarding the sin of murder and concerned about his immortal soul. Finally, if Ortel is acting in a fit of passion and unlike his regular self, Persiles's long speech, his resoluteness, and his concern should help to calm Ortel. Ortel Banedre's reaction indicates the effectiveness of Persiles's words:

Tú, señor, has hablado sobre tus años. Tu discreción se adelanta a tus días y, la madurez de tu ingenio, a tu verde edad; un ángel te ha movido la lengua, con la cual has ablandado mi voluntad, pues ya no es otra la que tengo si no es la de volverme a mi tierra a dar gracias al cielo por la merced que me has hecho. (III, 7; 505)

There is no indication that these words do not honestly express how Ortel is moved by Persiles's words. At least for the time being, Persiles has saved two lives, maybe three. Here he convinces Ortel to mend his ways and redirect his course of action both for his good and for the good of others. This speech is only one of a dozen others in this vein, all of which are as effectively convincing, if shorter. Persiles is nearly always successful at either moving his listeners to some understanding and subsequent course of action or at inspiring hope in a situation that appears to be irreparable or intolerable.

Yet there is another rhetorical activity that defines Persiles: his lies. By keeping the truth secret and telling something credible in its place, Persiles avoids or quells many potential conflicts. His lies are justified because they are aimed at diverting undeserved and unnecessary harm from him and from those he is in charge of.¹⁰

One central deception accounts for most of Persiles's lies; for various reasons, mostly to keep interested suitors away from Sigismunda, no one must know who he and Sigismunda really are. To cover this, Persiles gives them false names, Periandro and Auristela. He also claims to be her brother (I, 2). When the character Arnaldo proposes marriage to Sigismunda, she begins crying, and Persiles speaks to divert suspicion, telling Arnaldo that her silence and tears come from being overwhelmed at encountering Arnaldo in such an unexpected place (I, 15). This is a lie designed to appease Arnaldo temporarily, and it works. Later, however, Arnaldo again asks about Sigismunda, and again Persiles lies. Ultimately, Persiles begs Arnaldo to stop asking questions about the couple "porque no me obligues a que sea mentiroso, inventando quimeras que decirte mentirosas y falsas, por no poder contarte las verdaderas de nuestra historia." Arnaldo responds with a comment showing his tractability to Persiles's urgings: "Dispón de mí... a toda tu voluntad y gusto, haciendo cuenta que yo soy cera y tú el sello que has de imprimir en mí lo que quisieres" (I, 16; 227). Through this deception Persiles has shielded Sigismunda from the undesirable advances of other men, and kept her free from entan-

¹⁰ See Wilson for a discussion of Persiles's "saving" lies, as she characterizes them (29).

gements that may have kept her away from her goal of reaching Rome.

A similar situation occurs later when a prince's servant, hopeful of finding a bride for his master, inquires about Sigismunda (III, 13). Persiles answers—and Cervantes adds that Persiles trembles throughout this deception—saying that her name is Auristela, that she is not interested in any earthly prince but only God, and that he is her brother and knows that pursuing her further will only bring pain to everyone involved.¹¹

Not only does Persiles use lies himself when the situation may demand it, he also counsels others to use lies when it is prudent and for worthy ends. When Persiles needs time to devise a plan of escape from Hibernia, he directs Sigismunda to lie to King Policarpo and his daughter in order to avoid suspicion: “con tu buen juicio entretén al rey y a Sinforosa, que no la ofenderás en fingir palabras que se encaminan a conseguir buenos deseos” (II, 7; 318). Sigismunda manipulates her speeches in this prudent but deceptive manner for the first time in the book after this instruction from Persiles, whose idea rings very much like the following line from *Don Quijote*: “No se pueden ni deben llamar engaños—dijo don Quijote—los que ponen la mira en virtuosos fines” (II, 22; 188). While speech is most valuable as an instrument for revealing the truth of things and lying is typically considered base and cowardly, the “noble lie,” as Socrates calls it in Book III of Plato's *Republic*, is the exception. Persiles's lies are not to cover up selfish motives or to mislead others to their harm, but rather to protect those in his care.

We find a counterpoint to Persiles's prudential use of lies in the character Clodio, whose role is to show the potentially malicious side of truth-telling. Clodio is the literal minded truth-teller, who boldly exposes the weaknesses, shortcomings, and errors of others, and it is in account of this that he has been permanently exiled from his homeland. When the pilgrims meet up with Clodio, he describes the delight he takes in this activity: “tengo un cierto espíritu satírico y maldiciente, una pluma veloz y una

¹¹ El Saffar notes that this lie about the relationship of Persiles and Sigismunda “is essential to the exemplary characters' very survival” (11).

lengua libre; deléitanme las maliciosas agudezas y, por decir una, perderé yo, no sólo un amigo, pero cien mil vidas. No me ataban la lengua prisiones, ni enmudecían destierros, ni atemorizaban amenazas, ni enmendaban castigos" (I, 14; 217). After several characters in the story point out his contemptible and dangerous lack of prudence, Clodio answers that at least no one can accuse him of ever having told a lie and then adds that he is incorrigible: "si quieren que no hable o escriba, córtense la lengua y las manos, y aun entonces pondré la boca en las entrañas de la tierra, y daré voces como pudiere, y tendré esperanza que de allí salgan las cañas del rey Midas" (I, 14; 219).

Critics have discussed Clodio as a satirical poet (Wilson), a slanderer (Forcione), a *maldiciente* representing satire (Casalduero), and a character personifying rumor, such as "fama" in the *Aeneid* (Schevill). Some may regard him as a literal-minded philosopher in as much as he is shown to love the truth of things, albeit a rather low sense of truth, but mainly he is a loose cannon. Neither the "cielos" nor the "santos" as the character Rosamunda says, are safe from his tongue (I, 14; 218). Clodio has no sense of maintaining "noble" lies or at least maintaining the required silence, nor is he concerned with using rhetoric or irony. He is an imprudent truth-teller whose truths no one wants to hear because his efforts are spent exposing the worst of people, that which they do out of weakness. Clodio lacks the ability, or the desire, to tell his truths in careful and beneficial ways and dies halfway through *Persiles y Sigismunda* with a symbolic arrow to the mouth, silencing him forever. After seeing the effects of Clodio's misuse of the truth, we come to appreciate *Persiles's* judicious use of speech.

As counterpoint to the role of speeches in this work, one can look to the group of characters not moved by *Persiles's* speeches. In fact, in the broadest of outlines we can discern two key groups of characters in *Persiles y Sigismunda*: those who move and are moved through reason and *logoi* and those who do not or are not. Cervantes associates the former with peace, temperance, liberality, and compassion and the latter with violence of all forms: murder, war, torture, and rape, not only between larger groups but also within close communities and even families. The fates of the constituents of these two general groups reflect their respective

modi operandi: where there is no way of persuading—that is to say where one isn't disposed to listen, there is only some form of coercion. For example, one of the most violent scenes in *Persiles y Sigismunda* is the description in I, 2–4 of a chaotic and murderous melee that occurs on an island of rapacious pirates who dedicate their days to human sacrifice. When Bradamiro, a just man, speaks out to save the lives of Persiles and Sigismunda, the furious and tyrannical chief draws an arrow and shoots it through Bradamiro's mouth "quitándole el movimiento de la lengua y sacándole el alma" (I, 4; 146). The chief's violent act begets another. A barbarian seeking vengeance immediately lunges at the chief and drives a dagger through his chest, killing him instantly. This second murder stirs the passions of many, and the deaths multiply. Before long, the barbarians are all involved in a frenzied battle, clawing at each other's flesh without any regard for family or friends in an awful scene of death, darkness, and flames. The barbarians of this island are "moved" only in the most brute ways and to the most brute ends, through violence to violence. When a mind is not disposed to hear reason, no amount of speeches will genuinely move it in any way; only force works. This episode illustrates the utter breakdown of the rational and a situation where not even a sword will accomplish anything. Our hero would not enter this fray because these are not his arms, nor is there anything to be achieved by adding one more sword.

Another island with a violent practice is the homeland of the character Transila, which practices *ius primae noctis*. Transila flees her village on her wedding night in order to avoid this ritual deflowering, and the eloquence of the speech she delivers to the crowd gathered at her wedding party equals that of Persiles:

Haceos adelante vosotros, aquellos cuyas deshonestas y bárbaras costumbres van contra las que guarda cualquier bien ordenada república. Vosotros, digo, más lascivos que religiosos, que, con apariencia y sombra de ceremonias vanas, queréis cultivar los ajenos campos sin licencia de su legítimos dueños. Veisme aquí, gente mal perdida y peor aconsejada; venid, venid, que la razón, puesta en la punta desta lanza, defenderá mi partido y quitará las fuerzas a

vuestros malos pensamientos, tan enemigos de la honestidad y de la limpieza. (I, 13; 209–10)

Breaking the violent practice requires someone capable of exposing this custom for what it is and of persuading others to end it. Transila, a woman armed with a sharp wit, a sharp tongue, and a sharp spear, escapes from becoming the community's latest sexual scapegoat, as Wilson frames it (184). In this community, only the threat of the spear saves her.

It is a fascinating detail of this book that Transila's deeds are glorified while those of her father Mauricio are shown to be abstract and ineffectual. Mauricio, by far the harshest critic of Persiles's speeches, is a Renaissance scientist, and more specifically a "buen positivista" (Baena 147). While he may be disposed to reason, his reasons are only those of a narrow scientific rationalism. He is obtuse to appeals to reasons that do not fit in his positivist methodological framework. Thus, it is not surprising that Mauricio shows himself to be generally uninterested in Persiles's speeches and that he often censures Persiles for not adhering to strict poetic precepts, regarding his speeches from a literalist's formalistic standpoint that does not take into account their meaning. For example, when Persiles's eyes fix on the starry sky as he begins to tell an episode from his personal adventures, Mauricio comments to his daughter:

Apostaré...que se pone agora Periandro a describirnos toda la celeste esfera, como si nos importase mucho a lo que va contando el declararnos los movimientos del cielo. Yo, por mí, deseando estoy que acabe, porque el deseo que tengo de salir de esta tierra no da lugar a que me entretenga ni ocupe en saber cuáles son fijas o cuáles erráticas estrellas; cuanto más, que yo sé de sus movimientos más de lo que él me puede decir. (II, 14; 375–76)

For Mauricio, the starry sky to which Persiles alludes is associated uniquely with astrology, of which Mauricio is a scientific expert. The figurative language and functions of oratory elude Mauricio, and his reactions, apart from being comical, serve to illustrate

Mauricio's often anti-rhetorical attitude, which is attached to his role as the literal-minded scientist. Mauricio is incapable of persuading his townsmen not to deflower his daughter on her wedding night, justifying his inability to block the act by arguing that custom is another kind of human nature and therefore immutable: "la costumbre es otra naturaleza, y el mudarla se siente como la muerte" (II, 12; 208–09). Mauricio gives Cervantes an opportunity to touch on contemporary literary matters, as Forcione has demonstrated, but also to show how an anti-rhetorical attitude can affect life in community. Mauricio's impatience with speeches shows his lack of sensibility to the political arena and the necessary functions and concomitant demands of rhetoric in that arena. It is significant that Mauricio can do very little to help the group during the journey, a fact that is not incidental in a book about the role of speeches in the world. Mauricio the scientist knows all about the movement of the stars and planets, but he knows nothing about what moves men and women.

Having described the general contours of Cervantes' attention to speech in *Persiles y Sigismunda*, Persiles's role within this scheme, and the positions of his detractors and what they represent, I would like to turn now to Persiles's central story, which extends over the ten middle chapters of the work. This personal story is a long narration that provides the occasion for a discussion on aesthetic precepts.¹² It is also a politically prudent tactic, as Forcione notes (241). As usual with his lengthy speeches, Persiles has his eye on the welfare of the group. We saw above how some of his most rhetorically loaded speeches are rooted in self-defense, on the one hand, or defense of someone else or his group, on the other. In the ten chapters encompassed by his long speech, the group of pilgrims is experiencing its most ominous stretch of bad luck. The group is in great danger and has no plan of action. It

¹² There are several comments made by the characters, the narrator, and Persiles himself that attest to this and also to a critical awareness about this central speech. Forcione discusses Persiles as a hero-poet and writes that his long narration "is Cervantes' most significant use of the dramatic situation of the narrating author vs. the critical audience to examine the literary problems which preoccupied him throughout his career as a creative artist" (187). Forcione shows us how we may regard Persiles's long speech as a defense of imaginative literature.

would appear to some characters (and readers) neither the place nor the time for a long, anecdotal, and entertaining story. Persiles's judgment, however, is that the situation requires him to tell in a dilatory fashion the series of events that brought him to this point. If we are charitable to Persiles's rhetorical strategies and look for prudential functions behind this long story, we discover several.

Persiles begins to tell the story in Chapter 10 of Book II when the pilgrims are being held on an island whose king is concocting plans to marry Sigismunda. Persiles and Sigismunda are at their weakest personal moments during this most difficult part of the journey. Sigismunda falls dangerously ill from jealousy, the king pursues her, the king's daughter pursues Persiles, and Persiles suffers for Sigismunda and her precarious position. Witchcraft is used on one of the pilgrims, Clodio is killed, and dangerous plots are being formed. In sum, the travelers are vulnerable, and their defenses are weak. They are at the mercy of many people whose desires and means of satisfying them are decidedly at odds with those of the traveling group.

It is precisely at this moment that Persiles decides to catch everyone up with the series of events that have occurred to him since the book began. He gives speeches within stories within dreams within stories such that the listeners often "lose their place" and forget their immediate danger. Much like the maiden in *1,001 Arabian Nights*, he distracts everyone with his tales. Looked at as a rhetorical strategy from a clever leader, we may in part regard this long speech and its stories as something of a prudential move. It keeps everyone occupied, diverts the attention from other problems, keeps the imagination from straying down treacherous paths, and gives Sigismunda time to recuperate. The long tales, many of which feature Persiles's valor and skills, also allow Persiles to regain some power as the leader of the pilgrims through establishing ethos. This is important because Persiles has not been able to act in their favor and himself is psychologically very weak at this point. In sum, he is delivering a rallying story. The restorative power of his words animates the group and unites the listeners who—at this point in the story—are at cross-purposes among themselves. Persiles is planning an escape, but needs to keep his group together and recuperate strength before putting

the plan into action. Thus, one of the functions of Persiles's mini-epic is like that of all epideictic rhetoric, which is, as George Kennedy writes, "to increase social bonding and the solidarity of the cultural group" (22).

Here we see Persiles the future king in the final *trabajos* before he ascends the throne and assumes his political role. Disguised as a wandering Everyman—as El Saffar interprets his assumed name Periandro—he is exposed to hardships from which royalty commonly is protected. Through these *trabajos*, however, Persiles gains invaluable experience for his future role as king of a country with a long history of war. Along this journey he has no riches, no troops, no titles, and as such no authority or power other than that which he secures by his own means: his only available methods for protecting his group are his wits and his words. The more danger the group of pilgrims is in, the more Persiles speaks. He talks the least after he has finally established the group safely in Rome, uttering only the "sí" sealing his marriage vows to Sigismunda.

Persiles is nothing if not an eloquent orator.¹³ He shows nearly magical skill in moving an audience and wins the hearts and the respect of his interlocutors amenable to reason. He stays violent murders and secures political stability and the safety of his group of traveling pilgrims. He is patient in waiting out crucial moments and helps distract others from precipitous and dangerous moves. A truly skilled orator such as Persiles, who is a king in the making, always aims at establishing civility among those in his community. He is less concerned with entertaining or impressing his charges with his knowledge than he is with safeguarding their journey. In this regard, Persiles may be likened to Aeneas.

Several critics, such as Schevill,¹⁴ Forcione (187–211), O'Neill (59), and Romero (48) have associated *Persiles y Sigismunda* with Virgil's *Aeneid*, an oratorical masterpiece whose speeches have

¹³ See Blecua for further examples of Persiles's eloquence.

¹⁴ In Schevill's monograph about the wide influence of the *Aeneid* on *Persiles y Sigismunda*, he does not mention the common element of speeches beyond this observation: "While Periandro is on the island he is asked to tell the history of his experiences and wanderings, which he does to a listening audience just as does Aeneas (*Aeneid*, bks. II and III); Sinforosa especially hangs on his lips during his narrative" (502–03).

served as models of rhetoric for millennia and whose author is esteemed equally as heroic poet and orator. Highet begins his study of the speeches of the *Aeneid* by alluding to their importance in a passage that could very nearly describe Cervantes' craft in *Persiles y Sigismunda*: "In the *Aeneid*, the speeches are one of the most important elements of Vergil's art. Through them he shows us the inmost hearts of his characters; recalls the past and forecasts the future; and expresses conflicts almost as violent as a duel in armor" (3).

Furthermore, there are several points of similarity between *Persiles* and Aeneas. Both are the principal speakers in their respective works and both are introduced to us with speeches of despair. Both deliver one particularly long and central speech. In the epic tradition, both *Persiles y Sigismunda* and the *Aeneid* begin *in medias res*, providing the occasion for many speeches with stories recounting the events that occurred prior to the book's beginning, such as the personal story speeches of both *Persiles* and Aeneas. Both give encouraging speeches to their fellow travelers, and both dissimulate with the end of protecting companions. They pray often,¹⁵ have several monologues of pathos, and speak less as the story nears its conclusion. Furthermore, like those of Aeneas, *Persiles*'s speeches vary in style, length, model followed, and frequency, according to circumstances. Highet's characterization of Aeneas and what he accomplishes through his speeches in many ways describes *Persiles*: "Aeneas is performing the first duty of a commander: strengthening his men with confidence in their purpose, encouraging them by reminding them of their past exploits, and uniting them in loyalty to himself. Never again do we see him in such hopeless agony as in his first speech; yet he is still subject to fits of gloom until he reaches Italy" (30).

Comparing *Persiles* to Aeneas shows how the former may be regarded as a leader (the "capitán valeroso") closely associated with rhetoric. He is also the perfect picture of a prince-orator, constantly exercising persuasion and prudence. His eloquence, as is Aeneas's, is measured by its effectiveness. There are differences

¹⁵ Weiger traces the praying gestures of *Persiles y Sigismunda* to the same tradition as Vergil's *Aeneid* (285–88).

between the two: Persiles's effusiveness versus Aeneas's general restraint, for example, but the truly fundamental difference is that Persiles is not associated with violence. Aeneas's most animated speeches are designed to rouse his men to battle, and he himself is shown to spill much blood. This is not the case with Persiles, whose most rousing speeches persuade others to virtuous activities and who is never associated directly with violence.¹⁶ Persiles's rousing speeches, unlike those of Aeneas and other chivalric heroes, do not rally to war, but rather thwart violence and appeal to civility. In his heroic work, Cervantes chooses not to glorify the bloody battleground. "Arma virumque cano," I sing of a man and arms, are the opening words of Virgil's *Aeneid* and express the traditional formula for heroic poetry, which poeticizes the heroics of war and also praises and glorifies the hero's battleworthiness. Cervantes might have begun his *Persiles y Sigismunda* "Verba virumque cano," I sing of a man and words.

Spain's Golden Age of literature, Don Abbot writes, coincided with a golden age of rhetoric: hundreds of treatises on rhetoric were produced in Spain during this period, and rhetoric was a key component of the educational curriculum (104). Thus, it was natural for Cervantes to have known the forms and uses of rhetoric well, but it was his genius that turned words into the only arms of a hero.

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¹⁶ There is one exception. In III, 1 Persiles finds reason to take up arms against Turkish pirates on the attack: "Muchas veces, y quizá algunas no en vano, dispararon Antonio y Periandro las escopetas." Persiles's action here testifies to the fact that although persuasion is better than coercion in looking out for the human good, it is not always possible. A fundamental condition for persuasion is that the interlocutors be disposed towards the speeches. Here, clearly, the pirates are not amenable to persuasion.

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