A PALABRA HECHA NADA” is of course an ironic inversion of Joaquín Casalduero’s beautifully succinct definition of the dialogue in Cervantes’ farce El Retablo de las Maravillas as “la nada hecha palabra.”¹ The process is reversed in his romantic short story, La Gitanilla, whose heroine constantly questions the relationship between language and truth, in an environment where “del sí al no no hacemos diferencia cuando nos conviene” (p. 39).² Such is the old gipsy’s proud assertion in his welcoming speech to Andrés Caballero. This statement epitomizes the world of verbal instability into which both romantic hero and reader have entered, an instability which is established in the very early stages of the tale. An atmosphere of doubt is created quite deliberately by the narrator: Preciosa is introduced by her “abuela putativa” (p. 10) . . . “en nombre de nieta suya” (p. 9), and Preciosa is consequently defined by her grandmother’s mere claim that she is her granddaughter. Her experiences are appropriately bound up in the spoken word: in the songs she sings before her adoring public, in the fortunes she predicts for them, and especially in the role that most critics attribute to her as the personification of poetry.

It would be even closer to the truth, paradoxically, to see her life as being bound up in lies. Indeed, she unwittingly lives the lie that has been imposed upon her by her “grandmother.” Likewise, her relationship with normal society, or the general public, is determined by the latter’s demand for a conventional mode of entertainment which in the case of fortune-telling is artificial and frivolous, antithetical even to Preciosa’s true personality. Similarly, her rapport with the page-poet is based on the courtly cliché he addresses to her and which, it transpires, is ultimately insincere. Finally, her liaison with Juan Cárcamo is based on the courtly cliché he addresses to her and which, it transpires, is ultimately insincere. Finally, her liaison with Juan Cárcamo requires that he, too, undertake to live a temporary lie. The instability and mutability of these relationships and identities are quite conscientiously reflected in the levels of language in this novela, and more specifically, in the levels of scepticism, suspicion and distrust with which the spoken word is regarded. This study analyzes the relationships of several people within the context of their attitudes to language, and it is of more than passing interest that Clemente, the “poet,” figures among the most linguistically naive of the characters.

The critics to whom reference is made fall into two discernible groups. The first, comprising the likes of Joaquín Casalduero, Frank Pierce and Ruth El Saffar, focuses principally —though not exclusively— on the ideal elements of the tale: that is, genuine love overcoming all obstacles and leading to an ideal union. The second group, which includes J. B. Avalle-Arce, Alban K. Forcione and Michael Gerli, adopts a more sceptical attitude. Gerli states his own case: “The romantic elements singled out by the majority of the critics are usually viewed in isolation and do not take stock of the manner in which they are organized within the work.”³ Although I am by no means attempting to deny the validity of this idealizing interpretation—which would be absurd—it should, however, be seen in its proper perspective and emphasis will duly be placed on the various verbal intrigues that must be unravelled before such a happy ending is possible. In this I coincide with Forcione in questioning the relationship between the Cervantine artist and his art. Although I shall make more frequent reference to Forcione than to any other critic in this regard, I generally do so in order to modify rather than develop his arguments, particularly in his more radical assertions concerning the “criminal” associations of the “poet.” As a form of postscript to my analysis of La Gitanilla I shall add some general thoughts specifically concerning the poet and his art, and draw some interesting distinctions between the enterprising performer or confidence trickster and the poet proper. Although, as the title indicates, this is primarily an analysis of dialogue in La Gitanilla.

Mendacious Discourse in La Gitanilla

attitudes to art and artifice quoted or implied therein beg comparison with those of poets and performers elsewhere in Cervantes’s fictional society.

Forcione writes of linguistic divisions as characteristic of much of Cervantes’s work but he does not carry the concept far enough in his treatment of La Gitanilla: “Cervantes’ preoccupation with linguistic fragmentation is observable both in the instability of proper names throughout his writings and in his portrayal of the breakdown of human society into units, each with its own linguistic distinction.”⁴ He refers to Preciosa’s ceceo, an artifice which is emphasized by the narrator who wants us to be aware of Preciosa’s conscientious performance. This concept of “linguistic perspectivism” is not, of course, original. Leo Spitzer has applied such a criterion to Don Quixote.⁵ The fragmentation in La Gitanilla is of another order, in as much as it promotes a schism within individuals and splits character into an authentic and a performing self. Juan plays at being a gipsy, the page-poet at being Alonso Hurtado, don Sancho and later Caballero. This statement epitomizes the world of verbal instability into which both romantic hero and reader have entered, an instability which is established in the very early stages of the tale. An atmosphere of doubt is created quite deliberately by the narrator: Preciosa is introduced by her “abuela putativa” (p. 10) . . . “en nombre de nieta suya” (p. 9), and Preciosa is consequently defined by her grandmother’s mere claim that she is her granddaughter. Her experiences are appropriately bound up in the spoken word: in the songs she sings before her adoring public, in the fortunes she predicts for them, and especially in the role that most critics attribute to her as the personification of poetry.

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Preciosa's audience remains oblivious to her ironic invalidation of her own words. Some time later, after her comparative assessment of word and deed in her dialogue with Juan, her grandmother comments on her prodigious reasoning and eloquence. Preciosa, in a characteristically pragmatic tone, replies thus: “Calle, abuela, ... y sepa que todas las cosas que me oye son noendas y son de burlas para las muchas que de más veras me quedan en el pecho” (p. 28). This dismissal of her own sensitive articulacy hardly inspires confidence in the “muchas de más veras” to which she refers, but rather serves to enhance Preciosa’s enigmatic linguistic personality and the ambiguity of the dialogue in general. Before she will come to any agreement with Juan, she needs to verify that he is indeed who he claims to be, “tengo que saber si sois la de más veras” (p. 26, italics mine). One cannot exaggerate the irony of this inversion whereby a gipsy distrusts a nobleman. Later it falls to Juan to suspect and question the page-poet, albeit provoked by jealousy rather than any moral quest for absolute truth. In the final, suspense-filled scenes, the Corregidora needs to substantiate the claims of the old gipsy by seeking out her daughter’s birthmarks, and the Corregidor verifies the grandmother’s confession by cross-examining Juan in his cell. Although individual motives for such suspicion vary markedly, there is a distinct pattern of disbelief, and a subsequent need for verification which progressively divests the spoken word of its literal meaning.

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Preciosa is a skilful manipulator of words, and however sceptical she personally may be of statements and “juramentos,” she is prominently a “literary” figure, and both the page-poet and the Licenciate Pozo eulogize her as such. She is differentiated from her gipsy fellows linguistically, “porque era en extremo cortés y bien razonada,” and even succeeds in imposing a linguistic restriction on their more characteristic desenvolvura: “Era tan honesta, que en su presencia no osaba alguna gitana, vieja ni moza, cantar cantares lascivos ni decir palabras no buenas” (p. 9). This striking effect on her fellows is observed on several occasions. Her relationship with conventional society is equally determined by a degree of awe and admiratio. The public not only derives pleasure from her dancing and singing but entertainment from her witty repartee: “Admirados quedaron los que oían a la Gitanilla, así de su discreción como del donaire con que hablaban” (p. 17). In my introduction I referred to Preciosa's rapport with her admirers as at least partially artificial and frivolous: two scenes specifically crystallize the facetiousness of her use of dialogue. The first takes place at the home of the Tiniente, in which Preciosa recites the nonsensical buenasaventuras and in which she also concedes that she may not be telling the truth. This mesmerising enchantress is perfectly in control of her material, inciting greater curiosity rather than doubt in her gullible audience: indeed, the ladies are most eager to continue the dialogue: “Acabó su buenaventura Preciosa, y con ella encendió el deseo de todas las circunstantes en querer saber la suya” (p. 22). Simultaneously with Preciosa's frivolous make-believe, each member of her audience is involved in another performance—that of not being able to find the right change to pay for the favour. The wily Preciosa plays them at their own game of empty verbal gestures and offers to return the following week: “Yo volveré y le diré más venturas y aventuras que las que tiene un libro de caballerías” (p. 17). In my introduction I referred to Preciosa's rapport with her admirers as at least partially artificial and frivolous: two scenes specifically crystallize the facetiousness of her use of dialogue. The first takes place at the home of the Tiniente, in which Preciosa recites the nonsensical buenasaventuras and in which she also concedes that she may not be telling the truth. This mesmerising enchantress is perfectly in control of her material, inciting greater curiosity rather than doubt in her gullible audience: indeed, the ladies are most eager to continue the dialogue: “Acabó su buenaventura Preciosa, y con ella encendió el deseo de todas las circunstantes en querer saber la suya” (p. 22). Simultaneously with Preciosa's frivolous make-believe, each member of her audience is involved in another performance—that of not being able to find the right change to pay for the favour. The wily Preciosa plays them at their own game of empty verbal gestures and offers to return the following week: “Yo volveré y le diré más venturas y aventuras que las que tiene un libro de caballerías” (p. 24). Critics such as Frank Pierce and Joaquín Casalduero focus on the desenvolvura of her language and remarks in this scene without paying due attention to the power of Preciosa's deceptive artistry over her public. This audience is totally impervious to the ironic implications of her reference to the chivalric romance. Preciosa, the artist, is fully aware of the distinction between truth and artistic deception and in the course of the tale reveals her religious deference for the former and artistic mastery over the latter. The gullibility of Preciosa's interlocutors is underlined once more in the course of her dialogue with the noblemen at the home of Juan Cárcamo. When Juan hears the recitation of the page-poet's composition, he swoons with jealousy. The “unas ciertas palabras” which Preciosa invents as his remedy are accepted unquestioningly by his father who naively requests a transcript for future reference. Thanks to her artistic spontaneity Preciosa is able to respond convincingly, “que las diría de muy buena gana, y que entendiesen que aunque parecían cosa de burla, tenían gracia especial para preservar el mal de corazón y los vaguidos de cabeza” (p. 36). Although she obviously says this tongue-in-cheek, her words nevertheless reflect the central problem of the dialogue, the need to decipher true meaning beneath the
her credulous audience. In fact, the whole scene is characterized by such riddles and conundrums, decipherable by the minority, unintelligible to the majority. Although Pierce refers to the “double edge” of her words in this scene and to the scene as a whole as “amusingly ironic,” this is to ignore its relevance within a much broader ludic pattern of verbal games, artistry and deceit. Deceiving with the truth in the following statements: “ya sé del señor don Juanico que es algo enamoradizo” and “un viaje ha de hacer muy lejos de aquí” (p. 32), Preciosa possesses an essential advantage over the literal-mindedness of her audience. They comprehend only the literal meaning of words. The riddles she produces in this scene illustrate how language can function on a far from literal level, while Clemente’s empty poetic metaphors similarly show that edifying communication is (within the framework of this tale, at least) far from literary. In both registers of language there is a need to separate authentic and apparent meaning. The examples I cite of linguistic deceit are, of course, the very stuff of Cervantes’s romantic prose and drama (cf. El Laberinto de Amor and La Entretendida) as they are similarly of Lope’s and Tirso’s theatre. Lope, in his Arte Nuevo, speaks of the delight aroused in the audience by “el engañar con la verdad,” “el hablar equivocado” and “aquella incertidumbre antilógica.” This dramatic common place of deceiving with the truth needs to be acknowledged before any further significance can be claimed for the verbal games in La Gitanilla.

Up to this point I have dealt solely with Preciosa the artistic performer, the singer of ballads and fortune teller, who is perfectly happy to maintain this witty repartee and lucrative rapport with the general public, and equally content to wield her illusory power over it. By contrast, however, in normal, “unartistic” conversation, she reveals herself to be deeply committed to the truthfulness and integrity of the word: being so adept at artistic illusion and manipulation herself, she is acutely suspicious of the intentions and sincerity of her fellows. The experience of Juan as the gipsy Andrés seems to confirm this hypothesis: once he has learned to live a lie himself, he is able to suspect and recognize untruth in others, namely, in the elusive figure of the poet, Clemente.

This page-poet has aroused much interest among critics, but has eluded concrete definition. Forcione appropriately defines him as a “shadowy figure.” Ruth El Saffar’s description of his instability captures the contradictions he embodies: “As a character, the page-poet remains totally undefined: he appears at night, apparently from nowhere and without being able to state a convincing destination. In Madrid he had described himself as a poet and yet not one, as neither rich nor poor, as a page and yet more than that.” This elusive figure, especially in his ties with poetry, intensifies the essential verbal ambiguity of the story. J. B. Avalle-Arce similarly refers to him as the “paje anónimo” and although this “anonymity” or elusiveness is undeniable, Clemente is nevertheless a significant figure in this tale of verbal intrigue. He bestrides both the world of poetic ambiguity and that of prosaic deception.

Preciosa’s relationship with this mysterious page-poet is another verbal enigma. It is, literally, a purely verbal relationship: he composes poetry and she performs it. The first time they meet he hands her a poem and exhorts her to read it, and at their next encounter is eager to ascertain whether or not she has read it. The nature of their dialogue is therefore a professional poetic exchange. It is worthy of note that the first time such an exchange is alluded to, it is done in no idealistic terms. The grandmother normally acquires Preciosa’s material: “y no faltó poeta que los diese; que también hay poetas que se acomodan con gitanos y les venden sus obras, como los hay para ciegos, que les fingen milagros y van a la parte de la ganancia” (p. 10). Although Clemente alters this process somewhat by giving Preciosa money as well as poems, the general poet-gipsy relationship is depicted as venal and unideal. That there is nothing intrinsically remarkable in this common commercial enterprise is quite explicit. What strikes the reader as incongruous or inappropriate is the fact that Clemente, who extols poetry as “una bellísima doncella . . . que se contiene en los límites de la discreción” (p. 30), should deal so readily with gipsies. Don Quixote himself further supports this argument in his dialogue with Don Diego de Miranda (II, 16): “esta tal doncella no quiere ser manoseada, ni traída por las calles, ni publicada por las esquinas de las plazas.” On this poetic or artistic level Preciosa does not concern herself with the validity of the poem—whether his words are written with sincerity is of no consequence to her. Indeed, her only stipulation when they strike their deal is “que sean honestos,” but not, as it transpires, honest. Juan, on the other hand, interprets this amorous metaphor literally, having not yet learned to distinguish the literary lie.

This expression must obviously be used with caution: poetry is not necessarily judged according to moral rather than aesthetic criteria, that is, in terms primarily of its sincerity. Sansón Carrasco’s words corroborate this: “el poeta puede contar o cantar las cosas no como
the material; therefore function as valid lies within the dialectic of the novela. While they are automatically accepted as "poetry" by Preciosa, they successfully deceive Juan and they simultaneously present a confusing ambiguity to the reader.

The distinction between poetic distortion and reality is of course fundamental to Cervantes's own art. Mauricio is highly sceptical of Periandro's narrative detail in Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, II, 20 and Clodio, the slanderer, suspects Auristela and Periandro of living a lie (II, 2). Don Quixote's fundamental chivalric inspiration derives from his inability to recognize literature as a lie. He is, as A. A. Parker defines him, "educado en la mentira por sus libros." I deliberately draw attention to three different types of lying in these illustrations: they combine to alert the reader to the essential role of verbal deception in Cervantine fiction.

It is Preciosa who initiates Juan into the various levels of the lie. Living poetry in her professional life, she is better able to analyze and manipulate language. Don Quixote, for his part, is mad and naive enough to accept his chivalric literature at face-value. Only in rare moments of lucid self-restraint is he able to assert: "es menester tocar las apariencias con la mano para dar lugar al desengaño" (II, 11, 613). Preciosa, however, actively accumulates the wisdom thatuits truth from fiction, probing far beneath its clichés and pretexts.

Preciosa is unwilling to enter into dialogue with the "poet" unless he pledges to tell her the truth, "primero que le responda palabra, me ha de decir una verdad, por vida de lo que más quiere." Her commitment to the truth is such that it requires an oath. What is striking at this point is the fervour of the poet's response and his apparent eagerness to be frank: "Conjuro es ése . . . que aunque el decirla me costase la vida, no la negaré en ninguna manera" (p. 29). His commitment to a sincere reply clashes with the fundamental insincerity of his poetic clichés. This contradiction brings us back to the very core of one of Cervantes's principal concerns—the rapport between reality and fiction, and specifically in this case, the role of the "poetic lie." The very lie in the courtly praise he presents to Preciosa justifies her essential scepticism vis-à-vis poetic language, yet he is candid in his definition of himself in relation to his art. Although he does not disclose his real social role, his often-quoted qualification of poetry is revealing. It reflects his idealization of his art: "La Poesía es una bellísima doncella, casta, honesta, discreta, aguda . . . y finalmente, deleita y enseña a cuantos con ella comunican" (p. 30). Preciosa might well be seen in these same terms, but she is simultaneously aware of poetry's potential ambiguity. Indeed, she uses her art to deceive her audience but only when they demand it, by requesting that their fortunes be told. Clemente is a novice poet, trapped somewhat naively within poetry's ambiguities. At the end of their second encounter he appears to be under the spell of the poetry he has written her. He seems actually to be pursuing her, although he later denies this.

From a theoretical point of view his idealization of Poetry is remarkably similar to another personification which the poet Cervantes proffers in his Viaje del Parnaso, IV, lines 143, 144.19

La santa y hermosa doncella,  
Que admiración, como alegría,  
pone.

Mercury subsequently takes up her eulogy:

Esta, que es la Poesía  
verdadera,  
La grave, la discreta, la elegante,  
. . . la alta y sincera.

Both Clemente's and Mercury's definitions of Poetry reflect the exalted view that Cervantes holds of the art as a divine gift. Calíope in Book IV of La Galatea refers to the poets as "los divinos espíritus cuyo loable ejercicio es ocuparse en la maravillosa y jamás como debe alabada ciencia de la poesía."20 There is a fundamental disjunction between this recurring praise of poetry and the equally recurrent portrait of the poet in undignified, frequently burlesque terms. Clemente is portrayed with greater dignity, since he is appropriately awed by poetry. There is in general, however, an important aesthetic gap between the poet and his art. I shall focus on this distance in due course.

Preciosa's dismissal of Juan's amorous overture is consistent with

her basic linguistic detachment or scepticism. In response to his oaths she categorically asserts that "a mí no me mueven promesas, ni me desmoran dáfívas, ni me inclinan sumisiones, ni me espantan finezas enamoradas . . ." (p. 25). Despite this scathing mistrust of the spoken word, she nevertheless encourages Juan to participate in a lie. By virtue of this necessary deception both Juan and Preciosa can discover their true emotions and Preciosa can ascertain the sincerity of Juan's earliest pledges. While Juan is deceiving conventional society, Preciosa is putting to the test words addressed directly to her.

It is ironic how Juan's early statements contain their own contradiction. He holds fast to the gentleman's conception of the oath while blatantly undermining it. Much of the comic irony is derived from his naiveté. In his emotional fervour lying is not abhorrent to him and he acquires quite a facility for it. Twice in one breath he voices his planned deceptions: "Con ocasión de ir a Flandes engañaré a mis padres . . . A los que fueren conmigo yo los sabré engañar de modo que salga con mi determinación" (p. 27). When they meet at Juan's home, Preciosa suggests that Juan will not keep his word. This provokes several ironic responses, the first of which runs as follows: "En verdad, gitanica, que has acertado en muchas cosas de mi condición; pero en lo de ser mentiroso vas muy fuera de la verdad, porque
dialogue with Juan in a symbolic context. For him, Juan is exhorting Clemente to lie more convincingly in accordance with the Aristotelian principle that the poetic lie should be verisimilar. He is a poet but not a performer: he is not totally comfortable with his art, he is not committed to it but merely “aficionado a la poesía.” In fact, he is not committed to anything. He is certainly not comfortable with the Aristotelian principle that the poetic lie should be verisimilar. He is a poet but not a performer: he is not totally comfortable with his art, he is not committed to it but merely “aficionado a la poesía.”

Preciosa is the real artist of the piece, the true performer. She is far more at home with the lawlessness of pretence and her allotted social role as a gypsy. Forcione links Clemente and Pedro de Urdemalas together. On close examination it becomes obvious that they share this conviction until Clemente explodes the poetic metaphor of his courtly clichés with the following confession: “. . . que hermosas tiene Madrid que pueden y saben robar los corazones y rendir las almas tan bien y mejor que las más hermosas gitanas” (p. 50). Andrés is unconvinced by Clemente’s feeble excuse for being there and in his fervor to uncover the true story he accuses Clemente of being a bad liar —“pues tan mal sabéis mentir”— in admonitions such as the following: “advíértelo que si os conviene mentir en este vuestro viaje, mintáis con más apariencia de verdad” (p. 49). There is indubitable irony in the fact that Juan, so recently initiated into deception, should advise Clemente, the poet, in the art of pretence. Even after Clemente has ostensibly confessed all and has wished vuestro viaje, mintáis con más apariencia de verdad” (p. 32). Caught up in the poetry of his romantic adventure, he does not consider how he is deceiving his family and the delightful irony is reinforced in yet another declaration of integrity: “la palabra que yo doy en el campo, la cumpliré en la ciudad, pues no se puede preciar de caballero quien toca en el vicio de mentiroso” (p. 33). Thus the caballero is well and truly initiated into the process of lying. In this, his shortsightedness can be compared with that of Clemente: while Preciosa normally remains in command of the situation, both Juan and Clemente are carried away by romantic fallacies. There is nothing intrinsically original or surprising in the concept of a lying caballero: such dramatic irony is virtually a pre-requisite of the romantic intrigue of the epoch. Even Periandro (Persiles) lives a justifiable lie. What is pertinent within the context of La Gitanilla is that Juan’s lie is just one of many. Juan’s fervent assertions of truthfulness provoke a further peripheral irony. He has just referred to Preciosa’s companions as “dams.” Convinced by his oaths of verbal integrity and harbouring no delusions concerning their true status, they conclude that Juan cannot be referring to them. Cristina dispels the doubt and flatters herself into the bargain: “No es mentira de tanta consideración . . . la que se dice.


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discourse not only provides light relief after Juan’s energetic protestations of honesty, it also reflects the multivalence of the lie which constitutes the main dynamic of the story.

One of the most fascinating encounters and most pertinent dialogues in this respect is the conversation which takes place between Clemente and Andrés when Clemente has unexpectedly turned up near the gipsy camp. Both Andrés and Preciosa are made uneasy by his presence. He seems to intrude upon their contentment as an echo and a reminder of the mutability of things. It is partly Andrés’s eagerness to change and surrender all to please Preciosa that increases her uneasiness and causes her to consider “que como había don Juanes en el mundo, que se mudaban en Andrees, asi podia haber don Sanchos que se mudasen en otros nombres” (p. 54). In fact, the poet changes his name three times in one night. He introduces himself as Alonso Hurtado and is later referred to by the narrator as don Sancho before being christened Clemente by the gipsy community. Fired with jealousy, Juan needs to discover the motive behind Clemente’s sudden appearance. He is convinced that Clemente is as much in love with Preciosa as he himself is. The reader shares this conviction until Clemente explodes the poetic metaphor of his courtly clichés with the following confession: “. . . que hermosas tiene Madrid que pueden y saben robar los corazones y rendir las almas tan bien y mejor que las más hermosas gitanas” (p. 50). Andrés is unconvinced by Clemente’s feeble excuse for being there and in his fervor to uncover the true story he accuses Clemente of being a bad liar —“pues tan mal sabéis mentir”— in admonitions such as the following: “advíértelo que si os conviene mentir en este vuestro viaje, con más apariencia de verdad” (p. 49). There is indubitable irony in the fact that Juan, so recently initiated into deception, should advise Clemente, the poet, in the art of pretence. Even after Clemente has ostensibly confessed all and has wished Preciosa and Andrés well, the latter continues to be suspicious, “estuvo en duda Andrés si las razones habia como enamorado, o como comodido . . . ” (p. 55).

This scene reflects the extent and energy of Juan’s jealousy and also his newly-developed ability to recognize a lie. He is seeking the truth behind the unconvincing assertion. Although he has been initiated into the workings of the lie by Preciosa, he is not yet capable of distinguishing the artistic lie. In this interpretation of Juan’s character I differ from Forcione who chooses to see Clemente’s...
structural requirement is easily accommodated in this story by an intensification of the central dynamic—as the mistrust of the spoken word.

The blurring presence of poetry as an obstacle to clear interpretation is totally absent from the concluding stages of suspense-filled confusion. In the rapport between Preciosa and her milieu the problem of artfulness has been developed on both poetic and personal levels. In the final scenes the situation is being assessed in judicial terms by a professional magistrate. Just as Preciosa and Juan have learned to seek meaning beneath the spoken utterance, it is the professional practice of the Corregidor to listen to any given statement and assess its true value. In his interview with Juan in his prison cell, the Corregidor himself participates in another necessary lie: he deceives in order to extract the truth from Juan. He feigns surprise at Juan’s categorical assertion that “no es posible que Preciosa diga mentira.” He replies, “¿Tan verdadera es? . . . No es poco serlo, para ser gitana” (p. 66). This short dialogue is important on several counts: it brings to mind the two Preciosas, the gipsy who is capable of maintaining a frivolous conversation with her public and the private, noble upholder of verbal integrity. The truth-lie dichotomy is also intensified in this exchange between gipsy and judiciary. The enigmatic personality of Preciosa is forever present: she is an artist who can separate herself from her art but who holds on securely to the insights she has gained through it. Unlike Pedro de Urdemalas, her nearest rival in terms of artistic performance, who virtually withdraws into fiction, she holds on tenaciously to the truth.

Although this romantic tale reaches a happy conclusion, its portrayal of language appears to run counter to this emotional optimism. This story was not conceived principally to idealize the language of love. Amid the sustained verbal scepticism the intimate and edifying colloquies between Preciosa and Andrés are summed up in the one single phrase: “Pasaba Andrés con Preciosa honestos, discretos y enamorados coloquios” (p. 45). This is obviously not the place for amorous eloquence: Preciosa has already dismissed it from their dialogue. The principal characters are more concerned with the unveiling of the lie.

In his illuminating Reading and Fiction in Golden Age Spain Barry Ife recounts the problematic relationship of reader vis-à-vis printed matter. He focuses on the tension between Platonic moralists and theorists, for whom secular literature was mendacious and ultimately dangerous, and the Aristotelians who delighted in manipulating the distinction between fact and fiction. In La Gitanilla it is the validity of the spoken word that is constantly doubted and questioned and the potential ambiguity in everyday discourse is brought into vivid relief. Preciosa gains this privileged insight through her practised art and through the suspicion with which gipsy society is regarded, her father through his frequent, professional encounters with the criminal confession. The imposing presence of poetry provides another essential layer of ambiguity to confuse the issue of identities, relationships and true meanings. The tale does not, as is implied by Forcione in his Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles, link poetry, Clemente and the Cervantine artist in general with criminality. It rather divulges a broader principle—that of multivalence and complexity in the disarmingly simple act of speech. While the old gipsy would unflinchingly exchange a yes for a no, controlling this arbitrary use of language and meaning is Preciosa’s literary raison d’être.

In speaking of “artistic deception” throughout this study I am by no means supporting the argument of sixteenth-century moralists and their condemnation of literature as a lie. This is not Cervantes’s attitude. I hope rather to signal the very richness of the ambiguities in both literary and non-literary discourse which form an undercurrent throughout Cervantes’s prose after La Galatea. Thereafter many of his characters are either perpetrators or victims of word games.

Forcione takes this concept of artistic deceit one very general step further: “Cervantes’s various surrogate poets have little in common with the inspired figures who haunt the groves and springs of Parnassus. Nearly all of them are tainted with criminality; they glory not in the act of edification but rather in the act of deception.” In writing these lines Forcione also has in mind characters such as Pedro de Urdemalas, the false captives of Persiles y Sigismunda (III, 10) and Periandro when he fails to convince Mauricio with the hyperbole of his narration (II, 20). From these widely diverse examples it can be seen just how arbitrarily Forcione endows the title of poet on many Cervantine characters. Pedro de Urdemalas is a versatile actor; Persiles is a romantic hero who is only once caught in the act of exaggerating his own achievements, although the implication is that he stretches the credibility of his audience for much of his narration; the false captives (III, 10) are wily but essentially harmless tricksters. These are artists and performers in the broad sense rather than pure poets. Forcione does not make this very necessary distinction. Since a detailed analysis of the “performer” as compared and contrasted with the “poet” is not a practicable undertaking at this juncture, I shall establish some basic differences but largely confine my comments to the nature and function of the poet alone.

Forcione poses one fundamental question, although he fails to answer it satisfactorily: ‘Why does Cervantes surround his poets with such ‘negative attributes’; does it reflect a major function which Cervantes associates with the artistic undertaking?’ It is true that Clemente’s symbolic value as poet and “outlaw” is unarguable, but he does not answer the requirements of Cervantes’s “deceptive artists” such as Pedro de Urdemalas and Maese Pedro. Although in characters such as Ginés de Pasamonte creativity is linked with a degree of lawlessness, I do not agree with Forcione’s concept of the poet’s infernal associations, either in La Gitanilla or anywhere else in the Cervantine opus. Neither Preciosa nor Juan nor Clemente fits into the normal pattern of deceptive artist; their social status precludes it for a start. Preciosa does not carry the artistic lie into her private life: Juan cannot sustain his performance and allows the “gentleman within him” precedence at the crucial moment of the soldier’s insult: Clemente, the figure upon whom Forcione focuses
when he speaks of infernal symbolism, is a non-achiever, he possesses neither the will nor the imagination to rank among Cervantes's enterprising performers. On his own confession merely “aficionado a la poesía,” he is committed to neither truth nor fiction, an aimless, naive talent. He is as much at the mercy of language as manipulative of it. Preciosa is a gipsy who, beyond the limits of her art, cannot and will not lie: Juan belies his noble station in a series of deceptions: Clemente, although capable of lying via the medium of the courtly cliché, has too little imagination and creativity to sustain his lie in his dialogue with Juan. Thus the potential for truth and untruth reveals itself in the three central personalities.

In Cervantes's fictional society—and exclusive of the pastoral idyll—it is the bad or wildly ambitious poet who appears most frequently, in ironic or burlesque guise. One unimpressive example is the poet-soldier of El juez de los divorcios, who, in the words of his estranged wife, “en toda la noche no sosiega, dando vueltas . . . haciendo un soneto en la memoria para un amigo . . . y da en ser poeta, como si fuese oficio con quien no estuviese vinculada la necesidad del mundo.” The playwright who shares his bread with Berganza in the concluding stages of El coloquio de los perros is another self-deluding idealist. The examples are numerous. El Licenciado Vidriera's thoughts on poetry and the poets are significant at this point: “Pregúntole otro estudiante que en qué estimación tenía a los poetas. Respondió que a

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la ciencia en mucha; pero que a los poetas en ninguna.” Sir Philip Sidney, in his own apology for poetry, draws a similar distinction between the poet and his art. When poetry falls short of ideal theories, “it is not the fault of the art, but that by few men that art can be accomplished.”

The buffoon Madrigal in La gran Sultana is another character who considers himself a poet. He looks forward in Act III to returning to Spain from captivity where he will be able to narrate his adventures:  

¡O! ¡Qué cosas les diré! Y aun pienso 
pues tengo ya el camino medio 
andado 
siendo poeta, hazerme comediante.

There is, however, a distinction to be drawn here. This inclination to poetry is just one facet of Madrigal's personality. He is far too adept at convincing the Cadi that he can make an elephant talk to be a mere poet. Most Cervantine poets convince no-one of anything. In general the confidence trickster or illusionist is a far more imaginative and enterprising character. Consider especially the intellectual distance between the eloquent illusionist Chanfalla and Gomecillos, the Governor of the village whom he fools, and who furthermore prides himself on his “puntos y collar de poeta” in El retablo de las maravillas. Although Mary Randel (like Forcione) does not draw the theoretical divide between confidence trickster and “poet,” she succinctly deals with their practical differences: “La oposición entre los autores del invisible Retablo y el autor de comedias sin representar, no es, sino una expresión más de la paradoja inherente a todo arte: la misteriosa alianza entre el que engaña a los demás y el que engaña a sí mismo.” Gomecillos, with the characteristic ingenuousness of the Cervantine poet, is fooled by these illusionists. The only parenthesis in the ever more vigorous dialogue is provided by this “poet,” who is misguided by the very fervour of the spoken word.

This basic difference between “performer” and “poet” has obvious implications for our focal poet, Clemente. Akin to even the most laughable of Cervantine poets, he takes himself very seriously. Preciosa, by way of contrast, adopts a theatrical playfulness and like other Cervantine artists, she enters into the spirit of the game. In his naiveté Clemente is trapped within his romantic metaphors, causing both the jealous Juan and the reader to suspect his motives. Yet he is obviously uncomfortable with lies: in fact, it is Juan who upbraids him for his pathetic attempts to mislead. Clemente, in spite of all the

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external differences between himself and other Cervantine poets—his talent, his status and the relative dignity that Cervantes accords him—is another of Cervantes's stunted poets. Whereas the likes of the poet-soldier in El juez are thwarted by a lack of talent, Clemente is thwarted by circumstance and outlawed out of the picture. He is not, however, banished from the scene on the same terms as Plato's poets from his Republic—for lying. If anything, he is removed from the scene because he does not lie well enough. “The deception that works so well for Andrés is woefully inadequate for Clemente. He abandons verbal deception when Andrés refuses to believe that he has lost his way.” This is crucial: other individuals, such as the afore-mentioned false captives in the Persiles are given credit for the creativity of their lies. Even in the case of Preciosa and Juan lying functions as a justifiable means to an end. Although the lawlessness imposed upon Clemente after the romantic adventure in Madrid links him with other lawless artists such as Ginés de Pasamonte, he does not possess their worldly wisdom, imagination or enterprise. It is his poetry that temporarily misleads Juan and reader alike into expecting more of him. Preciosa does not fall into the same trap: in her capacity as a performer she has the power to analyze, control and manipulate language. Clemente is ultimately the victim of his own art. Cervantes often portrays the poet as the despicable victim of his own illusions.
Such a figure is laughable for even attempting to embrace so exalted an art form. Although Clemente is granted the dignity of composing poetry that is lauded by the public, as a fictional character he is doomed, not only by the essential requirements of the plot and the peace of mind of Andrés Caballero but by his poetic pursuit: outside the confines of the pure pastoral Cervantes's poets are frequently subject to criticism and ridicule.

The architecture of *La Gitanilla* reflects its essential statement on language. Within an ostensibly idealized framework of poetry and love the progressive invalidation of the word is quite acute, and Clemente's poetic clichés are accordingly rendered null and void. Whereas Chanfalla in *El Retablo* successfully mesmerizes his audience with “la nada hecha palabra,” in *La Gitanilla* this “palabra” is sceptically and systematically reduced to nothing: the language both of literature and of life is rendered subject to this scrutiny. While Chanfalla celebrates the triumph of his imaginative eloquence, Preciosa reaps the rewards of her capacity to transcend deception and become the Doña Costanza beneath her grandmother's lie. *El Retablo* disingenuously fabricates illusions: *La Gitanilla* ingeniously demolishes them.

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NOTES

2 All references to the text are to the following edition: *Novelas Ejemplares*., (Mexico: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, 1981).
13 Thus the stylised poetry of love ceases to function as a means of communication (which is its role in the pastoral): it remains as an aesthetic superficiality, an artistic lie.
14 *Don Quijote*, p. 560.
18 A. A. Parker “El concepto de la verdad en el*Quijote,*” *Revista de Filología Española*, 33 (1948), 287-305 (397).


23 *The Humanist Vision*, p. 152.
26 ibid.
28 *Novelas ejemplares*, p. 118.
33 Anne E. Wiltrout, “Role Playing and Rites of Passage. *La ilustre fregona* and *La gitanilla,*” *Hispania* 64, (1981) 388-99 (396).
34 *El viaje*, I, lines 97 and 98.