

Cipión, Berganza, and the Aesopic Tradition

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When near the end of “El casamiento engañoso” Campuzano tells his friend, the licentiate Peralta, that while he was in the hospital he overheard two dogs speaking to each other, Peralta reacts with an outburst of frank incredulity: “¡Cuerpo de mí!—replicó el Licenciado—. ¡Si se nos ha vuelto el tiempo de Maricastaña, cuando hablaban las calabazas, o el de Isopo, cuando departía el gallo con la zorra y unos animales con otros!” (2: 294).¹ Despite his friend’s disbelief, Campuzano insists that the dogs were in fact talking, and that he was not dreaming what he heard. He then gives his friend a notebook containing a near word-for-word transcription of the dogs’ conversation, and the contents of the notebook become the “Coloquio de los perros,” the story framed by the “Casamiento engañoso.”

Peralta’s mention of Aesop²—whose name will come up

¹ All citations from the “Casamiento engañoso” and the “Coloquio de los perros” are from Harry Sieber’s edition of the *Novelas ejemplares*.

² Little is known of the “Maricastaña” mentioned by Peralta along with Aesop. Amezúa can say only that the name was a signifier of the remote past in which, among other things, animals had the power of speech (417–18 n. 51).

again later, this time mentioned by the dog Berganza in the “Coloquio” itself—and the fact that the interlocutors of the “Coloquio” are two talking dogs, have led readers of the novella to speak of it in terms of the work of the ancient Greek author of animal fables. Such comparisons between the “Coloquio” and Aesop have not gone very far, however. Commentators who cite Aesopic fables as a source of the “Coloquio” do it in one of two ways: either they are content to mention Aesopic fables as one of many sources of the novella, and leave it more or less at that, or they mention the Aesopic tradition only to dismiss it as a serious influence on Cervantes in his creation of the dogs Cipión and Berganza. While some of the discussions in the former category have been suggestive, they have not gone far enough in bringing out the important links that exist between the Aesopic fable—the most traditional of genres—and Cervantes’ experimental narrative in the form of dialogue.

The first task of this study will be to demonstrate a greater influence of the Aesopic tradition on the “Coloquio” than has been observed hitherto: the Aesopic corpus does more than provide a possible model for the talking dogs Cipión and Berganza. To begin with, critics have ignored the possible influence of the so-called *Life of Aesop* on the adventures of Cervantes’ dog characters. The *Life of Aesop*, a purported biography of the fabulist, presents readers with an Aesop who, beginning life as a mute slave, was one day magically given the gift of speech, and then proceeded to serve several masters as a servant, philosophical interlocutor, and all-around problem-solver. This *Life*, used as an introduction to a collection of the fables that was first translated into Castilian in the late fifteenth century, became highly popular in Spain. Modern critics have pointed to the *Life*’s picaresque nature and possible influence on the Spanish picaresque genre as a whole, but have not gone as far as to compare it explicitly to the “Coloquio.” While it is impossible to prove without doubt that Cervantes was influenced by the *Life of Aesop* in composing the “Coloquio,” I hope to show that it is highly useful to read the two texts side by side, for the “Coloquio” re-stages, in a highly inter-

esting way, the *Life's* dismantling of the hierarchy between philosophy and popular literature, between lofty theoretical speculation and base corporeal adventures.

In addition to the possible influence of the *Life of Aesop* on the "Coloquio," there is also the question of Aesop's fables themselves and their presence in Cervantes' novella. Here again the comparisons are fruitful. We will see that one of the more interesting themes of Aesopic fables is the question of identity—what is "real" about both self and other, and how to guard against possible deception. What the Aesopic fable promises is a way to learn the "true" identity of one's surroundings by means of, paradoxically, a fiction. The "Coloquio" presents an interesting variation on the same paradox: an utterly fantastic story is claimed by its intradiagetic author to be true, and the story presents itself as exemplary. While I do not claim that a comparison to Aesopic fables alone can give us a comprehensive interpretation of the "Coloquio" and its frame, "El casamiento enga3oso," I will demonstrate that the themes of the Aesopic tradition appear in the "Coloquio," that they had their possible source in Aesopic fables, and that recognition of this leads to a more profitable reading of Cervantes' two novellas.

When commentators discuss the possible sources and models of the "Coloquio," the works most often discussed are stories of metamorphosis, such as Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* or Lucian's *The Cock*. Aesopic fables are usually not mentioned as possible sources. When they are, they are usually dismissed as a model because the dialogue of Cipi3n and Berganza takes place in an otherwise "realistic" world, not a fantastic world in which animals can talk as a matter of course.³

³ Murillo, for example, argues that the dogs' meditation on their own possibility of discourse, in a world that is otherwise no different than the world that Campuzano and Peralta inhabit, distinguishes the "Coloquio" both from Aesopic fables and from other possible classical models. The "Coloquio" "is distinguishable from other fantasies in which animals speak, Aesop's *Fables*, *The Golden Ass*, and the Lucianesque dialogues, as well as the literature of dreams and flights of

The first commentator to compare the "Coloquio de los perros" to Aesop's fables was Agustín de Amezúa y Mayo, in his edition of the two novellas. After downplaying earlier assertions of the importance of Apuleius' *Golden Ass* and Lucian's dialogues as sources, Amezúa notes that there was a closer model at hand for Cervantes, in the form of Aesop's fables (92): "Sin dar al 'Coloquio,' literariamente, todo el valor y carácter de un apólogo, ya que otro es su linaje, al menos, en lo que toca a su forma y a la encarnación canina de sus protagonistas, Cervantes no tuvo necesidad de imitar a Apuleyo ni a Luciano para idear el sabroso diálogo entre Berganza y su fiel camarada; en Esopo y sus fábulas tenía ejemplar bastante en que inspirarse; tanto más, cuando él mismo, en 'El casamiento engañoso,' nos da testimonio de haberlo leído, y apuntó veladamente que a semejanza suya se escribía" (93). Amezúa goes on to cite López Pinciano's definition of an "apólogo"—"poema común, el cual debajo de narración fabulosa enseña una pura verdad, como se ve en las fábulas de Esopo"—as an "excelente y justísimo retrato del 'Coloquio'" (110–11).

Frank Pierce, in an article entitled "Cervantes' Animal Fable," also downplayed the influence of Apuleius and Lucius on the "Coloquio," in favor of seeing it in terms of an animal fable. For Pierce, Cervantes' use of the animal fable model gives the "Coloquio" more credibility as a story by placing it in the fantasy world of a genre in which animals talk as a matter of course. Using the animal fable as a source "allows Cervantes to enter upon his dialogue with more imaginative freedom and to introduce the moralistic comment at an earlier stage, because of the very independence of his two creatures from the world they discuss and criticize" (106).⁴ Pierce does not go very far beyond this, however, in

the seventeenth century. The colloquy is as fantastical as any one of these works, but only because its unrealness is everywhere fixed to a rational plan and a rational criticism of the imaginary event ('milagro,' 'portento')" (179). See also Riley, "Antecedents" 167.

⁴ Compare this, however, to the views of Riley and Murillo (references in the preceding note). They emphasize the realistic nature of the world of the

connecting the "Coloquio" to the Aesopic tradition.

Several commentators have devoted attention to the second mention of Aesop in the intertwined novellas. The mention comes as Berganza is relating to Cipi3n his service to a rich merchant and his family. One day the merchant unties Berganza, in return for the joy exhibited by the dog on his master's return. Once untied, Berganza follows the example of an Aesopic fable in showing his thanks in a way appropriate to his canine condition: "Como me vi suelto corr3 a 3l, rodeele todo, sin osar llegarle con las manos, acord3ndome de la f3bula de Isopo, cuando aquel asno, tan asno que quiso hacer a su se3or las mismas caricias que le hac3a una perrilla regalada suya, que le granjearon ser molido a palos. Pareci3me que en esta f3bula se nos dio a entender que las gracias y donaires de algunos no est3n bien en otros; apode el truh3n, juegue de manos y voltee el histri3n, rebuzne el p3caro, imite el canto de los p3jaros y los diversos gestos y acciones de los animales y los hombres el hombre bajo que se hubiere dado a ello, y no lo quiera hacer el hombre principal, a quien ninguna habilidad d3stas le puede dar cr3dito ni nombre honroso" (2: 313). Monique Joly has argued that Cervantes adapted this fable via Castiglione's *Courtier*, where it is used to illustrate correct relations between princes and courtiers; she further argues that Cervantes' transformation of the fable from one of prince-courtier relations to that of master-servant is relevant to the "Coloquio"'s milieu. Whether or not the fable came to Cervantes via Castiglione, Joly does not compare the "Coloquio" to the genre of Aesopic fables as a whole.⁵

"Coloquio" outside of the dogs' ability to converse.

⁵ Ruth El Saffar, in discussing the episode of Ca3nizares, seems to confuse the dogs of the "Coloquio" with the men of the "Casamiento enga3oso" as the ones who mention Aesop by name: "The witch invites us to ask not whether dogs can behave like men, but rather, whether men, under the influence of the devil, can behave like dogs. She converts the story from an idle animal fable to one of deep moral dimensions. Through her we move from Aesop, whom the dogs cited in their opening speculation about their gift of speech, to Apuleius, to whose *Golden Ass* the witch refers" (63). Berganza's mention of Aesop comes long after their opening speculations about their ability to speak, so perhaps El Saffar is thinking

Several things are missing from these analyses. In the first place, as I will argue below, these commentators fail to investigate fully some important issues that Aesopic fables raise insistently, and that the "Coloquio" (as well as, in some cases, the "Casamiento") takes as central themes. These are the issues of identity, the difference between example and those who imitate it, and the place of didactic literature in lived experience. And what is completely missing from these earlier discussions is any mention of the fictional *Life of Aesop* as a part of the Aesopic tradition that may have influenced Cervantes. Both must be taken into account, since the *Life of Aesop* and the fables attributed to him circulated together in the Renaissance, as will be discussed below. It is to the influence of the *Life* that I will turn first.

A summary of the *Life of Aesop* will serve to suggest the connections it has to the Spanish picaresque novel. The *Life* purports to be a biography of Aesop which scholars date to the first century A.D., long after the animal fables that bear Aesop's name were set down and circulated.⁶ The *Life* begins the narration with Aesop's birth in Phrygia. According to the *Life*, Aesop is born deformed, "un mozo diforme y feo de cara y cuerpo, más que ninguno que se hallase en aquel tiempo."⁷ He also has a stutter. He is soon captured and sold into slavery, where, despite his speech impediment, he stands out for his astuteness. After Aesop shows hospitality to a traveling priest, the priest prays that Aesop be given the gift of clear speech, and the next day Aesop

of Peralta's reference to the fabulist near the end of the "Casamiento."

⁶ The *Life of Aesop* has survived in two main Greek versions, called *Vita W* and *Vita G*. *Vita W* was used as the basis for the medieval vernacular translations, while *Vita G*, older and more complete, was discovered later. Both versions are printed by Perry (35–107). There is a modern English translation of the *Life* by Lloyd W. Daly, and a modern Spanish one by P. Bádenas de la Peña and J. López Facal.

⁷ My quotations from the Spanish *Vida de Esopo* are taken from a microfilm copy of *La vida y fábulas del clarísimo y sabio fabulador Ysopo*, Antwerp, 1541? (hereafter *Vida*). I have modernized spelling. The above quotation is from *Vida* fol. 4r.

awakens with the ability to speak clearly and eloquently.

Aesop's new ability arouses the ire of the majordomo, who convinces Aesop's master to sell him to another master. At Ephesus Aesop is purchased by the philosopher Xanthus. During Aesop's life with Xanthus, the future fabulist demonstrates his intelligence again and again by besting Xanthus and his disciples in solving riddles or problems. At times Aesop exasperates both Xanthus and the philosopher's wife by taking their orders either too literally or too figuratively. Later, Aesop wins his liberty by interpreting an omen for the residents of Samos; he then goes on to serve as counselor to the kings of Babylon and Egypt. When he travels to Delphi, he is accused of stealing sacred objects from the oracle of Apollo. Aesop attempts to convince his accusers not to execute him by telling them fables, but the attempt fails and he is thrown from a cliff.

Francisco R. Adrados has pointed to the parallels between the *Life of Aesop* and the Spanish picaresque novel, with special reference to the anonymous *Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*.⁸ Indeed, for Adrados the *Life* provides the most exact model for the picaresque genre, surpassing in importance the possible influence of saints' lives or the Byzantine novel ("*Vida*" 349). In both the *Life* and the picaresque genre, the themes are very similar: servitude to a master, the search for food, travel, a description of society from a critical perspective ("*Vida*" 354). At times the servant gets the upper hand on his master before again becoming the victim of adverse fortune. Though Adrados does well to elucidate these parallels, the body of his study ("*Vida*" 354–57) focuses on possible influences of the *Life* on *Lazarillo* only.

⁸ Adrados' article is an expansion of a comment by Elvira Gangutia comparing Aesop's *Life* to the Spanish picaresque novel: "Las *Vidas de Esopo*...nos muestran una obra que debió de tener una influencia gigantesca a través de la Edad Media hasta la novela cervantina y picaresca. Pues ¿qué es Esopo, como los *Asnos de Luciano y Apuleyo*, sino un criado de muchos amos, al igual del *Lazarillo y el Buscón*?" (173). Holzberg ("Lesser-Known 'Picaresque' Novel" 1–2; "Novel-like Works" 638) also notes the resemblance of the *Life of Aesop* and its possible influence on *Lazarillo*, though without citing Adrados or Gangutia.

By the time *Lazarillo* appeared, the *Life of Aesop* had already been a part of the vernacular tradition of the Latin West for several decades. A Greek text of the *Life of Aesop* affixed to a collection of fables bearing Aesop's name was taken to Italy by a Byzantine ambassador in 1327. Around the middle of the fifteenth century this text was translated into Latin, an edition that in turn led to vernacular translations. A Spanish edition was published in three incunabular editions beginning in 1488,⁹ and went on to become one of the most popular books of the Renaissance and after.¹⁰ The Spanish Aesop, according to Theodore S. Beardsley, "became the number one bestseller for two centuries" (27).

That Cervantes was familiar with the Aesopic tradition is also made clear by the references he makes to it in *Don Quijote*. In *Don Quijote* I, 25 Sancho, upset at the vow of silence imposed on him by his master, wishes to be able to talk to his mule like in the time of Aesop: "si ya quisiera la suerte que los animales hablasen, como hablaban en tiempo de Guisopete, fuera menos mal, porque departiera yo con mi jumento lo que me viniera en gana y con esto pasara mi mala ventura" (I, 25; 271).¹¹ Don Quijote makes reference to specific Aesopic fables in counseling Sancho

⁹ The first incunable of the *Vida de Esopo* (aside from an incomplete version published in Zaragoza in 1482) was published in Toulouse, and has been edited by Victoria A. Burrus and Harriet Goldberg as *Esopete ystoriado* [Toulouse 1488]. The second was published in Zaragoza in 1489, and was edited in facsimile by Emilio Cotarelo y Mori (of which there is an English translation by John E. Keller and L. Clark Keating: *Aesop's Fables, with a Life of Aesop*). A third was published in Burgos in 1496. For a description of the incunables, see Burrus and Goldberg in *Esopete ystoriado* xiii–xiv, and for a list of Spanish editions of Aesop up until Cervantes' time, see Cotarelo y Mori's introduction to the *Fábulas de Esopo*, xx–xxvi.

¹⁰ For a more detailed history of the *Life's* transmission from Greece to Spain, see Adrados, "Vida" 352–54.

¹¹ For an explanation of Sancho's use of the form "Guisopete" see McGrady, "Notes on *Guisopete*." Quotations from *Don Quijote* come from Francisco Rico's edition. Compare Sancho's remark to the outburst of Peralta reproduced above: "¡Se nos ha vuelto el tiempo de...Isopo, cuando departía el gallo con la zorra y unos animales con otros!"

on how to govern the 3nsula Barataria. First he tells Sancho not to become puffed up and self-important “como la rana que quiso igualarse con el buey” (II, 42; 970).¹² Then in a letter to Sancho he tells the squire to enforce the laws he passes so that he won’t become “como la viga, rey de las ranas, que al principio las espant3, y con el tiempo la menospreciaron y se subieron sobre ella” (II, 51; 1049).¹³ Some of the descriptions of Rocinante and Sancho’s mule may also be inspired by the Aesopic tradition.¹⁴

We can begin our examination of the *Life of Aesop’s* possible presence in the “Coloquio” by noting that they share the major themes that Adrados saw in common between the *Life* and the *Lazarillo*: the theme of serving a master, and the adventures that elicit a critical description of society. The emphasis on the details of everyday life—servants, household duties, food—is pervasive in both texts.

Also, the *Life* provides a possible source for the dogs’ miraculous ability to talk. The dogs don’t know who to thank for their new ability, if not the heavens: in the opening speech of the “Coloquio,” Cipi3n bids Berganza to retire to a pair of mats on the floor “donde podremos gozar sin ser sentidos desta no vista merced que el cielo en un mismo punto a los dos nos ha hecho” (2: 299).¹⁵ The Aesop of the *Life* also receives the gift of speech from the heavens. The priest to whom Aesop shows hospitality prays that the gods grant the servant a boon. In response to the priest’s prayers, “la diosa de la piedad y caridad... apareci3 a Ysopo, y di3le en gracia que pudiese hablar distintamente y sin ning3n impedimento todos los lenguajes de las gentes, y que enten-

¹² The corresponding fable appears in the *Vida* as “De la rana y del buey” (49^v).

¹³ See “De J3piter y de las ranas” in *Vida* 41^v.

¹⁴ For example, Aesop may be a source of the “sospiros” of Sancho’s donkey, which the squire takes to be a good omen in *Don Quijote* II, 8 (McGrady, “Sospiros”).

¹⁵ See also Cipi3n’s speech a little later on: “sea lo que fuere, nosotros hablamos, sea portentoso o no; que lo que el cielo tiene ordenado que suceda, no hay diligencia ni sabidur3a humana que lo pueda prevenir” (2: 301).

diese los cantares de las aves, y las señales de todas las animalias, y que dende adelante fuese inventor y recitador de muchas y diversas fábulas." Aesop, like the dogs in the "Coloquio," is suitably thankful: "no puedo pensar de dónde tan súbito el tal conocimiento haya recibido. Pienso que por la piedad, caridad y amor de que muchas veces he usado contra los huéspedes me han hecho esta gracia los dioses." Aesop rounds off his expression of gratitude with a sententious moral not unlike those of Aesopic fables themselves, and not unlike the dogs' conversations in the "Coloquio": "quien cosas derechas hace buenas esperanzas recibe en el corazón siempre" (*Vida* 6').

Where the "Coloquio" differs from the *Life* is in the fact that the dogs are unable to instruct their masters because of their inability to speak. In fact, the one time when Berganza tries to instruct his superiors—he attempts to tell the Corregidor of Valladolid how to keep women from falling into prostitution—he can only bark, and he is thrown out of the house for his pains (2: 357–58).

Significantly, however, the dogs *do* instruct—they instruct the readers when they finally receive the gift of speech, and the dogs' use of language in commenting on Berganza's adventures is another element that connects the "Coloquio" thematically to the *Life of Aesop*. Critics have long noted the problematic mix of picaresque adventures and philosophical reflection in Cipión and Berganza's dialogue. The *Life of Aesop* also features philosophy interacting with the witticisms, moralizing, and the trickery of a servant. After being sold to the philosopher Xanthus, Aesop repeatedly gets the better of his master and even helps him out of several jams, as when Xanthus fails to interpret a portent for the Samians. This kind of interaction between Aesop—or at least the fable tradition ascribed to him—and classical philosophy is not new. Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*, in prison preparing for his execution, relates to his disciples that he had a dream instructing him to "make music and work at it." At first believing that the dream was ordering him to continue practicing philosophy—"because philosophy was the greatest kind of music and I was

working at that”—Socrates later decided to hedge his bets by putting a story into verse in case that is what the dream really meant by “making music.” And “since I was not a maker of myths,” Socrates continues, “I took the myths of Aesop, which I had at hand and knew, and turned into verse the first I came upon” (*Phaedo* 60e–61b). Annabel Patterson has pointed to the paradoxical nature of this image: “preparing to separate his own philosophical soul from the body, and to present that separation as a manumission from slavery to the body, [Socrates] has nevertheless used as an instrument of that preparation the extremely corporeal and anti-idealistic fables of Aesop, the Phrygian slave” (7; emphasis Patterson’s). The use of Aesop as handmaiden to philosophy did not last long, however. “In the long run,” writes Patterson, “the idealist, Platonic tradition triumphed, or, rather, chose to suppress that aspect of its own dialectic,” and Aesop was placed in opposition to Plato (7).¹⁶ But the interaction reappears in the *Life of Aesop*, and the results for the presumed superiority of the philosophical tradition are problematic to say the least. According to Thomas Keenan, “what the *Life of Aesop* undoes most compellingly is any stability that might ground the hierarchal subordination of literature to philosophy as master to slave...and vice versa” (54; ellipsis in the original).¹⁷

In the “Coloquio” there is a similar clash between “filosofar” and “murmurar,” and the results are similarly ambiguous. Berganza at one point asks permission to “filosofar un poco” and say everything that he remembers about the incident he is relating, “porque si dejase de decir las cosas que en este instante me han venido a la memoria de aquellas que entonces me ocurrieron, me parece que no ser3a mi historia cabal ni de fruto alguno.” But

¹⁶ It is significant perhaps that the Neo-Platonic philosopher Macrobius, in a discussion of what fictions are appropriate to include in philosophical treatises such as those of Plato, says that Aesopic fables should not be included because, while they are designed to instruct the reader in virtue, “both [their] setting and plot are fictitious” (*Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* II.9–11).

¹⁷ In a painting that seems heavily influenced by the *Life*, Vel3quez also depicted Aesop as a philosopher. For a discussion, see Rico 69–97.

Cipión warns him that what he is saying may be “murmuración” masquerading under the guise of philosophizing: “no tiene la murmuración mejor velo para paliar y encubrir su maldad disoluta que darse a entender el murmurador que todo cuanto dice son sentencias de filósofos y que el decir mal es reprehensión y el descubrir los defetos ajenos buen celo.... Y debajo de saber esto, filosofea ahora cuanto quisieres” (2: 318).

Berganza persists, however, and after delivering an indictment of people who exaggerate their knowledge of Latin to impress others, Cipión responds to Berganza’s version of philosophy with his noted comparison of “murmuradores” to Cynics: “¿Al murmurar llamas filosofar? ¡Así va ello! Canoniza, Berganza, a la maldita plaga de la murmuración, y dale el nombre que quisieres, que ella dará a nosotros el de cínicos, que quiere decir perros murmuradores” (2: 319). In an article on Cervantes and Cynic philosophy, E. C. Riley generally praises the dogs’ caustic criticism of society as a proper response to the degradations and depredations revealed by Berganza’s story. But at the same time, Riley adopts Cipión’s position in seeing the “murmuración” of the dogs’ Cynicism as being somehow separate from philosophy (“Cervantes and the Cynics” 196). But the *Life of Aesop* reveals that philosophy—represented by Xanthus—and criticism of people and society—represented by Xanthus’ slave Aesop—are inseparable. Similarly, in the “Coloquio,” while the dialogue form of the novella evokes Plato’s dialogues and their Renaissance imitators,¹⁸ the text’s major themes—indictment of Spanish society and the exhortation to change—come more from the dogs’ direct criticism of what they have experienced than from their philosophizing.

The Cynicism of the “Coloquio” is another element which connects it to the *Life of Aesop* and the fables attributed to him. In fact, both the *Life* and the corpus of Aesopic fables were shaped by Cynic influence in antiquity. As for the *Life of Aesop*, it shares

¹⁸ See the articles by Murillo and Hart for the “Coloquio”’s relationship to the Classical and Renaissance dialogue.

several themes and even individual details with the life of Diogenes of Sinope, the founder of Cynic philosophy. For example, both Aesop and Diogenes were sold as slaves but went on to guide their masters, and the larger theme of the challenge to the prevailing mores of society is also a major feature of both biographies.¹⁹ As for the fables attributed to Aesop, they were adopted by the Cynics for their own didactic purposes. As caustic opponents of the status quo, the Cynics had made it a practice to appropriate existing literary genres to their own ends. They did the same with the Aesopic fable since it was, in Adrados' words, "a genre midway between the satirical and didactic, a genre of 'opposition' and enlightenment" (*History* 1: 543).²⁰

Besides the *Life of Aesop*, the corpus of Aesopic fables themselves also has thematic concerns that are highly relevant to the "Coloquio." Thomas Keenan has argued that one of the major concerns of Aesopic fables is that of identity. In discussing a fable that appears also in the Spanish versions of Aesop,²¹ Keenan con-

¹⁹ See Adrados, *History* 1: 677–81 for parallels between Aesop's *Life* and that of Diogenes Laertius. For more on Cynic influence on the *Life*, see Adrados, "Elementos c3nicos," especially 313–17, and "Life of Aesop" 96 and 102. Riley ("Cervantes and the Cynics" 191–95) argues that Diogenes' life, preserved in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, may have been known to Cervantes and may have in turn influenced the portrayal of Tom3s Rodaja in the "El licenciado Vidriera." For more on the theme of Cynicism in the "Coloquio," see Forcione, *Humanist Vision*, especially 261–63 and 275–76.

²⁰ There is also considerable wordplay about dogs in the *Life*, which may be related to its Cynicism and may, furthermore, provide another possible connection to the "Coloquio." For example, there is a ribald canine reference in the episode where Aesop is brought home to Xanthus' household: stricken by Aesop's ugliness, one of the female slaves asks, "¿D3nde es la cola?" Aesop replies, "Si rabo habr3s menester no te faltar3" (*Vida* 12'). Then Xanthus' wife, incensed at Aesop's ugliness, complains that her husband has bought him in order to force her to leave the house: "me hab3is tra3do esta cabeza de perro, pensando que antes me ir3 de casa que conversar con 3l" (*Vida* 12'). Later, while at dinner, Xanthus gives some meat to Aesop and instructs him to give it "a la mi bien queriente." Aesop then takes the meat and, in the presence of Xanthus' wife, gives it to the family dog (*Vida* 15'). For canine wordplay in the life and its relation to Cynic influences, see Adrados, "Elementos c3nicos" 317.

²¹ In the Steelsio edition it appears on 89^v.

cludes that the Aesopic fable in general imposes identities on things and then admonishes them not to step out of that identity. In this fable a crow, envious upon seeing an eagle carry off a lamb, attempts to do the same with a wether but is unable to get the animal off the ground. The crow's claws get tangled up in the wether's wool and a farmer comes along and captures the crow, cuts off its wings, and gives it to his children as a plaything. When one of the children asks the crow what sort of bird it is, the crow responds "primero quanto al corazón fui águila, agora me conozco que soy cueruo" (*Vida* 89^v). Thus at the end of the fable, the crow has finally applied the correct name to itself: it is not an eagle, but a crow, and the imposition of the name imposes responsibility on the crow to be what it is and nothing else. As Keenan remarks, "It is thanks to that link between the I and name... that cognition and action, knowing and doing, articulate themselves: know your name, and do what it says" (63). Indeed, as we shall see more fully below, this interpretation of the fable is exactly the one that Berganza takes away from the fable he tells about the donkey and the lapdog: one should not try to be what one is not, and the donkey who tries to be like his master's dog only ends up injuring his master.

Transgressions against identity occur frequently in the "Coloquio," and more often than not it is the humans who forget the fact that they are human. The novella is replete with humans who act as if they were animals. Berganza reports that the butchers he served in Seville "con la misma facilidad matan a un hombre que a una vaca" (2: 303); the witch Cañizares rationalizes stories of ancient witches like Circe turning men into beasts by explaining that "no era otra cosa sino que ellas, con su mucha hermosura y con sus halagos, atraían los hombres de manera a que las quisiesen bien, y los sujetaban de suerte, sirviéndose dellos en todo quanto querían, que parecían bestias" (2: 337). Cañizares herself abandons her role as a human during her seances, when she and other witches, "a nuestro parecer, mudamos forma, y convertidas en gallos, lechuzas o cuervos, vamos al lugar

donde nuestro due1o nos espera" (2: 342).²² Campuzano in the "Casa miento" evinces a similar confusion about who he is: he pretends to be someone he is not, and he pays dearly for it.²³ So while the more obvious confusion of identity is experienced by the dogs who one day have the power to talk like humans, the humans in the story have the confusions of identity with the most serious implications. Like the crow and other animals in Aesop's fables, the humans in the "Coloquio" and the "Casamiento" do not act according to their identities.

There is another important instance of this confusion between man and animal in the "Coloquio" that also has connections to the Aesopic tradition. It occurs during Berganza's stint working for the shepherds guarding their flock of sheep. A wolf is ravaging the flock, and Berganza cannot catch it despite his best efforts. But one night, from behind some bushes, he sees two shepherds kill a sheep in a way that makes it seem the work of a wolf. Berganza is stunned at the revelation: "Pasm3me, qued3 suspenso cuando vi que los pastores eran los lobos y que despedazaban el ganado los mismos que le hab3an de guardar" (2: 311). The episode bears a striking resemblance to the fable about the "wolf in sheep's clothing" that, in the modern mind at least, is connected to the Aesopic tradition, but which nevertheless does not appear in Aesop's works. Joseph Jacobs retells this fable in an 1894 edition of *Aesop's Fables*:

A Wolf found great difficulty in getting at the sheep owing to the vigilance of the shepherd and his dogs. But one day it found the skin of a sheep that had been flayed and thrown aside, so it put it on over its own pelt and strolled down among the sheep. The Lamb that belonged to the sheep, whose skin the Wolf was wearing, began to follow the Wolf

²² For more on the animal imagery in the "Coloquio," see Forcione, *Mystery* 84 and 108–20.

²³ For good discussions of *enga1o* in the "Casamiento," see El Saffar 27–35 and Sieber's introduction to his edition (2: 31–32).

in the Sheep's clothing; so, leading the Lamb a little apart, he soon made a meal off [sic] her, and for some time he succeeded in deceiving the sheep, and enjoying hearty meals.

*Appearances are deceptive.*²⁴

Though the above passage is not genuinely Aesopic,²⁵ it shares the genuine article's concern with identity. According to Keenan's discussion of the fable, "in Aesop the fable names the simulation—the borrowing, comparison, or simile (wolf as sheep)—as the very definition and signature of the predator" (48–49; emphasis Keenan's). Though in this case the wolf, unlike the crow in the earlier fable, does not suffer the adverse consequences of transgressing identity, the sheep suffer for failing to recognize the transgression. The same is the case with the sheep in the "Coloquio," as well as the dogs like Berganza who are blamed for not catching the fictitious wolf. Retelling the episode makes Berganza despair of anyone ever righting the wrong. "¿Quién podrá remediar esta maldad?" he asks. "¿Quién será poderoso a dar a entender que la defensa ofende, que las centinelas duermen, que la confianza roba y el que os guarda os mata?" (2: 311).

The answer to Berganza's last rhetorical question—who will make it known that people are masquerading under false appearances?—is, of course the two dogs. And this brings us to a paradox at the heart of the Aesopic fable. We have already seen how the fable teaches one not to transgress one's given identity.

²⁴ 93–94; emphasis Jacobs'. Jacobs says that the fable derives from Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you dressed up as sheep while underneath they are savage wolves." He also reports that the Italian fabulist Absternius (Lorenzo Asternio) turned it into a fable in the fifteenth century (209). In any case, the phrase "wolf in sheep's clothing" has become proverbial, at least in English (see Apperson).

²⁵ The theme of sheep menaced by wolves is nevertheless pervasive in Aesopic literature. For such fables in the Steelsio edition, see "Del ciervo y de la oveja y del lobo" (46^{r-v}); "De los lobos y de las ovejas y perros" (where the sheep are convinced by the wolves to give up the dogs that guard them; 56^{r-v}); and "Del berraco, y de los corderos y del lobo" (68^v–69^r).

But as Keenan notes perceptively, at the same time that the fable attempts to teach the reader not to be something he is not, it imparts the lesson by encouraging an *identification* with the animals in the story—in other words, the reader must pretend to be what he is not. Returning to the fable about the eagle and the crow, Keenan notes how the reading strategy demanded by the fable contradicts its moral: “The moral—be responsible, which is to say, don’t compare yourself with what you’re not, heed the call of your own name and resist the seduction of a false supposition, a mistaken comparison—requires, in order that it be understood and taken seriously, that it be ignored” (65–66). If we look at Adrados’ attempt to define the fable, we can see the paradox at work. Adrados writes that the theme of the fable genre can be summed up as: “Things have a natural way of being, symbolized by the animal, human and divine world presented in the fable. Those who persist in working against it, suffer the consequences and must complain or resign themselves to being the object of satire; or else they simply die or suffer some misfortune. Everything is organized around this central core, sometimes with slight marginal variations. And in this centre is the animal, representing true nature: man and god only enter occasionally and marginally” (1: 36–37). There is considerable irony in the fact that a genre that aims to instruct humans on the “natural way of being” of the world does so by featuring animals that, often, talk and act like humans.

Cervantes seems to recognize the contradictory demands that the Aesopic fable places on the reader. The fable about the dog and the ass alluded to by Berganza, like the fable of the eagle and the crow discussed by Keenan, demands that the reader remain within his nature by, paradoxically, identifying with the unfortunate animal in the story. What makes the “Coloquio” so interesting vis-à-vis the Aesopic fable is that Cipi3n and Berganza reach their potential as characters only by *ignoring* the moral of the fable—that is, they fail to identify with the animal in the story. While both dogs pay lip service to the moral to stay within one’s nature, it is only by stepping out of their nature as dogs that they

become, as it were, new Aesops with the ability to instruct and entertain the reader.

A closer look at the fable about the dog and the ass alluded to in the text of the “Coloquio” and its use in literature before Cervantes will illustrate our point. The fable is one of many that enjoyed a healthy life after its appearance in the Aesopic corpus. In Spain it had already appeared in the *Libro de buen amor* (1401–08), the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*, and, of course, the Spanish editions of Aesop’s fables before Cervantes used it.²⁶ As in the tale of the eagle and the crow, “the usual lesson of this Aesopic tale,” according to Ian Michael, “is a warning against foolish imitation, or going against the limits set on one by God and nature” (210). But when used in a narrative context, the fable’s function seems to be to allow characters, most notably Cipi3n and Berganza, to transgress it

The version of the fable in the *Caballero Zifar* and its context is instructive. In the *Zifar* the eponymous knight has just arrived at a hermitage to stay the night. The servant of a nearby fisherman—called “el ribaldo” because of his brutish character—finds out about the knight’s presence and decides to try to incite him to anger by saying “*algunas cosas 3speras e graves*” (130). The Ribaldo tells the hermit that his plan will determine whether the knight has a good character or not, but the hermit tries to talk the Ribaldo out of it by arguing that a *loco* like the Ribaldo cannot hope to interact successfully with an “*ome bueno*” like the knight Zifar. The hermit then tells the fable of the ass and the dog to make his point. The moral the hermit derives from the story is the conventional one that seems to apply well to the *loco ribaldo*: “ninguno non podemos m3s atrever de quanto la natura le da. Onde dize el proverbio que ‘lo que la natura niega, ninguno non lo deve cometer.’ E t3 sabes que non te lo da la natura nin fueste criado entre los omes buenos nin sabes razonar; e este cavallero

²⁶ “Del asno y de la perilla” (*Vida* 39^v–40^r). See Burrus and Goldberg in *Esopete ystoriado* 46 n. 18 for other appearances of the tale in European fable literature.

parece como de alfaja e de buen entendimiento e, por aventura, que cuidases dezir algo ante 3l e dirás poco recabdo" (131). The Ribaldo's response carries the anti-Aesopian message on the need to test the limits of one's condition: "Andat, ome bueno... que nesçio me faría sienpre si non provase las cosas" (131–32).

Subsequent events bear out the Ribaldo's response: in Roger M. Walker's words, "the Ribaldo...undergoes a complete ennoblement, not only of rank but also of character. After his elevation to the title of Cavallero (and later Conde) Amigo, he loses almost entirely his original 'picaresque' qualities and becomes a respected member of the highest society, the ambassador and counsellor of kings" (121). Cervantes' dogs gain similar fruits from their transgression. While their ability to talk is a magical event that does not flow from any *osadía* on their part—or, seen another way, their ability is a convention of Aesopic fables that Cervantes is drawing attention to—their philosophizing is a conscious transgression of their condition.

Cipi3n and Berganza's actions prove the validity of the reading strategy assumed implicitly by the Aesopic fable: one must pretend to be what one is not in order to improve. And in Cipi3n and Berganza's case the benefits extend from them to the reader who has both enjoyed and learned from reading their dialogue. While insisting that no one should try to be what they are not, they have demonstrated the benefits of doing precisely that, a point that Cipi3n makes near the end of the "Coloquio" without apparently realizing it: "Mira, Berganza, nadie se ha de meter donde no le llaman, ni ha de querer usar del oficio que por ningún caso le toca. Y has de considerar que nunca el consejo del pobre, por bueno que sea, fue admitido, ni el pobre humilde ha de tener presumpci3n de aconsejar a los grandes y a los que piensan que se lo saben todo" (2: 358). The existence of the "Coloquio" proves Cipi3n wrong. He and Berganza, two *pícaros* who are even worse off than other heroes of the picaresque genre for being dogs, have taken on the role of philosophers and, in the process, instructed their readers on the ills of their society. Becoming what they are not, in order to insist that people should

never stop being what they are, is an example of the paradox at the heart of the fable genre that so clearly informs the “Coloquio.”

I hope to have demonstrated that the Aesopic tradition is present in the “Coloquio de los perros” beyond the obvious feature of the two dogs who speak. The picaresque *Life of Aesop*, a highly popular work in Cervantes’ time, may have provided the model for the dogs who, as servants, critique their society so effectively. At the very least, the “Coloquio” can be read profitably beside the *Life of Aesop* as another instance in which the fable, so often considered a debased genre, is a gate-crasher in the world of philosophy and appropriates the latter’s discourse as a didactic tool. We have also seen how the central preoccupation of the Aesopic fable—that of identity and the consequences of transgressing it—is also a major theme in the “Coloquio.” The dogs interpret the fable of Berganza’s story in a way that Aesop’s fables ask to be interpreted: no one should try to be what he or she is not. But the very fact that Cipi6n and Berganza can read the fable at all demonstrates that one must become someone else in order to read a fable, explaining why their dialogue—the “Coloquio” itself—is both an admonition against inconstancy and a plea for change.

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