

Literature and Early Studies of the Mind: Alchemical Imagery and Meaning in *La ilustre fregona*, an Exemplary Novel by Miguel de Cervantes.

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Introduction: Cervantes, Jung, and the *Novelas ejemplares*

When Miguel de Cervantes published his *Novelas ejemplares* in 1614, he surprised his readers with intriguing characters and shocking plots. His proud proclamation in the prologue about hidden mysteries and benefits that may be unlocked through careful reading has been examined for centuries. Looking to reveal the mysteries emphasised in the prologue, this study undertakes an esoteric, specifically alchemical analysis of *La ilustre fregona* to bring attention to Cervantes' keen observations of the human condition and its aspirations for perfection, which he represented in the *Novelas ejemplares* through very specific images and processes of individual awareness and transformation¹. In his prologue, Cervantes admits to having didactic aims and the hope that his novels could have a transformative influence on his readers, a vision significantly similar to modern psychological processes of individuation, modification, and adaptation. In Cervantes' novels, the reconciliation of opposites is strongly related to the psychological processes that Carl Gustave Jung explored in his psychiatric practice and documented in his seminal work on the relationship between psychology and alchemy centuries later.²

2. Esotericism and Alchemy

The presence of esoteric content in the work of Cervantes was first identified in studies by Baldomero Villegas (1857), Nicolas Díaz de Benjumea (1878), Atanasio Rivero (1916), and Dominique Aubier, who saw in Cervantes' texts an abundance of enigmatic, but not random, elements. Concerning the relation between alchemy and literature, Jung indicates that one of the first scholars to consider this approach was the German philologist Richard August Reizenstein who recognized the mythological and Gnostic ideas embedded in alchemy as a peculiar doctrine of redemption, opening the field of literature to new and enriching possibilities of interpretation, as Benoit Rousseau indicates:

Carl Jung found in alchemy both the individuation process and his two mystical experiences. He was the first to notice, in the psychology field, that alchemy was about the process to consciously produce mystical or transcendent experiences. That is the alchemical secret he only revealed to those who could read him (1).

Scholars and bona fide alchemists such as Fulcanelli (1930), his disciple Eugène Canseliet (1971, 1972), and Emmanuel d'Hoogvorst identified esoteric, cabalistic, and alchemical significances in the work of Cervantes, but also of his contemporaries Edmund Spenser, Geoffrey Chaucer, François Rabelais, Francesco Colona, Jonathan Swift, Charles Perrault, and others. *Don Quixote* has been examined under Jungian, psychological, esoteric, and alchemical approaches,³

¹ According to Hanegraaf, esotericism is a legacy of all Western cultures and should be considered a tool of legitimate academic inquiry in academia. .

² Cervantes' keen understanding of the human condition and psychological depth have been identified by James A. Parr in "Cervantes Foreshadows Freud: on Don Quixote's Flight from the Feminine and the Physical" (1995).

³ See Canseliet, Castillo Martos, Dibb, Roula, El- Saffar, Fulcanelli, and Percheron.

but not much has been commented on the *Novelas ejemplares*, where Cervantes admitted incorporating hidden mysteries with the hope that aware readers would understand: “Solo esto quiero que consideres que pues yo he tenido osadía de dirigir estas Novelas al gran Conde de Lemos, algún misterio tienen escondido que las levanta” (20).

In the *Novelas ejemplares*, the complex character outlines and plot development reveal Cervantes’ profound reflections on the human condition and its potential for regeneration, as well as more than a passing knowledge of alchemical principles and literature. Of note is the conclusion of the *Corpus Diacrónico del Español* of the Real Academia Española that Cervantes is the Golden Age author with more mentions of the word *alquimia* in his works, with a total of eleven cases in eight documents. The words *alchemy* and *alchemist* are not used in isolation in Cervantes’ works; images and language of the alchemical tradition identified for centuries in texts dispersed throughout Europe and Spain were applied as a clever structural device in the *Novelas ejemplares* to challenge his readers with examples of processes of personal transformation.⁴ On the specific style of the *example* or *exemplary* and its relation to alchemy, Rodríguez Guerrero (2002) indicates,

Pietro Bono⁵ comenta sobre ese estilo de redacción: ‘Y hago saber que este arte, más que ningún otro en el mundo, utiliza en su doctrina nombres propios, extraños e inusitados, utiliza las alegorías, los enigmas, las metáforas, los equívocos, los sentidos figurados, los disfraces, la prosopopeya, las hipérbolos y la ironía.’ Sobre la misma época un texto pseudo Arnaldiano como el *Exempla in artem philosophorum* abunda ya en el estilo netamente parabólico de tema religioso y es un ejemplo claro de la aplicación en la alquimia del género de los ‘exemplum’ que se extendió con gran éxito desde el siglo XIV en toda la literatura medieval.

1. *La ilustre fregona*

La ilustre fregona narrates the story of a kitchen maid from Toledo, born of the rape of an aristocratic widow by old nobleman Diego Carriazo and adopted by Toledo innkeepers after the mother’s death.⁶ Fifteen years later, the paths of Constanza –the title character—, her unknown father, her brother young Carriazo, and her future husband Tomás, intersect as the young men undertake a journey seeking adventure and self-discovery. Constanza is described as a model of beauty and perfection hidden under the anodyne appearance of a scullery maid, although her only job consists of taking care of the silver wares at the inn. A second plot involves two aristocratic young men, Diego Carriazo and Tomás Avendaño and their adventures after they run away from Burgos and spend time in the low-class environments of Toledo, Madrid, and in the tuna fisheries of Seville. Despite some picaresque inclinations and bad company young Carriazo and Tomás constantly emerge from villainous situations uncorrupted, always demonstrating their honourable nature. Anagnorisis ensues and Constanza’s identity is revealed by her repentant father, old Diego Carriazo. The novel ends with the reconciliation of Constanza with her father and her brother, her marriage to Tomás Avendaño, and the return of the family to Burgos and their aristocratic origin.

⁴ See Arola, Castillo Martos, De Luanco, Forshaw, García Font, McLean, and Rodríguez Guerrero.

⁵ Pietrus Bonus (14th century), alchemist and physician, author of *La pretiosa margarita novella* (1330) a mystical, alchemical treatise that greatly influenced Renaissance literature.

⁶ Because there are two characters with the name Diego Carriazo, to distinguish between the two, the father will be referred to as old Carriazo and the son as young Carriazo.

Cervantes assures the reader that all characters have happy marriages and noble, good, and studious children with no picaresque inclinations.

3. Alchemical Opposites: *Sol, Luna, Mercury*

La ilustre fregona addresses the restoration of the title character to her rightful place in society; however, most of the action is concerned with the quest of a socially dominant, but psychologically immature male element, which will achieve new awareness in the proximity of the title character, a model of feminine perfection who becomes the catalyst for the completion of several processes of transformation. For an aware reader, the name Costanza is an initial suggestion to the mystical nature of the text, as constancy and steadiness are significant qualities associated with alchemical work. The title of the novel is not inconsequential, as it illustrates the contradictions of the alchemical *prima materia*: a humble yet precious element (ilustre), closely associated to water and silver in her occupation (fregona) in a kitchen. The spatial elements in the text are of extreme importance; the kitchen in this case, where Costanza performs the sole activity of caring for the silver, “Ella no friega ni entiende en otra cosa que en su labor, y en ser guarda de la plata labrada que hay en casa que es mucha” (399), is a crucial image in an alchemical reading. The reference to silver in the text should not be interpreted in isolation as the material of utensils or coins; rather, consideration must be given its proximity to the images of *Luna*, water, and other attributes that associate Costanza with alchemy, as Pernety indicates: “Lorsque les Philosophes disent, *notre Argent ou notre Lune*, ce n’est pas de l’argent vulgaire, dont on fait les ustensiles, les meubles & la monnoye, qu’ils parlent, c’est de leur matière quand elle est parvenue au blanc parfait par le moyen de la cuisson” (43). Jung explains silver as a reference to Mercurius as alchemical quicksilver and/or water, a substance of spiritual nature, which:

Was the true object of the alchemical procedure. Quicksilver, because of its fluidity and volatility was also defined as water. [...] The “divine water” so often mentioned in the Greek texts is quicksilver, Mercurius as the arcane substance and golden tincture is indicated by the designation *aqua aurea* and by description of the water as *Mercurii caduceus* (1970, 208).⁷

Cervantes describes Costanza with mundane adjectives, such as beautiful and discrete, but the description becomes more enigmatic as it progresses:

En una mejilla tiene el sol, y en la otra, la luna; la una es hecha de rosas y la otra de claveles, y en entrambas hay también azucenas y jazmines... más la dotara de buena gana si me la quisieran dar por mujer; pero yo sé que no me la darán, que es joya para un arcipreste o para un conde (383).

The symbolic implications of Constanza’s description are remarkable, the language precise: Sol and Luna are the most representative opposites in alchemy and religion, the ultimate reconciling forces in the mystical reconciliation or marriage. Constanza already possesses the attributes of Sol and Luna within her person, echoing Jung’s quotes about the orphan who is “opposed to myself” (*MDR* 272). Cervantes makes Constanza appear as a model of genuine feminine perfection, indeed

⁷ Jung’s footnotes 12-15 in *Alchemical Studies* (208) provide information on the numerous alchemical sources he consulted, such as the *Aurora consurgens*, texts by Berthelot, Basilus Valentinus’ “Practica” in the *Museum Hermeticum*, Philalete’s *Metallorum metamorphosis*, and *Introitus apertus*.

the divine feminine identified by several scholars in Cervantes' works. The dual qualities of Sol and Luna bestowed by Cervantes upon Costanza surpass those of feminine characters around her and in other stories of the collection. In his alchemical series, Jung refers to important texts relating exclusively to the separation and synthesis of psychic opposites: Sun is a masculine principle that signifies gold, whose sign it shares. But just as the "'philosophical' gold is not the 'common' gold" (1963, 92) ...the alchemical sol is a 'virtus,' more than a chemical substance, a mysterious power believed to have a generative and transformative effect" (1963, 94), while Luna, the Moon and the counterpart of Sol, is cold, moist, feebly shining or dark, feminine, corporeal, passive, representing silver and quicksilver" (1963, 94). Cervantes endows Costanza with all the qualities of the Philosophers' Stone, the reconciled opposites related to the masculine principle Sol, the feminine Luna, and the crucial proximity to silver and Mercury, which carries the secrets of alchemical process: *solve and coagula* –dissolve and fix—meaning the reconciliation of the solid with the volatile, according to Jung (1989, 271). Additionally, the specific colours of Costanza's appearance with a 'saya de paño verde, and hair the colour of gold (1614, 390), are identified traditionally with Hermes and alchemy, two elements also associated with Preciosa in *La gitana*.⁸

In addition to *Sol* and *Luna* in the initial description, Cervantes introduces the third and important element of water to Costanza's proximity: "Y una de las causas porque los mozos de mulas se huelgan de traer as sus amos a mi posada es por la abundancia de agua que hallan siempre en ella" (392). *Sol*, *Luna*, and Mercury are insisted upon in reference to Costanza in the verses sung in the middle of the story:

Que de las batallas triunfa,
cuarto cielo y *sol* segundo, que el primero deja a oscuras,
cuando acaso deja verse,
que el verle es caso y ventura;
grave embajador que hablas⁹
con tan extraña cordura,
que persuades callando,
aún más de lo que procuras.
Del segundo cielo tienes
no más que la hermosura,
y del primero, no más que el resplandor de *la luna*
esta esfera sois Constanza (409, my emphasis).

Other important contradictions apply to Costanza: she is an orphan but a daughter; only fifteen years of age, but wise; a portent of beauty and virtue but hidden under an anodyne appearance. From a general alchemical perspective, references to *hidden*, *orphan*, *widow*, *kitchen*, *silver*, *filth*, *fish*, and *marriage* frequently mentioned in the story are not random elements but echoes of what Jung identifies as the alchemical *lapis* from the alchemical texts he researched:

⁸ The colours green and gold are associated with Hermes Trismegistus. Gold is the metaphorical objective of the alchemical Great Work, namely the perfection of the soul, while the colour green indicates different alchemical elements, such as the Green Lion (poison, acid, vitriol), and the *Emerald Table*.

⁹ The 'grave embajador' is the Classical god Hermes/Mercury, identified in the Renaissance as Hermes Trismegistus, father of alchemy. Medieval and early modern alchemists attributed the *Emerald Tablet* to Hermes Trismegistus and associated the text to the creation of the philosophers' stone and the artificial production of gold.

I am an *orphan*, alone; nevertheless I am found everywhere. *I am one, but opposed to myself*. I am youth and old man at one at the same time. I have known neither father nor mother, because I have had to be *fetched out of the deep like a fish* or fell like a white stone from heaven. In woods and mountains, I roam, *but I am hidden in the innermost* soul of man, I am mortal for everyone, yet I am not touched by the cycle of eons (*MDR*, 270-72, my emphasis).

2. Chaos, Separation, descent, restoration, and ascent

Costanza, just as Preciosa in *La gitanilla* (whose real name will be revealed as being also Costanza) is taken from her aristocratic origins at birth and placed in a socially inferior environment, where she dwells for fifteen years. The description of Costanza's mother is that of an old, pregnant, and enfeebled woman:

El aparato era principal, y la peregrina representaba ser una gran señora; y aunque en la edad mostraba ser de cuarenta o pocos más años, no por eso dejaba de parecer hermosa en todo extremo. Venía enferma y descolorida, y *tan fatigada* que mando que luego luego le hiciesen la cama (426, my emphasis).

The significance of this paragraph is remarkable when associated to Jung's description of the alchemical *Vetula extenuata*, (Jung, 1963, 18), the mother of a precious child. Synonyms of the old widow are *Mater, matrix, Venus, regina, femina, virgo, and puella praegnans*. Furthermore, the name *child of the widow* is another name for the Philosophers' stone, furtherly linking Constanza to the alchemical *filia philosophorum*. Clearly, Cervantes uses alchemical allegories to the virginal or maternal quality of the old, anonymous widow which exists without a man, and yet is the "matter of all things" (Jung, 1963, 18). Before her death, Costanza's mother confesses that she is pregnant with a child of rape, a dishonourable origin which prevents the mother from acknowledging Costanza existence or introduction to her aristocratic social group, so the baby is left in the care of the innkeepers in Toledo when her mother dies.

Costanza's downward journey is necessary to ascend to her rightful status in society, so Cervantes surrounds Costanza with the symbolic filth that characterizes the lower realm, recurrently represented by the corruption and violence of muleteers, prostitutes, gamblers, procurers, and thieves and their dissolute behaviour. Costanza, just as any of the 'sleeping beauty' characters of old tales, is caught in a metaphorical slumber from the world. Sheltered in a kitchen in Toledo, she is at the lowest point of the circular process of transformation, living an obscure life where she rebuffs all the amorous intents aimed at her.

Costanza—just as Luisito, the redeeming son in *La fuerza de la sangre*—are children born of rape, a crude motif presented in both stories which allows Cervantes to introduce these characters as orphans whose story must be acknowledged and rectified, as Clamurro observes: "As a provisional generalization, one could say that the resolution of each of the *novelas* leads, in the comedic and positive cases, to the restoration of the main characters to their proper places" (38). From an alchemical point of view, Luisito and Constanza symbolize the alchemical philosophers' stone crucial to important transformation processes upon other characters in the stories that will propel them to this restoration. Despite the chaotic circumstances of their birth, these orphans possess wisdom and nobility that transcend their origin and surroundings. Most alchemical treatises refer to the *prima materia* or the philosophical stone with the name *orphan* because of its

unknown and modest origins, occasionally referred also as filthy or chaotic. In Cervantes's *Novelas*, images frequently relate to images identified in Jung's research of early alchemical treatises. *Orphan* refers to the obscure origins of the *prima materia* and is the name of a *gem* comparable to the modern *solitaire*—a diamond in the rough, a very apt name for the unique *lapis philosophorum* (Jung, *MC18*). Cervantes invariably refers to Costanza as a jewel, hidden to the world, uncorruptible despite her origin and surroundings. The extent to which Costanza is hidden is made clear when the mayor of the town inquires about her, and the innkeeper denies that such girl is under his employment (424).

Costanza's social journey downward, which begins at birth, must be rectified by anagnorisis, restoration in society, and a marriage suitable to her rightful status; therefore, the events of the novel are organized to be consistent with the alchemical stages of *Visita, Interiora, Terra, Rectificando, Invenies Occultum Lapidem* of the anagram V.I.T.R.I.O.L. attributed to Basilus Valentine. (Figure 1):



(Figure 1).

“Visit the interior of the earth and rectifying you will find the hidden stone,” in Basil Valentine's *Azoth* (1624)

Concealed to the world in Toledo, Costanza awaits the turn of destiny, caring for the silver, which is the most obvious clue of the alchemical significances of the story. In the end, the proximity to Constanza is the one influence that reconciles the elements of the *masa confusa* of immature male characters and rectifies the problematic events of the story.

While Constanza dwells in this metaphorical depth, Cervantes creates the second plot, where three mischievous male characters enter the scene: her father, her brother, and her future husband. It is at this point when the first events of the alchemical process identified again in Figure 1 move toward what Jung calls the process of individuation. Diego and his friend Tomás de Avendaño abandon their families to embark on a journey of personal discovery in the form of a social descent, a process that is in many ways compensatory to the alchemical process of initiation and renewal.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Eliade's *The Forge and the Crucible*.

Trece años, o poco más, tendría Carriazo, cuando, llevado de una inclinación picaresca, sin forzarle a ello algún mal tratamiento que sus padres le hiciesen, solo por su gusto y antojo, se desgarró, como dicen los muchachos, de casa de sus padres, y se fue por ese mundo adelante... Finalmente, el salió tan bien con el asunto de pícaro, que pudiera leer cátedra en la facultad al famoso de Alfarache (373).

The journey through the different stages of alchemy for the male characters corresponds to the search of the self and spiritual growth, a metaphorical process of gold-making or testing and perfecting matter in the fire and the crucible of the alchemist. Before Cervantes' time, seven operations –the ones represented in Figure 1—were agreed to build the path of the process to achieve the perfect result, so the events of the novel are carefully organized to follow the sequence that moves the wheel of the alchemical process. Psychologically, the process of individuation for young Diego and Avendaño begins with the questioning of the self. The original inconformity follows a precise sequence of events: the separation from their families, the temporary dissolution of family ties, the change of names, the journey to the metaphorical deep of filthy environments, the rectification of circumstances at the bottom of the wheel, and a final restoration characterized by a newly acquired consciousness.¹¹ The change of names related to young Carriazo/Lope Asturiano is a resource that Cervantes utilises throughout the *Novelas* and is clearly related to images and associations to alchemical mysteries, where the *prima materia* assumes a great diversity of names and appearances as it presents itself in different aspects of the Great Work, as Pernety explains: “La plupart sont expliqués dans ce Dictionnaire parce que, dissent Morien & Raymond Lulle, c'est dans l'intelligence de ces noms si différents d'une même chose, que consiste tout le secret de l'Art” (272).

Cervantes uses the word *picaresque* when referring to young Carriazo but does not follow the character outline of the traditional rogue, whose linear development into progressive corruption cannot be compared with the circular plot of *La ilustre fregona*, where characters descend to the lower realms but ascend restored, regenerated, and transformed for the better. Young Diego Carriazo/Lope Asturiano seems to represent faithfully the immature Hermetic trickster of mythology and literature: He wanders the world, lies to his parents, uses tricks to regain the donkey lost to the muleteers, and in general, spends his time travelling between two worlds, exhibiting the dual behaviour of a ruffian from the tuna fisheries and a gentleman from the upper class. The *prima materia* potential of the mischievous characters in the *Novelas ejemplares*, particularly their incorruptibility, is remarkably different from that of Lazarillo, Guzmán or don Pablos of picaresque stories, whose characters normally do not return renovated or with new awareness from the depths of corruption that they regularly visit. At the age of thirteen young Carriazo is at the top of the social class, surrounded by the comforts of privilege, but he is discontent and wants to see more of the world. His immaturity is thoroughly exposed in an episode of uncontrollable anger and violence:

Apeóse, en fin; pero con tan malas entrañas, que arremetió a su enemigo, y asiéndole con ambas manos por la garganta dio con él en el suelo, y tal golpe dio con la cabeza sobre una piedra, que se la abrió por dos partes, saliendo tanta sangre, que pensó que le había muerto (395).

¹¹ In his 2001 edition of the *Novelas*, Rico refers to this event as “Carriazo *transmutado* en Lope Asturiano” (373).

In his journey, young Carriazo enjoys the freedom of the inferior surroundings of seedy inns, dark alleys, and the tuna fisheries, which he fondly remembers, “Oh, pobres atunes míos que os pasáis este año sin ser visitados deste tan enamorado y aficionado vuestro! Pero el que viene yo haré la enmienda de manera que no se quejen de mí los mayores de las mis deseadas almadrabas” (401). In these places, young Carriazo is immersed in a metaphorical filth represented by anger, sloth, vice, crime, gambling, murder, and danger. Clearly, this is not the education desired for sons of *caballeros principales*, but young Carriazo emerges uncorrupted, just as his sister Constanza avoids corruption from the environment of the inn. From an alchemical point of view, these events represent the downward spiral of the *prima materia* crucial for the transformation, as Jung indicates:

The alchemists understood the return to chaos as an essential part of the Opus. This is the stage of the nigredo and mortificatio, which was then followed by the 'purgatorial fire' and the albedo. The spirit of chaos is indispensable to The Work, and it cannot be distinguished from the 'gift of the Holy Ghost (...) The unconscious is both good and evil and yet neither, the matrix of all potentialities (1963, 197).

In all the stories of the collection images are exceptionally symbolic. If readers were to penetrate Costanza's surroundings in the inn, Leocadia's dark isolation in *La fuerza de la sangre*, Isabella's captivity in England, Preciosa's life with the gypsies, and Carriazo's sojourn at the tuna fisheries they would be touched by the unpleasant smell of moral corruption, the grave, rotting fish, and salt water. Inherent good judgment is critical for these characters to resist corruption in the descent; thus, Cervantes endows his redeemable characters with qualities and distinctive strength to descend into chaos and navigate the labyrinth of the descent represented by the inn, a spatial choice symbolic of the lower realm which propels the characters through different paths to the high end of the alchemical wheel where the cure for all ills is found. Although for young Diego the resolution of the novel and the reconciliation with his family constitute an unconvincing conversion, this is an external situation, the reconciliation of father, brother and sister and the reparation of a terrible sin of the past are the most important events.

The insistence on the images of water and fish are also critical in an alchemical reading of *la ilustre fregona* as fish is a revered alchemical theriomorphic image, as described in the alchemical treatise the *Book of Lambspring* (1625).¹² First published as *De Lapide PhilosophicoTriga Chemicum* in Prague 1599, where two large fish seem to swim in different directions, following a circular pattern identified with the alchemical process which symbolizes the unconscious, according to Jung.¹³

The ancestral spirits play an important part in primitive rites of renewal [...] This atavistic identification with human and animal ancestors can be interpreted psychologically as an integration of the unconscious, a veritable bath of renewal in the life-source where one is once again a fish, unconscious as in sleep, intoxication, and death (1953, 125).

¹² The *Book of Lambspring* is well known as one of the gems from the *Musaeum Hermeticum* published in 1625 by Lucas Jennis in Frankfurt, according to McLean.

¹³ For Jung, the fish are the Cinedian entities; the word comes from the Greek word *kineo*, meaning to set in motion. Alternative definitions would be 'to originate' or 'to be the author of.' The root *kineo* is the basis of the word kinetic and the word cinema for moving pictures.

Furthermore, Jung indicates that, “the fish in dreams signifies the unborn child, because the child before its birth lives in the water like a fish; similarly, when the sun sinks into the sea, it becomes child and fish at once. The fish is therefore a symbol of renewal and rebirth” (1953, 198). Thus, in the alchemical interpretation of Costanza and Diego, both children, always surrounded by water – in the inn, in the fisheries, and in Diego’s job as a water bearer— undergo a process of renewal and rebirth. In his interpretation of alchemical images, Adam McLean explains that Emblem 1 of the *Book of Lambspring* “shows us two fish swimming in opposite directions in our inner sea: ‘The sea is the body, the two fish are Soul and Spirit,’ states the epigram. These two polarities coexist though work in different ways.” (Figure 2). Once reconciled as brother and sister, Costanza leaves the metaphorical slumber that has kept her in the kitchen of the inn while Diego completes a journey of self-discovery.



Figure 2.

Emblem 1. Two fishes swim in opposite directions on the surface of a lake or sea. In the background some sailors in a boat raise their arms in greeting.

Jung interprets this emblem in the *Book of Lambspring* as a psychological process of individuation through which two opposite characters set in motion the wheel of the alchemical process that culminates in the reconciliation of the alchemical brother and sister which is one of the goals of the Great Work. José Luis Rodríguez Guerrero mentions that the fish image is more iconographic than contained in alchemical treatises, representing a great treasure disdained by vain and careless practitioners. Faithful to the Hermetic tradition, in *La ilustre fregona* Cervantes constantly derides and exposes the ignorance of the vulgar people and rogues who will not understand the purposes of the Great Work, calling them dirty kitchen help, accusing them of being superficial, of not having visited the depths of the *clean filth*, and having no idea of what they are doing:

“¡Oh, picaros de cocina, sucios, gordos y lucios; pobres fingidos, tullidos, falsos, cicateruelos de Zocodover de la plaza de Madrid, ¡vistosos oracioneros... no os llaméis pícaros si no habéis cursado dos cursos en la academia de la pesca de los atunes! ¡Allí, allí, que esta en su centro el trabajo junto con la poltronería! Allí esta *la suciedad limpia*, la gordura rolliza, el hambre prompta, la hartura abundante (374/75).

Cervantes emphasises the ignorance of the unworthy mob in several episodes of *La Ilustre fregona*, “la mala bestia del vulgo, por la mayor parte, es mala, maldita y maldiciente (422) as they insult young Carriazo (409), deride Costanza for her virtues (410), and worst of all, show their disdain for poetry, an art which Cervantes has in high esteem as a lofty product of alchemy itself, as he mentions in *Don Quixote* :

La poesía, señor hidalgo, a mi parecer, es como una doncella tierna y de poca edad y en todo extremo hermosa, a quien tienen cuidado de enriquecer, pulir y adornar otras muchas doncellas, que son todas las otras ciencias, y ella se ha de servir de todas, y toda se han de autorizar con ella. Pero esta tal doncella no quiere ser manoseada, ni traída por las calles, ni publicada por las esquinas de las plazas ni por los rincones de los palacios. Ella es hecha de una alquimia de tal virtud, que quien la sabe tratar la volverá en oro purísimo de inestimable precio (...) No se ha de dejar tratar de los truhanes, ni del ignorante vulgo, incapaz de conocer ni estimar los tesoros que en ella se encierran (*OC* 1325).

The episodes related to the mob highlight the implication that thoughtless readers will never understand the mysteries hidden behind the specific images of rape, orphans, old women, kitchens, fish, and fisheries, and clean filth upon which Cervantes insists.

La ilustre fregona ends with the reconciliation of Constanza with her father and brother, as amends of past sins of rape and abandonment take place in the *Rectificando* stage of the process. The only way is now upward in the alchemical wheel and a new bright future for the family at the end of journey in Burgos. Critics argue that in *La fuerza de la sangre* and in *La Ilustre fregona*, the motif of rape courts the limits of acceptable narrative from a social and moral point of view and a reconciliation of feminine characters and their abusers is indefensible, but within an alchemical approach this event symbolizes a conjunction that must take place to reconcile what is solid (the feminine characters) with what is volatile (the male characters). Pernety indicates that marriage precedes sublimation and may symbolize the union of brother and sister as well, the reconciliation of contrary principles and in general, a positive event. The reconciliation of the title character with her father and brother and her restoration in society are the most important events in the story that represent the rectification of sins committed and a harmonious family life as the remedy (the *vera medicina*) for old Carriazo’s crime. Constanza represents the divine feminine, a model of perfection and Diego represents the dark brother that must regenerate. Surrounded by water in all the events of the story, they represent the philosophical fish swimming in the *Book of Lambspring*. It must be emphasized that reconciliation as *Conjunctio* is traditionally seen as an incestuous image only metaphorically, referring to the union of celestial *brother Sun* and *sister Luna*, who are indeed psychological opposites. In *La ilustre fregona*, there is a reconciliation of a father and a daughter and of brother and a sister, but the image of *conjunctio* as marriage is carefully presented through the marriage of Costanza with Tomás Pedro and the marriage of Diego with the daughter of the Corregidor. On the importance of marriage as conclusion to the novelas, Clamurro indicates,

In this light, *La ilustre fregona* is surely a most exemplary novela ejemplar, for it must be stressed that, by «social order», I am referring not only to the obvious theme of restored social harmony and the new microcosmic “fortunate society” symbolized by the marriage

of Costanza and Tomás (and the two other young couples), but also to the structural and typological implications of “societies” as Cervantes has deployed them in this *novela*.

In conclusion, an esoteric/alchemy reading of Cervantes’ *Novelas* is valuable as it seeks to understand the mysterious images and plot structure about which Cervantes warned his readers in the Prologue to the *Novelas ejemplares*.¹⁴ In the series, Cervantes utilised a great amount of elements of the esoteric traditions known in his time, such as alchemy and magic, which according to Hanegraaf:

These perspectives may still not be acceptable within academic discourse, which has approaches and methodological principles all of its own, but need not on that account be dismissed...Like art or poetry, they may be respected as pursuits and viewpoints that are clearly different from academic ones, but that have their own traditions and legitimacy, and have greatly contributed to the richness of Western culture (WEA, Hanegraaf, 378).

While alchemy may be a bridge that connects Cervantes’ vision and hopes for the improvement of the human condition with Jung and his processes for individuation and adaptation, Jung’s views of archetypal psychology and Christian esotericism are still challenging.¹⁵ This study seeks mostly to highlight the fact that Cervantes, just as Jung, saw in alchemical images principles of desirable, positive transformation. Cervantes’ vision is rather chimeric, but allegories are brilliantly adapted to the events of the novel to propose individual life changes that could in turn change society. In that sense, psychology and alchemy mirror each other in their aspirations and processes of attaining awareness. The specific images incorporated by Cervantes in *La ilustre fregona* that were also identified by Jung in an unrelated manner in his series on psychology and alchemy, transcend the possibility of coincidence and highlight Cervantes’ keen awareness of the human condition and society that transcends centuries. As a conclusion for his article related to the philosophical fish, Rodríguez Guerrero challenges scholars to ‘undertake the difficult task of breaking the seal of *La Ilustre fregona*’ and its mysteries. An alchemical interpretation of the images and themes contained in *La ilustre fregona* illuminates the text for readers and reevaluates its aesthetic value, providing exciting clues about the nature of the hidden mysteries proudly acknowledged by Cervantes in the prologue.

¹⁴ The historical presence of practical, philosophical, and spiritual alchemy in Spain has been amply documented by de Luanco, Forshaw, Garcia Font, and Arola.

¹⁵ See Wehr’s contribution to *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (1992).

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