Robert Folger*

Pero Mexía and the *otium* of varied reading

https://doi.org/10.1515/iber-2019-0014

Abstract: *Otium*(leisure), idleness (*ociosidad*) and labor (*negocio*/*trabajo*) are central categories in Pedro Mexía's *Silva de varia lección* (1540), one of the most influential and popular miscellanea of the Early Modern Period, in Spain and Europe. In his work we see the breakdown of the opposition of *ocio* and *negocio* in the context of a new aristocratic ideology. Mexía's reflections on leisure and intellectual labor shed new light on the nature of the mental sufferings of Cervantes's Don Quijote, and contemporaries' views of the *hidalgo*'s favorite pastime: reading.

Introduction

The Spanish Golden Age offers the most prominent victim of *otium*, or leisurely reading, in World Literature: Don Quijote. In the first part of the novel, published in 1605, the author is already playing with the literary conventions and learned practices of his time in the paratexts: The dedication to the Duke of Béjar is an example of outrageous plagiarism, although this can be partly attributed to the printers.[1] The laudatory poetry is not penned by famous authors, but attributed to characters from chivalric romances, such as the sorceress Urganda the Unknown, or the squire of Amadis of Gaul. We find a dialogue in sonnet form between Babieca, the legendary horse of Spain's national hero, El Cid, and Rocinante, Don Quijote's nag.

The prologue carries this form of parody and metafictional play to extremes. It is directed to the "desocupado lector", the "idle" or carefree reader.[2] In his fore-

1 See Franciso Rico (1996: 317). Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch was the first to notice that the text is mostly a copy taken from Fernando de Herrera´s *Obras de Garcilaso de la Vega con anotaciones* (1580).

2 Despite its European diffusion and influence, Mexía´s work is today largely unknown to cultural and intellectual historians outside of Hispanism. In order to facilitate the interdisciplinary dialogue, I provide translations of all quotes in Spanish. Translations into English are taken from John Ormsby (1885), available from the Cervantes Project (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha),

***Corresponding author: Robert Folger,** Universität Heidelberg, Romanisches Seminar, Seminarstrasse 3, D-69117 Heidelberg, Germany, E-Mail: robert.folger@rose.uni-heidelberg.de

word, Cervantes cultivates the art of being unable to write a prologue. He muses that he would like to praise his book but his "sterile, illtilled wit" ("estéril y mal cultivado ingenio mío"; I, Prólogo, 1989: 79) does not afford more than a "dry, shriveled, whimsical offspring, full of thoughts of all sorts" ("hijo seco, avellanado, antojizado y lleno de pensamientos varios"; ib.). The reason is that the novel and its protagonist were conceived in prison "where every misery is lodged and every doleful sound makes its dwelling" ("donde toda incomodidad tiene su asiento y donde todo triste ruido hace su habitación"; ib.). *Don Quijote* is supposedly shaped by an environment characterized by the uneasy idleness that paralyzes the spirit and stifles creativity. The reader addressed by Cervantes is, by contrast, "desocupado", a reader who enjoys tranquil leisure, *otium*, free from the troubles of everyday life, who can dedicate himself in freely chosen and serene activity to the arts and sciences – and to the cultivation of the self.

The motif of joyless and unproductive idleness, which causes writer's block, is further elaborated when Cervantes presents himself in the typical pose of the melancholic – elbow on the desk and head on hand[3] – feeling insufficiently educated to adorn his humble work with grave aphorisms and learned glosses. He confesses to his readers that he does not have famous friends who could provide the usual catalogue of sonnets, eulogies, and epigrams. His rescue comes in the guise of "a certain lively, clever friend ("amigo gracioso y bien entendido"; ib.: 80), who enters his study and quickly dispels the author's worries. The jolly friend recommends that Cervantes invent the preliminary texts himself, and attribute them to famous men. He should fill the glosses with bits and pieces of Latin quotes that he certainly remembers. The friend insists that it is sufficient to sprinkle a few pseudo-learned, trivial references in the text "to prove yourself a man of erudition in polite literature and cosmography" ("para mostraros hombre erudito en letras humanas y cosmógrafo"; ib.: 83).[4] The list of the authorities Cervantes supposedly used in his work can be copied from one of the books with an alphabetized catalogue.

> You have only to look out for some book that quotes them all, from A to Z as you say yourself, and then insert the very same alphabet in your book.
> [N]o habéis de hacer otra cosa que buscar un libro que los acote todos, desde la A hasta la Z, como vos decís. Pues ese mismo abecedario pondréis vos en vuestro libro. (ib.: 84)

<http://cervantes.tamu.edu/english/ctxt/DQ_Ormsby/part1_DQ_Ormsby.html> (accessed 26.08.2019). s. p.

3 See Erwin Panofsky (1971: 156–164).

4 Pedro Mexía had been *cosmógrafo* of the *Casa de la Contratación* in Seville (1989: Castro 17) since 1537, thus considered a preeminent man of science and learning.

He concludes:

> [I]f I mistake not, this book of yours has no need of any one of those things you say it wants, for it is, from beginning to end, an attack upon the books of chivalry.
> [S]i bien caigo en la cuenta, este vuestro libro no tiene necesidad de ninguna cosa de aquellas que vos decís que le falta, porque todo él es una invectiva contra los libros de caballerías [...]. (ib.)

Cervantes's celebrated foreword is generally considered a diatribe against his rival, Lope de Vega.[5] The great innovator and star of the popular Spanish theatre (*comedia*) was fond of presenting second-hand erudition as his own; as did many others. This suggests that Cervantes's prologue and preliminary texts can be read as a general satire or criticism of humanist scholarly practices.

This view would unduly simplify things, on one hand, because Cervantes also engaged in this practice, and because he sweepingly condemns learned references and trivia.[6] He thinks that this kind of "false" erudition is inappropriate for light, entertaining and humorous literature, violating the rhetorical principle of the *aptum*.[7] On the other hand, one of the central themes of the prologue is melancholic idleness. We have seen that this idleness is not counteracted by intense intellectual activity and engagement with the *auctores*, but by the light reading of compilations and anthologies. Cervantes's alter ego in the prologue overcomes his writer's block and melancholic inactivity only when he listens to his friend's advice "to take it easy", to resort to compiled and digested knowledge.[8]

The motif of leisure is of crucial importance in the exposition of Don Quijote's character, and the foregrounding of his adventures. Cervantes presents an elderly

5 Alfonso de Fernández de Avellaneda´s "apocryphal" continuation clearly indicates that the Spanish Golden Age reader understood Cervantes´s prologue as a slander of Lope, "of the one whom foreign nations so deservedly celebrate, and to whom our own [nation] owes so much for having entertained the Spanish theaters with marvelous and countless plays" ("a quien tan justamente celebran las naciones mas estranjeras y la nuestra debe tanto por hauer entretenido honestisssima y fecundamente tantos años los teatros de España con estupendas è inumerables comedias [...]": ib.: 2011: 10).

6 Regarding Cervantes´s use of Mexía´s *Silva de varia lección*, see Carlos Castillo (1945).

7 Anthony Close argues that *Don Quijote* was primarily a reaction against the picaresque novel and the Lopesque *comedia* because both "comical" genres violated the crucial principles of comedy and satire: "appropriateness" ("propiedad") and "discretion" ("discreción"); see particularly Close´s chapter 2 (2002: 17–72).

8 Cervantes´s alter ego does follow his friend´s advice in all respects, but through the transcription of the fictive conversation, he demonstrates that he is familiar with the practice. Rhetorical pieces like Don Quijote´s oration on the Golden Age, and the "arms and letters", in particular, indicate that he did not hesitate to reproduce topical cultural references in contexts he deemed appropriate.

rural *hidalgo* named Alonso Quijano, who has a comfortable livelihood and cultivates activities befitting his rank. However, this gentleman also has a vice:

> You must know, then, that the above-named gentleman whenever he was at leisure (which was mostly all the year round) gave himself up to reading books of chivalry with such ardour and avidity that he almost entirely neglected the pursuit of his field-sports, and even the management of his property.
> Es, pues, de saber que este sobredicho hidalgo, los ratos que estaba ocioso (que eran los más del año), se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza y aun la administración de su hacienda. (Cervantes, I,1, 1989: 98)

The damage is psychosomatic rather than financial, because the gentleman's passion is books of chivalry whose archaic language and confused line of thought fascinate and exhaust him.

> Over conceits of this sort the poor gentleman lost his wits, and used to lie awake striving to understand them and worm the meaning out of them. […]
> In short, he became so absorbed in his books that he spent his nights from sunset to sunrise, and his days from dawn to dark, poring over them; and what with little sleep and much reading his brains got so dry that he lost his wits. His fancy grew full of what he used to read about in his books […].
> Con estas razones perdía el pobre caballero el juicio, y desvelábase por entenderlas y desentrañarles el sentido […].
> En resolución, él se enfrascó tanto en su letura, que se le pasaban las noches leyendo de claro en claro, y los días de turbio en turbio; y así, del poco dormir y del mucho leer se le secó el celebro de manera que vino a perder el juicio. LLenósele la fantasía de todo aquello que leía en los libros […]. (ib.: 99–100)

It occurs to him to become a knight errant himself and take the nom de guerre Don Quijote. We know how the story continues and ends. However, little attention has been given to the fact that Alonso Quijano makes poor use of his abundant leisure time: He exhausts himself with extended fictional and fantastic texts, reading them intensely, trying to fathom their meaning – in vain, of course.

The problem takes clearer shape after Don Quijote's first sally, when he is carried home, badly battered, and his family and friends examine his library. His collection of books is of a considerable size: "more than a hundred volumes of big books very well bound, and some other small ones" ("más de cien cuerpos de libros grandes, muy bien encuadernados, y otros pequeños"; ib., I,6: 129).[9] The

9 Regarding the relation between Cervantes´s and Don Quijote´s libraries, see also Daniel Eisenberg (1986).

library contains mostly romances of chivalry, but also pastoral novels, epic-heroic poetry, and some love poetry. However, we do not find the florilegia and encyclopedias and reference books mentioned in the prologue, which could have provided the *hidalgo* with scholarly wisdom – without undue effort on his part. Don Quijote's library is characterized by a lack of variety; his readings are one-sided and overly exciting or distressing.

Mexía's *Silva de varia lección* (1540)

A work known to and used by Cervantes could have remedied Don Quijote's fatal selection of books and his reading practices:[10] Pero Mexía's (also known as Pedro Mexía, or Pedro Mejía) *Silva de varia lección*, or *Foreste or collection of histories*, as Thomas Fortescue translated the title in 1571 (London: John Kyngston).[11] Pero Mexía was born in 1497 in Seville.[12] He came to be known as one of Spain's foremost humanists, exchanging letters with European scholars like Erasmus of Rotterdam. Mexía built his fame on his work as a historiographer,[13] achieving the position of official chronicler of Charles V, but he was and is today best known for the aforementioned *Silva de varia lección*.

This work was first published by Dominico de Robertis in 1540 in Seville, and comprised three parts, divided into 117 chapters.[14] Its immediate success encouraged Mexía to compose an extended version with additional ten chapters, printed in the same year in Seville by Jacopo Cromberger. With the ninth edition, printed in Valladolid by Juan de Villaquirán in 1550–1551, the *Silva* achieved its definite

10 See note 6.

11 See Antonio Castro (1989: 7–58). The 1613–1619 translation uses the title *The treasurie of auncient and moderne times*. The first German translation, by Lucas Zolekhofer (Basel: 1564), is titled *Petri Messiae von Sibilia vilualtige beschreibung*; Johann Beat Graß's 1570 translation (Straßburg) reads *Schöne historie, Exempel, Underweisungen*. It might be possible to establish a connection to Claudius Aelianus's *Varia historia*. The Latin *Varia historia* renders the Greek *Ποικίλη ιστορία* (*poikílos historia*) as "varicolored history." In his *Silva curiosa* (see note 44), Julián Medrano equates colors and style, postulating variety as a requirement for mental health.

12 See Castro (1989: 9–20).

13 Ib. (39–45).

14 Regarding the editions and their European reception see ib. (53–58). The Seville printers used the original plates for the frontispiece for subsequent editions. Only the center piece, which contained only text in the *editio princeps*, was replaced by a portrait of Pero Mexía, labeled as "magnífico caballero", emphasizing the nobility of the authorial subject. The addition of, "many pleasant and curious things", "muchas cosas, y muy agradables y curiosas", indicates that the generation after Mexía did not consider it necessary to maintain the didactic fiction construed by the author; see below.

form, with an additional fourth part containing twenty-two new chapters.[15] Mexía's work was a European bestseller, with thirty-two Spanish editions and at least seventy-five printings in other European languages (thirty Italian, thirty-one French, five English, five Dutch, and four German editions). The popularity of the *Silva* is also attested by the fact that Mexía found imitators outside of Spain, making him a founder of genre.[16]

Although there can be no doubt that the *Silva de varia leccción* is a text of considerable importance for the history of Early Modern culture, in Spain and elsewhere, we have only a few studies of the text in its own right. Most scholars are not interested in the *Silva* per se, but in the works of famous authors (Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Harsdörffer, Grimmelshausen, Cervantes, Mateo Alemán) who used the *Silva*,[17] incorporating, explicitly or not, the information it provided, or elaborating the stories provided by the Sevillian scholar. In literary history, Mexía's *Silva* has a marginal status as a para-literary genre, and as context or fodder for glosses and footnotes.

Given the nature of the genre, it is difficult to summarize the content of Mexía's *Silva*.[18] One focus of the compendium is natural philosophy, regarding inanimate as well as animate nature. In relation to humans, medicine is of major importance. Mexía, the chronicler, displays historical knowledge everywhere, particulary in the many sections on secular and church and salvational history. His interest in history also manifests itself in numerous biographical sketches. The inventor *topos*, which was propelled by Polydore Vergile's *De inventoribus rerum*, one of the fashions of the time,[19] is reflected in many chapters. Besides these *topoi*, the *Silva de varia lección* also satisfies trivial curiosity by relating many astonishing and marvelous (if not miraculous) facts and stories.[20]

Mexía excerpted and adapted more than 250 authors for his work, most of them authors of Latin sources, or texts that had been translated into Latin.[21] After Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis*, the Bible is the most frequently quoted text.[22] Mexía has a preference for Latin models of *miscellanea* (Aulus Gelius, Macrobius,

15 See Castro (1989: 54–55).

16 See ib. (53).

17 See for instance Adolf Bitter (1989) on Mexía and Grimmelshausen, and Don Cameron Allen (1941) on Shakespeare´s use of the *Silva* in his *As You Like It*.

18 See Castro (1989: 79–88).

19 See ib. (87–88). Regarding Polydore Vergile see Catherine Atkinson (2007) and Helmut Zedelmaier (2003).

20 See Mercedes Alcalá Galán (1996: 12).

21 See Castro (1989: 107–120).

22 Regarding Mexía´s sources see Castro (1989: 104–120), see also Isaías Lerner´s (1992; 1993) analysis of the use of classic ("poética") and Spanish ("autores") authors.

Gaius Julius Solinus, as well as some near-contemporary authors like Pietro Crinito and Lodovico Celio Ricchieri [Caelius Rhodiginus]). The sources he exploited most were texts that could provide him with information on his specific interests (for instance, Pliny and Valerius Maximus).[23] As indicated by the title, the *Silva* is a florilegium in which the author, often addressing his readers, shapes his sources into an easily readable form, reaching new layers of readers by translating the excerpts into the vernacular language.

Varied reading and *ociosidad*

In his jumble of materials we also find a chapter on leisure, *otium* – which is actually a chapter on work: "Chapter XXXII, which contains much praise and the advantages of work and the benefits it has; and also the damage and evils which are caused by 'ociosity'. It is a remarkable chapter, moral and beneficial" ("Capítulo XXXII. En que se contienen muchos loores y excelencias del trabajo y los bienes que siguen dél; y también los daños y males que causa la ociosidad. Es notable capítulo, y moral y provechoso"; I, 32, 1989: 446).[24] The meaning of "ociosidad", fluctuating between laziness, leisure, and *otium*, is key to understanding this chapter, which is apparently so important to Mexía that he breaks his own rules and discusses it in some detail:[25] "I am determined to slow down a little and spend more time on this than I do on the other topics" ("determinado estoy de hazerlo y detenerme un poco, en esto, más de lo que suelo en los otros propósitos"; I, 32, 1989: 446)

> It seems to me that I see the reader scared or angry to read the title of this chapter, assuming that I want to praise work, which is generally the most avoided and loathed thing in the world.
> Parésceme que veo el lector espantado y enojado de ver el título deste capítulo, viendo que quiero yo alabar el trabajo, siendo la cosa más huyda y aborrescida comúnmente de todos los hombres, de quantas ay en el mundo. (I;32, 446)

Mexía establishes an intimate dialogue with his readers, in a way that would characterize the modern essay.[26] Referring to various *auctores*, Mexía tries to convince

23 See Castro (1989: 118). On the use of Latin *auctores*, see also Isaías Lerner (1992); Lerner (1993) has also specifically studied the use of Spanish sources.

24 All translations from Mexía´s *Silva* are mine.

25 See Brian Vickers (1990); the discussion of *otium* versus idleness was not unique to Spain, but took a particular shape there (see below).

26 Alcála Galán interprets the dialogic structure as a sign of the text´s modernity, relating it to media change: "Silent Reading, which would gradually become the norm with the proliferation of

his disturbed or disgruntled readers that work is the human means to recover what has been lost through eating, particularly the forbidden fruit in Eden. Labor fortifies body and soul because it consumes the "bad humors", thus improving the *ingenium*, the inner and outer senses and mental faculties.[27] Only the man who works can experience the pleasure of resting. With work Mexía means not only physical labor, but also "spiritual work" ("trabajo espiritual"), that is, the intellectual work of the ancient sages ("sabios antiguos"). Labor is the origin of all arts and sciences.

Work is well-nigh the principle of nature.

> What else is nature but an incessant work of creation, formation, making, unmaking, production, destruction, change, organization and constant working, without ever stopping or resting?
> ¿qué otra cosa es naturaleza sino continuo trabajo de criar, formar, hazer, deshazer, produzir, corromper, alterar, organizar y obrar continuamente sin parar jamás ni descansar? (I, 32, 1989: 450).

It comes as no surprise that Mexía continues with a discussion of the "ocio" or "ociosidad", idleness as the antagonistic force of labor. It is not only the body that suffers from *ociosidad*, but also the mind.

> Even man's ingenuity is dulled if not used, and spirit and industry are lost and despondent. The bodily forces are impaired and destroyed.
> Hasta los ingenios de los hombres se entorpecen, no usados; y el ánimo y esfuerço se pierde y acobarda, las fuerças corporales se enflaquecen y destruyen. (I, 32, 1989: 451)

The reader is somewhat relieved when Mexía, after a prolonged discussion of the perniciousness of idelness, finds something reasonably mollifying to say.

---

the book – in its new form as a personal object – is an achievement of human freedom. The act of reading becomes a dialogue between book and reader, inaugurating an intimate space because individual access to an object become possible, which is of considerable value, consumable and circulating, and whose content is less and less seen as the essence of the inaccessible"; my translation ["La lectura en voz baja, que se van generalizando paulatinamente con la proliferación del libro – con su nueva entidad de objeto personal –, es un logro de la libertad humana. El acto de leer se convierte en un diálogo entre el libro y el lector, lo que inaugura un espacio íntimo al ser posible el acceso individual a un objeto de valor relativo, consumible, circulante y cuyo contenido es cada vez menos sublimado como esencia de lo inaccesible" (1996: 17)].

27 Next to imbalanced nutrition, premodern medicine considered the lack of bodily activity the major source of bodily and mental diseases. Lovesickness (*amor hereos*), for instance, was considered an affliction of elites, who were exempt from physical labor; see Robert Folger (2001: 27–81).

> But one should not understand so sternly what I say, that is, that people should neither eat nor sleep and have some rest, because *otium* (*ocio*) and diversion are occasionally appropriate. Be aware, however, that it [sc. leisure] has the function of being able to get back to work better, and leisure should be spent in decent and good pastimes and recreation. […] The moral Seneca says that only those who exercise themselves in wisdom are those who know and have proper/real *otium*. And Plutarch affirms that the wise man should spend his resting periods exercising the sciences and prudence.
> Pero no se entienda tan rigurosamente lo que digo, que no ayan de dormir ni comer los hombres por trabajar y tomar algún descanso, que lícito es el ocio y pasatiempo alguna vez; pero sabed que se ha de tomar para volver mejor al trabajo y en honestos y buenos pasatiempos y descansos. […] El moral Séneca dize que solo los que se exercitan en la sabiduría son los que saben y tienen justo ocio. Y Plutarco afirma que el sabio su descanso en exercicio de sciencia y prudencia lo deven gastar. (I, 32, 1989: 457)

He reaches the depressing conclusion that there is no real leisure in this life, but only in heaven, reserved for those the Almighty rewards for the work done in their earthly existence. Pero Mexía is familiar with the Greco-Roman authorities on *otium* but,[28] apparently, in his view, the "right otium" ("justo ocio"), can barely be justified.

The dedication

In spite of his ardent apology for labor and the no less outspoken condemnation of useless idleness, the reader of the *Silva* has the nagging feeling that Mexía is attempting to justify pastimes (*pasatiempos*) by a slight of hand, because the question arises naturally whether the reading of the *Silva* can be as seen as *ocio justo*, or *ociosidad*. In his dedication to Emperor Charles V (labled "prólogo", and followed by "proemio y prefación", the actual introduction) Mexía refers to Vitruvius, who dedicated his book on architecture to Augustus, and Oppian of Anazarbus, who wrote "a book that was about fish" ("un libro que tractava de los peces"; 1989: 156) for the emperor, as well as Iulius Pollux and Diophanes of Nicaea, who presented a book on agriculture to dignitaries, "and in this way many others about no more noble subjects" ("y desta manera, otros muchos de no más alta materia"; ib.). This juxtaposition of these books on lowly human activities and his own work is not only a form of the false modesty, typical of exordial rhetoric. It also is an indication of his awareness that he must legitimate his own writerly project.

Mexía is not content with expressing the hope that his book may contain something which does not offend the emperor's ears, which he enjoys reading or listening to.

28 See Sarah Culpepper Stroup (2010: 37–65).

> Because everything I write here is taken from great and approved authors, like somebody who plants saplings from excellent trees in his beds or garden. And although I have not done it as I should have, some good stories and topics are presented. I chose this manner of writing chapters without order and without dwelling on a subject, in imitation of the great authors of antiquity who wrote books in this guise.
> Porque lo que aquí escrivo, todo es tomado de muy grandes y aprovados auctores, como el que planta de muy buenos árboles para su huerta o jardín. Y, aunque no tan bien como deviera, todavía se tocan algunas historias y materias buenas. Escogí, assi, esta manera de escrevir por capítulos sin orden y sin perseverar en un propósito, a imitación de grandes auctores antiguos que escribieron libros desta manera. (ib.: 159–160)

Mexía explains and justifies his method because he imitates the "grave" classical authors, implicitly vindicating his choice of topics (*propósitos*) in his *miscellanea*.

Indeed there is a need to defend some of his choices, for instance the questionable chapter 38, titled "some strange and unusual inclinations and peculiarities of men" ("algunas inclinaciones y propiedades de hombres, estrañas y apartadas de las comunes de los otros"; I, 28, 1989: 406). Referring to Seneca, Mexía tells us about Senecio, a man who desired everything oversized: his horses, his shoes and clothing, and also women: "he sought and loved the very tall ones" ("buscava y amava las muy altas"; I, 28, 1989: 408). Mexía gathers stories and anecdotes of men who never laughed, ate, or drank, women who fed on spiders, men who could move their ears like horses. He takes great pains to make clear that he does not tell tall tales: "all the stories are true, because I do not pay attention to poets and tales which always touch on miraculous things" ("son todas <las> hystorias verdaderas. Porque de poetas y fábulas no hago caso; los quales siempre tocan cosas maravillosas"; I, 28, 1989: 412). Nevertheless, it is all too obvious that neither the writer nor the readers of all these curiosities and whimsicalities could interpret the time spent with the text as as *trabajo* or *ocio justo*, that is, as work or productive and edifying leisure.

Overall, however, the *Silva de varia lección* provides "useful" information. This information is always presented in digested and easily digestible form. We have already seen that conciseness, *brevitas*, is an essential criterion, and that Mexía explicitly wants to present his material without order ("sin orden").[29] The chapters are not interconnected in terms of structures or topics. This means that the book can be opened anywhere and anytime, for light reading. The contents are the fruits of "varied readings", and enable the reader a *varia lección*, as well. *Brevitas* and *varietas* are the criteria which define the entertainment value of the books, or, conversely, guarantee that reading it can be considered a pastime (*pa-*

29 See Castro (1989: 65).

satiempo). Thus the apology for work in the *Silva* is not a polemic against *otium*; it is, like the prologue, part and parcel of a strategy to justify the writer's concept, contributing, at the same time, to entertaining *varietas*.

From his attitude toward curiosities and its relation to time well spent, it can be seen that Pero Mexía does not simply accept the notion of *otium*, as he found it in his classic and patristic sources. In order to find out what he intended and how he justified it, we must turn to the actual prologue.

The prologue

Mexía claims that his book is characterized by "usefulness" ("utilidad"), for his fatherland ("patria"), and his friends ("amigos"; 1989: 161).

> Since I have spent a great part of my life with reading and browsing books, that is, with various studies, it occurred to me that, if I have attained some erudition or knowledge about things (which is surely very little), I have the duty to communicate about it, make it public and share it with my countrymen, writing a few things accessible for everybody.
> [A]viendo gastado mucha parte de mi vida en leer y passar muchos libros, y assi en varios estudios, parescióme que, si desto yo avía alcançado alguna erudición o noticia de cosas (que, cierto, es todo muy poco), tenía obligación a lo comunicar y hazer participantes dello a mis naturales vecinos, escribiendo yo alguna cosa que fuesse común y pública a todos. (Prólogo 161)

The Spanish humanist reasons that he is obliged to share his humble erudition with his fellow "citizens", who have not spent as much time reading as he has, or who have not had the leisure for reading. The humanist's productive *ocio justo* generates the material for the pastimes of the others.

> And since in this, like in other things, the peculiarities and personalities of men are so diverse that everyone goes his own way, I followed mine and decided that it was good to write this book this way, with stories and chapters about diverse subjects, without order. This is why I gave it the name *Silva*, because in the woods and forests plants grow without order or rule.
> Y como en esto, como en los demás, los ingenios de los hombres son tan varios y cada una va por diverso camino, siguiendo yo al mío, escogí y hame parescido escrevir este libro así, por discursos y capítulos de diversos propósitos, sin perseverar ni guardar orden en ellos; y por esto le puse nombre *Silva*, porque en las selvas y bosques están las plantas y árboles sin orden ni regla. (Prólogo; 1989: 161–162)

Since taste and interests (*ingenios*) are diverse, Mexía treats diverse topics. A strict system or order would not accommodate the diversity of individual dispositions, because everyone must find his own path in the forest of erudition – or lose his way, as implied by the metaphor. The difference between finding one's own way

and losing orientation equals the difference between *ocio justo* and *passatiempo* or *ociosidad*.

Although the forest of texts processes and provides scholarly knowledge, the pragmatics of the *Silva* do not point primarily to education, properly speaking. Mexía's explanation of why he wrote his *Silva de varia lección* in Spanish makes this clear.

> And because the Castilian language, if you consider it well, does not have to recognize the preeminence of any other language, I do not know why we should not dare to adapt in our language the inventions made in others, that is, the discussion of grave topics, as the Italians and other nations have done in theirs, because in Spain, there is no lack of sharp and lofty wits.
> Y pues la lengua castellana no tiene, si bien se considera, por qué reconozca ventaja a otra ninguna, no sé por qué no osaremos en ella tomar invenciones que en las otras y tractar materias grandes, como los italianos y otras naciones lo hacen en las suyas, pues no faltan en España agudos y altos ingenios. (Prólogo; 1989: 164)

The claim that he treats "materias grandes" in the vernacular needs further elaboration.

> That is why I, who boasts not only knowledge of the language I have learned from my parents, but also of the one I learned from my teachers, wanted to share the fruits of these vigils with those who do not understand Latin books, and I hope that they will appreciate this work, because they have the greatest need and desire to learn these things. Therefore I have surely tried to speak about matters that are not trivial and circulate among the crowd, and that are per se important and useful, at least in my opinion.
> Por lo qual yo, preciándome tanto de la lengua que aprendí de mis padres como de la que me mostraron preceptores, quise dar estas vigilias a los que no entienden los libros latinos, y ellos principalmente quiero que me agradezcan este trabajo, pues son los más y los más necesidad y desseo suelen tener en saber estas cosas. Porque yo, cierto, he procurado hablar de materias que no fuesen muy comunes ni anduviesen por el vulgo, o que ellas, de sí, fuesen grandes y provechosas, a lo menos a mi juycio. (Ib.)

This argumentation connects logically with the initial postulate that the professional scholar has the duty to share his knowledge with his fellow citizens.[30]

Since these do not know Latin, Mexía is forced to translate this knowledge into Spanish. However, the author does not simply want to popularize his learned readings. Although the prologue speaks of important matters, the author had made clear in the dedication that the subject matter of the *Silva* was not the "materias grandes". At the same time, he shuns trivial matters ("materias [...] communes"), which he associates with the *vulgo*, understood not as just "the people",

30 See Castro (1989: 69–70).

but as rabble, *hoi polloi*. The pragmatic orientation of the *Silva* clearly aims at a group of readers and buyers who have the necessary economic means and, particularly, free time, to become *desocupados lectores*, to use Cervantes's expression. These intended readers do not (only) crave sensationalist stories, as indicated by Mexía's persistent attempt to provide scientific explanations.[31]

Moreover, it is obvious that Mexía does not privilege the vernacular language per se; he associates Castilian with Italian, suggesting a competition between the two. Thus he inscribes his work into a cultural current that characterizes 16th-century Spanish humanism, connecting his work, after all, with the *grandes materias* of cultural history. One of the most important cultural developments in Early Modern Spain is the importation, or, to use Mexía's metaphors, the implantation of Italian Petrarchism, that is, the sonnet in its classic from and its underlying notion of passionate love. The two protagonists of this process were Juan Boscán (Joan Boscà), a Catalan nobleman, and Garcilaso de la Vega, the great Castilian poet and soldier, who would himself become the great model author for a subsequent generation of Spanish poets.

In 1990, Ignacio Navarrete studied the complex ideological premises and implications of this phenomenon in his *Orphans of Petrarch*. According to Navarrete, Italian humanism suffered from a feeling of "belatedness", as regards the cultural and linguistic flourishing of Greco-Roman antiquity. This belatedness manifested itself, in psychoanalytic terms, as the wish to emulate and surpass a father figure. At the same time, the triadic humanist model of history with a cultural apogee (Antiquity), decline (Middle Ages), and Renaissance produced an awareness in humanists of the precariousness of their own situation, and the always threatening possibility of imminent decadence, which could only be counteracted or prevented by a "fixation" and codification of culture, in terms of the refinement of the vernacular, and the establishment of a national canon.

Regarding humanist belatedness, Spain's situation was even more complex, according to Navarrete. On one hand, Spain was the hegemonic political and military European power, particularly in Italy, which was largely controlled by the Spanish crown. Culturally, however, Spanish intellectuals felt not only inferior to ancient Rome and Greece, but also saw themselves in the shadow of Italian culture. A solution to this problem was a double *translatio*: the *translatio imperii*, the west-ward migration of power, was already accomplished, and the *translatio stu-*

31 Rosemarie Zeller sees in the *Silva* a genuine "scientific interest"; she interprets the small folio format of the original printing as an indication that it must be seen in the context of the Early Modern sciences (1999: 81).

dii, the transfer of learning and arts, was only delayed.[32] The idea is already formulated in 1492 by Antonio de Nebrija in the foreword to his famous grammar of Castilian, the first grammar of a European vernacular language. Nebrija declares that the language has always been the fellow of the empire,[33] claiming that his body of grammatical rules will essentially contribute to codify and thus preserve the Castilian language.[34]

This constellation evoked by Nebrija is reflected in Mexía's prologue, where he claims the dignity of the Castilian language and expresses the desire to measure up culturally to Italy. Spain certainly has the potential, as there is no lack of acuteness (*agudeza*) and ingenuity (*ingenio*), the two categories that would be essential to develop aesthetics and cultural self-definition in the Golden Age of Spanish culture.[35]

Boscán's and Garcilaso's contribution to the translation of Italian culture and learning and thus an affirmation of a Spanish identity was the "naturalization" and cultivation of Italianate poetry. For Navarrete, the reception and adaptation of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528) was of decisive importance in this process.[36] The two Spanish poets revolutionized the traditional ideas of the place and function of art and literature.

> In their view [sc. the 15th-century poets and theoreticians], poetry was a distinct activity, separated in terms of social function and time from everyday life. The poet might aspire to be the equal of the patron, but by that very aspiration he revealed his difference and inferiority; his occupation, or *negocio,* is what the nobleman practiced only in his moments of leisure, or *ocio*. Castiglione expressly extends aesthetization to the activities of everyday life (or at least, the everyday life of the courtier), breaking down the general *ocio*/*negocio* dichotomy. Life itself becomes aesthetic, and aesthetics [...] is life. The new kind of poetry must be one that conforms to the principle of *sprezzatura,* that permits itself to hide its own artfulness; the new poet is not the man of letters, but the professional dilettante. (Navarrete 1994: 47–48)

32 Regarding the figure of the *translatio* in Mexía´s *Historia imperial y cesárea*, see Víctor Eduardo Krebs (1998).

33 "[S]iempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio" (Nebrija 19984: 97), "language has always been the companion of Empire" (my translation).

34 Castro sees the *Silva de varia lección* as part and parcel of the "construction of the New Spanish Empire" (my translation) ["construcción del Nuevo Imperio Español" (1989: 79)].

35 The *ingenio* was theorized by the physician Juan Huarte de San Juan and his *Examen de ingenios*, *The Examination of Men´s Wits* (1575, second revised version 1592 [1989]). The emblematic expression of *agudeza* as an aesthetic category was penned by Baltasar Gracián in his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, *Wit and the Art of Inventiveness* (1648 [2004]).

36 Boscán translated the *Cortegiano* into Castilian.

Poetry is not a subject matter in Pero Mexía's *Silva de varia lección*. Nevertheless, in the chapter on labor and idleness, he reproduces the traditional dichotomy of *ocio* and *negocio*. I am convinced that Mexía's work should be seen in relation to the breakdown of the opposition of *ocio* and *negocio* in the context of a new aristocratic ideology. With his *Silva de varia lección*, the Spanish humanist "translates" the fruits of his *negocio* (which, ironically, could be characterized as *ocio justo*) for an aristocratic audience, or an audience that aspires to the lifestyle of the aristocracy.[37] He enables this audience to acquire and display playful erudition in an act of *sprezzatura*. The *otium* as Boscán and Mexía understand it is no longer characterized by reclusive activity but finds its place in everyday life.[38]

Don Quijote's (*neg*)*ocio*

Of course, Mexía's *Silva* should not be limited to these pragmatics, because the *ingenios* are diverse, as Mexía says, and the reader-user choses his path or meanders through the compilation. Mexía feels the need to anticipate the accusation that his work is a waste of time, resulting in *ociosidad*. We should also not forget that the *Silva* purports to fulfill a psycho-hygienic or prophylactic function. The author dedicates a whole chapter to the dangers of the excesses of imagination: "How imagination is one of man's major and strongest faculties or inner senses" ("Cómo la ymaginación es una de las principales [y] más fuertes potencias o sentidos interiores del hombre"; II, 8, 1989: 585).[39] Mexías relates a series of curious examples of how imagination, once out of control, can affect body and mind. He mentions a man who is so fascinated by a bull fight that, the next morning, he wakes up with horns on his forehead; the case of young Diego Osorio, who is arrested by the Catholic Kings and, due to his worries and fears, turns into an old bald man overnight, etc.: "We see that imagination turns men into lunatics: sometimes it makes them sick" ("La ymaginación vemos que torna los hombres locos: a vezes los haze enfermar"; I, 8, 1989: 589).[40]

37 According to Castro, Mexía´s *Silva* also addresses "a courtly of bourgeois public" [my translation], "un público cortesano o burgués" (1989: 71; see also Zeller (1999: 82).

38 Antonio Prieto (1986: 220–221) associates the *Silva* with the Renaissance ideal of the *urbanitas*, that is, not the solitary activity of the traditional *otium*, but a social interaction.

39 Regarding the "inner senses", see Harry Austryn Wolfson's (1935) classic study.

40 Mexía addresses a serious, "real" problem, not a literary fancy. One of the most fascinating examples of the perceived dangers of excessively reading overly exciting texts is the famous English scientist Robert Boyle, who suffered from a mental affliction with striking similarities to Don Quijote´s obsession; see Robert Folger and Konstatin Mierau (2018: 180–181).

This brings us back to Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. The Knight of the Rueful Countenance suffers from an imagination gone wild – although his mental disease is, in terms of Early Modern psychology, better understood as an affliction of his *jucio* or judgement (*vis aestimativa*).[41] In all of the examples provided by Mexía, imagination becomes a problem when it leads to a fixation or obsession. Don Quijote's obsession is essentially, but not exclusively, related to the fact that the *hidalgo* dedicates excessive time exclusively to chivalric romances, an intensive and exhausting activity (*trabajo*, work, in Mexía's terms). This activity is related to sleep deprivation, suggesting a relation with Mexía, who also presents his *Silva* as the product of vigils ("vigilias").[42] Although the Sevillian humanist is most likely referring to Aulus Gellius and his *Noctes Atticae*,[43] his sleepless nights are a foil for the nightly business of Don Quijote. A *varia lección*, a varied reading, which is playful and amusing, informative but not too demanding, would have spared him the fate of becoming a madman.[44]

The idea of associating Cervantes and the learned but "curious" compilations of the 16th century is not too far-fetched, if we take into account that many Spanish writers and humanists strove to elaborate a form of literary entertainment not contaminated by the fantasies of chivalric romance and the false erudition of the picaresque novel in the vein of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599 and 1604),[45] and the no less popular theatre of Lope de Vega.[46]

> That is why these miscellanies are written in vernacular language and strive to teach and entertain at the same time, relating things that provoke admiration and the reader's or listener's interest, but were seen as true, in contrast to fabulous books, like chivalric novels, so despised by our humanists. The miscellanies would actually fulfill one of the great aspira-

41 Elsewhere (Folger 2001: 234–248) I argue that Don Quijote´s disease is modelled after lovesickness, an affliction of judgement that impairs the patient´s ability to process mental images conveyed by the outer sense or provided by imagination.

42 In *Quijote* scholarship, sleep deprivation has been identified as one of the main causes of the knight´s madness; see Teresa Scott Soufas (1990: 28–35), who also reviews studies on the subject.

43 See Francisco García Jurado (2012: 37).

44 In his *Silva curiosa* (Paris, 1583), Julián Medrano, one of Mexía's imitators, claims that "just like the diversity of colors strengthens and delights sight, so the variety of styles and curious materials recreate wonderfully the spirit" (my translation), "como la diversidad de colores conforta y delecta la vista, assí la variedad de discursos y materias curiosas recrea maravillosamente el espíritu" (cited in Alcalá Galán 1996: 19).

45 In Alemán´s immensely successful work, the presumably reformed rogue tells the story of his life, supplementing the episodes with extensive moralizing and pseudo-learned glosses. In the *Don Quijote*, Cervantes satirizes the *pícaro*, particularly in chapter 22 of the first part, which recounts the liberation of the galley slaves.

46 See Close (2001).

> tions of humanism: create diverting literature with no need to invent worlds and fantastic characters who taint the historic truth. (my translation)
> Por eso estas obras misceláneas están escritas en lengua vulgar y pretenden instruir y entretener a un mismo tiempo, contando cosas capaces de provocar la admiración y el interés en el lector u oyente, pero que son o se consideran verdaderas, difiriendo en esto de los libros fabulosos que, como las novelas de caballerías, fueron tan denostados por los humanistas. En realidad, la miscelánea vino a colmar una de las grandes aspiraciones del humanismo: lograr una literatura amena sin necesidad de inventar mundos y personajes fantásticos que adulterasen la verdad histórica. (Castro 1989: 62)

With his work, Pero Mexía, the *magnífico caballero*,[47] realized a form of harmless and not altogether useless entertainment. It is ironic that in his *Don Quijote*, like Pero Mexía in his *Silva de varia lección*, Cervantes stages a breakdown of the dichotomy of *ocio* and *negocio*: Alonso Quijano's *otium*, the world of imagination and fiction, spills into the real world – because it never really was *otium*, but *trabajo*. Seen in this light, *Don Quijote*, too, is a "realization" of *sprezzatura*, which, in the 17th century, could only take the shape of a farce.

Texts cited

Alcalá Galán, Mercedes (1996): "Las misceláneas españolas del siglo XVI y su entorno cultural", *Dicenda: Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica* 14: pp. 11–19.

Allen, Don Cameron (1941): "Jacques 'Seven Ages' and Pedro Mexía", *Modern Language Notes* 56.8, pp. 601–603.

Atkinson, Catherine (2007):. *Inventing Inventors in Renaissance Europe. Polydore Vergil's* De inventoribus rerum, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Bittner, Adolf (1989). "Petrus Mexia: *Sylva variorum lectionum*. Ein Beitrag zur Quellenrezeption Grimmelshausens", *Wolfenbütteler Barock-Nachrichten* 16.1, pp. 25–9.

Castillo, Carlos (1945). "Cervantes y Pero Mexía", *Modern Philology* 43.2, pp. 94–106.

Castro, Antonio (1989): "Introducción", en: Mexía, Pedro: *Silva de varia lección*, vol. 1., ed. Antonio Castro. Madrid: Cátedra, pp. 9–140.

Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de (1989: *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, 2 vol., ed. John Jay Allen, 12th ed., Madrid: Cátedra.

Close, Anthony (2002): *Cervantes and the Comic Mind of His Age*. Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press.

Eisenberg, Daniel (1986). "Did Cervantes Have a Library?", in: Miletich, John (ed.): *Hispanic Studies in Honor of Alan D. Deyermond. A North American Tribute* Madison, WI: Hispanic Seminar of Medieval Studies, pp. 93–106.

Fernández de Avellaneda, Alfonso (2011): *El Quijote apócrifo*, ed. Alfredo Rodríguez López-Vázques, Madrid: Cátedra.

47 See note 14.

Folger, Robert (2001): *Images in Mind: Lovesickness, Spanish Sentimental Fiction and* Don Quijote, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
Folger, Robert and Konstantin Mierau (2018): "Reading (in) *Don Quijote*", in: Maarten de Pourcq/ Levie, Sophie: *Travelling Literatures. An Introduction to European Literary History*, New York; London: Routledge, pp. 175–197.
García Jurado, Francisco (2012): "Aulo Gelio y la literatura española del siglo XV. Autor, texto, comentario y relectura moderna", *Revista de Literatura* 74.147, pp. 31–64.
Gracián, Baltasar (2004): *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, ed. Ceferino Peralta/Jorge M. Ayala/ José María Andreu, Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza; Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses; Departamento de Educación, Cultura y Deporte del Gobierno de Aragón.
Huarte de San Juan, Juan (1989): *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*, ed. Guillermo Serés, Madrid: Cátedra.
Krebs, Víctor Eduardo (1998): "*Translatio imperii* in the *Cancionero General* and Mexía's *Historia imperial y Cesárea*", *Hispanic Journal* 19.1, pp. 143–56.
Lerner, Isaías (1992): "Poética de la cita en la *Silva* de Pero Mexía: las fuentes clásicas", in: Vilanova, Antonio (ed.): *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, Barcelona 21–26 de agosto de 1989*, Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, pp. 491–500.
Lerner, Isaías (1993): "Autores y citas españolas en la *Silva* de Mexía", *Filología* 26.1–2, pp. 107–20.
Mexía, Pedro (1989): *Silva de varia lección*, 2. vol., ed. Antonio Castro. Madrid: Cátedra.
Navarrete, Ignacio (1994). *Orphans of Petrarch: Poetry and Theory in the Spanish Renaissance*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Nebrija, Antonio de (1984):. *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, ed. Antonio Quilis, Madrid: Editoria Nacional.
Panofsky, Erwin 1971: *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Prieto, Antonio (1986): *La prosa española del siglo XVI*. Madrid: Cátedra.
Rico, Francisco (1996): "El primer pliego del *Quijote*", *Hispanic Review* 64.3, pp. 313–36.
Soufas, Teresa Scott (1990): *Melancholy and the Secular Mind in Spanish Golden Age Literature*, Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press.
Stroup, Sarah Culpepper (2010): *Catullus, Cicero, and a Society of Patrons: The Generation of the Text*, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press.
Vickers, Brian (1990): "Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*", *Renaissance Studies* 4.1, pp. 1–37.
Wolfson, Harry Austryn (1935): "The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophic Texts", *Harvard Theological Review* 28, pp. 69–133.
Zedelmaier, Helmut (2003): "Die Karriere Eines Buches. Polydorus Vergilius *De inventoribus rerum*", in: Büttner, Frank/Friedrich, Markus/ Zedelmaier, Helmut (eds.): *Sammeln, Ordnen, Veranschaulichen: Wissenskompilatorik in der Frühen Neuzeit.* Münster: LITVerlag, pp. 175–203.
Zeller, Rosmarie (1999): "Wunderbares, Ingeniöses und Historien: zu Pedro Mexías *Geschicht-Natur- und Wunderwald*", *Simpliciana: Schriften der Grimmelshausen-Gesellschaft* 21, pp. 67–92.