

Picaresque Comedy and Its Discontents

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Abstract

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The emergence of *Lazarillo de Tormes* in sixteenth-century Spain represents not only the birth of the picaresque genre but also a new comic sensibility—picaresque comedy. The critical new dimension of picaresque comedy is ambivalence derived from the self-deprecation of the picaresque narrator and a newfound sense of pathetic identification with the plight of the poor. *Lazarillo* artfully interweaves divergent comic traditions into a synthesis, but in the next significant picaresque novel, Mateo Alemán's massive *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the picaresque comedy of *Lazarillo* is called into question. Alemán's novel draws on some of the new comic energy of the picaresque, but it ultimately suffocates picaresque comedy under the heavy weight of Counter-Reformation ideology. A fault line is therefore created in the nascent genre, and the source of this rift is the problem of picaresque comedy. The remainder of the study uses this initial contrast in sensibility to trace the trajectory of the picaresque in Spain and elsewhere. Cervantes' critique of the picaresque and its comic sensibility is considered, as are the reactions to

the heavy-handed didacticism of Alemán in subsequent Spanish picaresque texts. But the study expands beyond the Spanish tradition to consider the influence of the picaresque in Germany, England, and the United States. Another chapter considers the problem of the feminine picaresque in Úbeda's *La Picara Justina*, Grimmelshausen's *Courasche* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. In these works, the picaresque comedy of earlier texts is rendered problematic by the introduction of the female narrator who introduces a special dynamic to picaresque comedy. Later, the epic comedy of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* is contrasted with the picaresque comedy of Smollett's *Roderick Random*. The study concludes with a reading of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*—a text that demonstrates both the persistence of the picaresque and its churning internal contradiction.

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Introduction

Two theses are the subject of this study. The first is that the work generally understood to be the first picaresque novel introduces a new comic sensibility, which I label picaresque comedy. Picaresque comedy shares the confluence of comic energy in Shakespeare or Molière, but the distinctive feature of picaresque comedy is its internal opposition between the ludic quality of the comedic art and the weightier matters within it that militate against this free-spirited comedy. The reasons for this internal strife are numerous, but of great significance is the fact that the narrator of the picaresque text most often lavishes himself with a curious admixture of pity and scorn. Another key ingredient is the inherent unreliability and rhetorical savvy of the picaresque narrator. The history of comic prose fiction is rich in tricksters—Apuleius' s donkey-man Lucius comes to mind, as do Till Eulenspiegel and Rabelais' Panurge, but such figures lack the rhetorical slyness of the picaro who is at once trickster and author, and it is the rhetorical richness of texts like *Lazarillo*, *Guzmán*, and *Moll Flanders* that adds special significance to the question of comedy in those texts. An added dimension of picaresque comedy is the degree of pathetic identification, which goes hand in hand with the greater degree of verisimilitude offered in the picaresque. On this count we should remember that when *Lazarillo* emerged in 1554, novels of chivalry and pastoral novels were still the prevailing novelistic forms. The gritty, realistic detail of picaresque writing offers a degree of social urgency, an awakening to problems of poverty and an invitation to commiserate with the plight of the poor. The problem that arises is one of balancing pathetic identification and agape with the obvious waywardness of the picaro and, in the

case of the comic texts, with the natural tendency towards establishing distance between the laughing subject and the object of scorn and ridicule.

The second, related thesis of this study is that this new comic sensibility creates a fault line in the nascent genre with the publication of *Guzmán de Alfarache*—a novel that wrestles with its own comic impulses and ultimately poses a serious problem to the continued practice of picaresque comedy. Put another way, the picaresque distinguishes itself from its earliest stages as a genre at odds with itself, perpetually in search of self-definition. The problem of picaresque comedy becomes the axis around which picaresque texts from *Lazarillo* to Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March* organize themselves. As we shall see, each of the texts under discussion in this study will respond to the problem differently.

The challenges of this study are numerous. First of all, basic concepts are under interrogation, and the foundation of the study's broad subject, is undermined to an extent by the premises of its own argument. Which is to say that as much as the study promotes the idea of the picaresque genre as a meaningful concept, it calls into question the very notion of a unified picaresque. Moreover, understanding picaresque comedy as a phenomenon means not only distinguishing the picaresque from other novelistic creations but examining the slippery entity that we call comedy. The goal is therefore to distinguish the unique comic energy in the picaresque from the larger comic traditions that inform it. Yet comedy in the broad sense, perhaps more than any generic category, proves a vexing problem. For this reason, it seems fitting to step back and consider for a moment the difficulty in theorizing the comic more broadly.

The bias against comedy is a longstanding one and an important reason for it is mere accident. Significant portions of the *Poetics* dealing with the comic were lost to posterity, as was Homer's supposed comic epic. Had these ancient texts passed onward, the comic might well have achieved a greater degree of respectability. What Aristotle does tell us in the *Poetics* about comedy is of limited utility. For Aristotle, the comic is an expression of the base and ugly, and it features lower characters not refined or dignified enough to step on a tragic stage. Comedy for Aristotle knows neither tragedy's grand emotions, nor anything like a catharsis of pity and fear. It is rather a preoccupation with the perverse, indeed with what he terms the *aischros* or "ugly." This is no promising start for comic theory.

In fact, it is not until the fourth century that Donatus draws on lost manuscripts of Cicero and adds another dimension to the debate. Rather than understanding comic solely in terms of the laughter it incites or the baseness behind that laughter, Donatus (and presumably Cicero) emphasize the social dimensions of laughter. The keyword here is comedy as a *speculum consuetudinis*, a mirror of custom. For the first time, comic art achieves a degree of genuine respectability, endowed with a verisimilitude not matched by tragedy. Tragedy might approach more closely arcane metaphysical truth, but it does not achieve the same honest portrayal of humanity in all of its laughable imperfection. And yet the bias against comedy initiated by Aristotle persists. A millennium after Donatus, Italian translators and commentators of Aristotle revert back to his succinct conception of the comic, and in an attempt to take it further, they arrive at fascinating but somehow equally nebulous understandings of the comic. Vincenzo Maggi accepts Aristotle's notion of the ugly as a necessary condition for laughter, but discards it as a

sufficient one. He puts forth the argument that the comic springs from a marriage of the ugly and what he terms the “wondrous.” Yet what precisely accounts for this marriage is not spelled out. Ludovico Castelvetro approaches the problem from a different angle. For Castelvetro, laughter has deeper roots than visual or mental calisthenics. It is, rather, an expression of our fallen, sinful nature. By this definition, the comic art would draw us down into solemn reminder of sinfulness rather than exalt us as the sole species capable of laughter. Castelvetro’s understanding of laughter as an expression of our base nature may well have inspired Thomas Hobbes, writing a century later. Hobbes offers in 1650 one of the most influential definitions of laughter until the eighteenth century. For Hobbes, laughter is an expression of a brief but wondrous exultation of superiority over another person. Simon Dickie’s impressive new book on Hobbes considers how significant the influence of misanthropic humor has been, particularly on eighteenth-century England.¹

Hobbes is not the last word, but he is perhaps the dominant influence on comic theory until the eighteenth century. We might see in Molière an interesting counterpoint. Though more a practitioner than theorist, Molière’s prefaces and plays refine Hobbesian laughter and emphasize the sociability of laughter. Laughter leaves the Hobbesian world of *bellum omnium contra omnes* and enters that of polite sociability. In Shakespeare, comedy becomes a celebration of wit and ingenuity over the unimaginative and boorish. As Barber has shown in his famous study of Shakespeare and the comic, the many allusions in Shakespearean comedy to festive rites (often of pagan origin) celebrate the joys of the body (and indeed of jocularity in the broadest sense).² What separates Sir Toby, Falstaff and Dogberry from the comic protagonists of Jonson and Molière is that

Shakespeare creates genuinely likable fellows who are set in opposition to agelasts and killjoys like Malvolio and Jacques. Whereas Shakespearean comedy is positively festive, there is a cathartic quality in Jonson and Molière. Comedy becomes the vehicle through which eccentric social behavior is corrected, and the castigation through laughter of vices (hypocrisy, avarice, false erudition, choler) serves the greater good. Laughter assumes in these authors the same function that René Girard ascribes to ritual scapegoating in tragedy—namely, it unites society against a common adversary.

In eighteenth-century Britain and a bit later in Germany, a different aspect of the comic comes to the fore—the rational. The social corrective functions of laughter are downplayed and once more the emphasis shifts to the inner workings of the mind. The individual comic theories of thinkers as diverse as Addison, Fielding, Kant, Schopenhauer, Jean Paul, and Hazlitt can be grouped under the rubric of incongruity. The nature of the incongruity is of course different for each on some level. Addison and Fielding militate against the pessimism of Hobbes and that of Marmontel in France, who added in his *Encyclopédie* entry on comedy that “La malice naturelle aux hommes est le principe de la comédie.” For Addison, the object of laughter need not be base, nor must the butt of a joke be a rogue or oaf. Rather, all individuals of “wit and vivacity” are at some point the butt of jokes, and laughter becomes an endorsement of our human connectedness and indeed of our unique rationality (we may recall on this count Castelvetro, who two centuries earlier had claimed laughter was evidence of our sinfulness rather than our reason). Among the German thinkers, a Copernican Revolution of sort takes place similar to that undertaken by Kant in his critiques. Rather than understanding humor in terms of objects, the emphasis shifts to how the inner structure of

the thinking subject's mind filters the content of reality and produces an impulse towards laughter. For Kant, laughter amounts to little more than the surprise at incongruity resulting from some inexplicable discrepancy. For Jean Paul, "the comical, like the sublime, never dwells in the object, but in the subject."³

But the incongruity theories were not the last word either. George Meredith discerns the presence of a comic spirit that touches some and leaves others cold. His is a fitting metaphor for a study like this, for in truth the authors represented in these pages could well be described as purveyors of the spirit of picaresque comedy or alternatively as agelasts, dour opponents of laughter.

We have in this world men whom Rabelais would call "agelasts"; that is to say, non-laughers—men who are in that respect as dead bodies, which, if you prick them, do not bleed. The old gray boulderstone, that has finished its peregrination from the rock to the valley, is as easily to be set rolling up again as these men laughing. No collision of circumstances in our mortal career strikes light for them. It is but one step from being agelastic to misogynistic, and the μισόγελως, the laughter-hating, soon learns to dignify his dislike as an objection in morality.⁴

Meredith states here with great eloquence one of the central premises of my argument, namely that the internal division within the picaresque has to do with an aversion to laughter. What is important to point out in Meredith is the degree to which his theory relies on the audience's predisposition to laughter. In truth, of the authors I treat, only one might be fall under the rubric of the agelast—Mateo Alemán. And yet Alemán's aversion to laughter is among other things an aversion to his own comic instincts, and for

this I label his great and contradictory novel *Guzmán de Alfarache* a case of the neurotic picaresque.

What is interesting about much of the critical literature on the picaresque up to this point is that the problem of comedy in the texts considered in this study has not really been accounted for. To be sure, some very fine studies have come forward in English that approach the picaresque from a comparative perspective—Alexander Parker’s groundbreaking *Literature and the Delinquent*, Robert Alter’s *Rogue’s Progress* and Walter Reed’s *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque*.⁵ Parker deserves tremendous credit for a study that gives adequate treatment to both the Spanish and later European incarnations of the picaresque novel. Forty years after its publication, Parker’s study still sets the standard for comparative scholarship on the picaresque. Yet Parker’s readings of *Lazarillo*, *Guzmán*, *Moll Flanders*, and other picaresque novels are largely concerned with the ethical aspects of those texts. The problem of comedy is largely overlooked because for Parker the genre is not mere literary mischief, but genuinely concerned with larger ethical and philosophical matters. Alter’s study is full of wonderful insights, and I quote from it in my chapter on Fielding and Smollett. But Alter, writing roughly at the same time as Parker, seems keen on justifying the picaresque as “serious” literature by highlighting its bleaker moments. Once more, the comic spirit is underappreciated. Reed goes beyond Parker in historical scope (Parker stops in the eighteenth century, Reed with John Barth in the late twentieth) and in theoretical sophistication. Reed maps a genealogy of the European novel with two distinct family lines—the Quixotic and the picaresque. He treats novels largely in pairs, highlighting the co-existence of these competing approaches to the novel in works as

diverse as *Tristram Shandy*, *The Confidence Man*, and *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Yet the concern is understandably not with the history of comic prose fiction but with that of the novel, and as in Alter, the Spanish foundation of the picaresque is not given due attention. Valuable studies have been done on the Spanish picaresque by Maravall, Rico, and Dunn, but those works, rich as they are, do not consider picaresque expansion outside of Spain and more importantly, they avoid the question of comedy.⁶ Cristóbal Serra's work does a nice job of highlighting darkly comic moments in picaresque writing, but he ultimately generalizes these moments under the rubric of black humor, which as we shall see, is too broad a category to capture the peculiar innovations of picaresque comedy.⁷

The comic (and picaresque comedy in particular) maintains a dual existence—that is, it undergoes the same sociogenetic processes that Norbert Elias ascribes to manners and civil behavior, and yet it does not display a teleological progression from barbarism to civility, but rather a back and forth between the two. Comedy may choose to obey history's orders from time to time, but it can flout them just as easily. Comedy evolves, but it does so on its own peculiar terms. There are, for instance, underlying comic archetypes which enable Aristophanes, Plautus, and Apuleius (not to mention Shakespeare or Cervantes), despite their individual differences and despite the yawning historical gap separating us from them, to retain much of their comic punch today. In other words, the comic undergoes constant evolution (caught, like all human institutions, in the maelstrom of historical change) and yet demonstrates sufficient consistency to largely transcend historical, social, and linguistic specification.

Another point to make about both comic and literary evolution in the broad sense is that neither is linear or teleological. Whereas the modern cinematic conception of “low

comedy” is unabashedly bawdy, the same “dark” comic forces are present in Aristophanes, Apuleius, and Rabelais, and, in a milder form, in Shakespeare and Fielding. An important characteristic of comedy is that it offers a useful benchmark of an age’s values and of its flexibility in dealing with and subverting those values—be they political, legal, social, or sexual. The most effective comedy tests the limits of decency, quite often transgressing them. Yet inevitably, such transgressions of an age’s comic (and moral ethos) are castigated, if not through censorship (and in many cases the physical punishment of comic perpetrators) then within the realm of the literary, by authors who lead by example and reel in the often wayward spirit of the age. The practitioners of comic excess in my study (the anonymous author of *Lazarillo*, Quevedo, *Úbeda*, Grimmelshausen, and Smollett) are set in opposition to those who, though they draw their stones from the same quarry, erect quite different novelistic edifices. All fall under the rubric of the picaresque, and all, as we shall see, adopt an original solution to the problem of picaresque comedy. Alemán injects into his picaresque narrative a steady stream of didacticism, flavored both by the metaphysics of *engaño* (traditionally Christian in its devaluation of the earthly, proto-Schopenhauerian in its condemnation of the world of *Schein*). Cervantes is of course no enemy of the comic as such, but his comic vision and indeed his aversion to the monologic quality of the picaresque narrator, set his picaresque experiments apart from the important Spanish picaresque texts of his day. Fielding, like Cervantes, privileges the narrative voice of epic comedy over the monologic limitations of the picaresque, but *Joseph Andrews* nonetheless presents, in one of its key interludes, a fascinating foray into picaresque comedy (which contrasts nicely with the epic comedy of the novel as a whole). Defoe, for his part, transforms the female pícaro, who in *Úbeda*

and Grimmelshausen is a mere object of ridicule, so that more serious psychological and sociological concerns can be emphasized. Finally, Bellow develops a new cynical realism that draws on some of the same sensibilities of picaresque comedy but that nonetheless injects a seriousness of purpose, a sense of world-weary *desengaño* that is foreign to the picaros of *Lazarillo* and the *Buscón*.

One of the great misfortunes of a study as inclusive as this one is that it excludes quite a number of texts. Indeed, a broad understanding of the picaresque and the reactions to the peculiar internal strife I diagnose here could be expanded to include a number of texts that regrettably do not fall into the scope of this study. Among these texts would be Grimmelshausen's *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus*, Lesage's *Gil Blas*, Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* and *Tom Jones*, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Melville's *Confidence Man*, Mann's *Felix Krull*, Grass' *Tin Drum*, and Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

One further point deserves mention. Though the present study is organized around the problem of the picaresque comedy, it is by no means exclusively concerned with the comic. The readings offered address in some substantial way the issues of picaresque comedy, but they likewise explain the narrative idiosyncracies of each text. If anything, the picaresque is not a mere restatement of a basic narrative situation. Rather, its loose form allows for great experimentation and discovery, and although nearly all the texts discussed here share the same first-person picaresque approach, they diverge considerably when examined more closely. The picaresque is a genre at war with itself, in constant search for self-definition.

Chapter One

Picaresque Comedy Emerges: Comic Confluence in *Lazarillo de Tormes*

In this chapter, I trace the emergence and confluence of three related but separate comic forces in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Taken together, these comic forces constitute a new brand of comic prose fiction which I label picaresque comedy. *Lazarillo* is a text bristling with comic energy, but after the third *tractado* of the narrative, a sudden shift occurs, almost as if the narrator runs out of breath. The comic energy which had suffused the text before dissipates, and a kind of death occurs. Yet as in the case of the honest beggar in the Gospels, the ironic point of reference for the dishonest Lazarillo, a sort of resurrection occurs here. The comic spirit of the text, repressed after the third *tractado*, reemerges in the narrative's final segment, but in a new form.

Physical Comedy in *Lazarillo*

The physical is the most obvious comic form in *Lazarillo*, and it is likewise the most representative of comic prose fiction from Antiquity to the Renaissance. It celebrates and ridicules at once the baseness of the body, the infinite imperfections of earthly finitude. Obvious examples of the physical are the clumsy stage shenanigans of farce or the scatological motifs in prose works of Apuleius or Rabelais. Yet the physical comedy in *Lazarillo* stands apart from precedents in at least one important way—namely, it is interwoven with a new sense of pathos. This pathos is a significant aspect of a new sense of realism greatly lacking in those comic precedents. The peculiar dynamic of the comic in *Lazarillo* is that unlike traditional comedy, which consistently erects a barrier

between comic protagonist (set off from the world by his mishaps or ridiculous character) and audience (who exalts in a sense of superiority), *Lazarillo*'s comedy is part of a broad rhetorical strategy to win over the reader to the protagonist.

To illustrate the new sense of comic pathos that emerges in *Lazarillo*, let us briefly consider a passage from Apuleius' *Golden Ass* in which the proto-picaro Lucius, having been transformed into a donkey, is miraculously saved from sure death through the content of his bowels:

But the men, after having with some difficulty controlled their dogs, caught me and tied me to a hook with a very strong strap. They began to beat me again, and would certainly have killed me if it had not been for my belly, which was constricted by the pain of the blows, crammed full with those raw vegetables, and weakened with slippery diarrhea: it sent forth ordure in a jet and drove the men away from my poor beaten haunches, some with the spray of the foul liquid, others by the stink of the putrid stench.⁸

This passage derives its comic force through an ambush on the senses and a similar assault on rational expectation. This is physical comedy of the basest scatological sort. The donkey's olfactory onslaught is repellent not merely to its pursuers, but to the reader, and all are taken aback with the suddenness and unexpectedness of this comic explosion. Yet such a scene, though it weds violence to the comic, is too absurd to involve genuine pathos. Even if the narrator being beaten to the point of near death were not a donkey, the *deus ex machina* residing in his unruly belly would drive away pity as it does the attackers.

Now let us consider as counterexample one of the most powerful expressions of physical comedy in *Lazarillo*, namely a scene from the first *tractado* in which the picaro receives comeuppance for having siphoned out wine from the blind man's jar:

Y luego otro día, teniendo yo rezumando mi jarro como solía, no pensando el daño que me estaba aparejado ni que el mal ciego me sentía, sentéme como solía; estando recibiendo aquellos dulces tragos, mi cara puesta hacia el cielo, un poco cerrados los ojos por mejor gustar el sabroso licuor, sintió el desesperado ciego que agora tenía tiempo de tomar de mí venganza, y con toda su fuerza, alzando con dos manos aquel dulce y amargo jarro, le dejó caer sobre mi boca, ayudándose, como digo, con todo su poder, de manera que el pobre Lázaro, que de nada desto se guardaba, antes, como otras veces, estaba descuidado y gozoso, verdaderamente me pareció que el cielo, con todo lo que en él hay, me había caído encima. (*Lazarillo* 32-33)⁹

[And then the other day, while I was savoring drops from the jar as I often did, not imagining the harm in store for me nor aware that the blind man could hear me, I sat down as I usually did. Tasting those sweet sips, my face turned upwards to the sky, my eyes slightly closed to better savor the flavor of the tasty liquor, the desperate blind man sensed it was time to take vengeance on me, and with all his strength, raising with both his hands the sweet yet bitter jug, he let it fall on my mouth, making use as I say of all his force, in such a way that I, poor Lázaro, was suspecting nothing and was as careless and pleasure-seeking as in the past, truly thought that the sky and everything in it had collapsed onto me.]¹⁰

Whereas the Apuleius passage overwhelms with its rapidity, this scene delays itself. The purpose of this delay is to build up a comic snowball effect. Brilliant here is the attention to detail, notably the way Lazarillo closes his eyes and tilts his head back to relish each drop of wine that comes his way. The rich hypotaxis of this passage demonstrates a stylistic panache seemingly alien to a lowly picaro. Like the passage above, the topos of self-pity comes to the fore, yet here, the object of identification is not a donkey speaking literary (albeit low-comic) Latin, but a boy communicating in an “honest” and seemingly forthright vernacular.¹¹ Moreover, the author of *Lazarillo* is far more eager to communicate the extent of his pain. Lucius’ supposedly near death experience is given short shrift, but Lazarillo’s face-smashing encounter with a wine jar is, like the wine it once contained, relished for every drop:

Fue tal el golpecillo, que me desatinó y sacó de sentido, y el jarrazo tan grande, que los pedazos dél se me metieron por la cara, rompiéndomela por muchas partes, y me quebró los dientes, sin los cuales hasta hoy día me quedé.(33)

[The little blow was so hard that it unravelled me and knocked me unconscious, and the jamming of the jar was so great that the pieces dug into my face, breaking over me in many parts, and it broke my teeth, and I have remained today without them]

Lazarillo is Freud’s worst patient. Rather than repressing childhood trauma, he appears to derive curious pleasure from it, if only to bask in self-pity and thereby elicit pity from the implied reader *Vuestra Merced* (and presumably all other readers as well). The syntactical construction of this passage demonstrates this eagerness to embellish for the sake of effect. And what is this desired effect? It is a curious blend of unfettered comic

revelry and focalized pathetic identification. This is, to be sure, an exceedingly violent passage, and the marriage of violence and comedy in *Lazarillo* is one problematic aspect of the new comic pathos peculiar to *Lazarillo*. Violence and comedy are wed in a number of Golden Age texts, most notably perhaps in the *Quijote*, but *Lazarillo*'s comic violence is rendered especially problematic because it is depicted with meticulous care by the picaro himself, who in all cases but one is the unlucky recipient of the violence. The great care taken to depict what most would consider a traumatic event presents two possibilities. Either the narrator is a masochist, who genuinely derives pleasure by reflecting on past trauma, or he is embellishing for the sake of rhetorical (or in this case comic) effect.

One angle from which to approach both the violent physical comedy as well as the comedy of self-effacement in *Lazarillo* is Hobbes' notion of comedy as self-assertion. In witnessing the disgrace and humiliation of the other, the subject delights in his own sense of superiority. Hobbes writes in Chapter IX of his treatise *On Human Nature* (1650):

Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own are set off and illustrated. Also men laugh at jests, the wit whereof always consisteth in the elegant discovering and conveying to our minds some absurdity of another: and in this case also the passion of laughter proceedeth from the sudden imagination of our own odds and eminency: for what is else the recommending of ourselves to our own good opinion, by comparison with another man's infirmity or absurdity? ¹²

Laughter for Hobbes is an assertion of power over an object of ridicule. It appeals to an instinct present in us all (which Nietzsche grasps upon in constructing his theory of the Will to Power) which seeks out any available means, physical or psychological, to obtain a sense of superiority over an unfortunate party. And moreover, laughter is sudden, arising from an instant realization of higher status, at once Dionysian celebration and smug rational awareness of power attained. *Lazarillo* would appear at first glance to speak to this instinct in his reader. After all, the subjugation of the picaresque, his hunger, the degradation and physical violence to which he is subjected—all would seem to caress the ego of the presumably well-off reader. Yet Hobbes' model of laughter does not provide a satisfactory account of the comic techniques in *Lazarillo*. Indeed, *Lazarillo* communicates a great deal of personal hardship, and much of this is done in comic fashion, but he does so with great cleverness—indeed, in the same way he humbles himself before his masters in order to subtly undermine their authority. And the use of the diminutive in the mature Lázaro's description of his former self heightens the element of pathos. Indeed, particular emphasis is stressed in the *Lazarillo* on the youth and relative innocence of the protagonist.¹³ And yet there is great artfulness in the artlessness of the boy. *Lazarillo*'s narrative, as much as it awakens the Hobbesian/Nietzschean instinct for superiority, is motivated by that selfsame instinct, and its ultimate aim is to subjugate the reader to the will of the seemingly harmless picaresque.

Parts Two and Three of this essay will discuss both the social dimensions of *Lazarillo*'s power struggles and the psychological/rhetorical strategy of self-pity he employs. For now, our emphasis is on the physical, and it is not difficult to discern a common thread running through *Lazarillo*'s adventures in the first three *tractados* (which

constitute the lion's share of the narrative). Over and over, the picaresque is eager to reveal how horribly hungry he is. With regard to Lazarillo's first master, the blind man, we learn the following: "Mas también quiero que sepa Vuestra Merced que, con todo lo que adquiría y tenía, jamás tan avariento ni mezquino hombre no vi; tanto, que me mataba a mí de hambre, y así no me demediaba de lo necesario." (27) [Moreover I'd like Your Honor to know that with all I've acquired and had, I have never seen such a stingy man, who starved me to death and did not share necessary goods with me.] Yet Lazarillo's second master, the priest, is even less inclined to feed the boy:

Pensé muchas veces irme de aquel mezquino amo; mas por dos cosas lo dejaba: la primera, por no me atrever a mis piernas, por temer de la flaqueza que de pura hambre me venía; y la otra, consideraba y decía: "Yo he tenido dos amos: el primero traíame muerto de hambre, y, dejándole, topé con estotro, que me tiene ya con ella en la sepultura. (54)

[I considered on many occasions taking leave of that stingy master, but two things prevented me: first, I couldn't trust my legs due to fear of decrepitude that the starvation had caused to me, and the other considering and saying to myself that I had had two masters and that the first had starved me to death, and having leaving him, I ran into this second who now has me in a tomb.]

Of course, Lazarillo has no choice in this matter, and is booted out of his second master's home after his ruse to steal communion is uncovered. And though his third master, the squire, is of a far more generous disposition on a moral level, he has no food for the boy (let alone himself). Whereas the belly of Apuleius' donkey-man Lucius generates laughs through its expulsions, Lazarillo's *estómago* is perpetually empty, and much of the

narrative is occupied with a “heroic” quest for gastric satiety. Hunger in *Lazarillo* consumes the narrative; it is the *sine qua non* of narrative progression. Where there is no hunger, there is no action. The hunger theme in *Lazarillo*, unlike the depiction of violence above, establishes connection to rather than distance from an audience. Whereas it can be hoped that not every reader can easily relate to the feeling of a wine jar crashing over their face, it can be safely assumed that all understand the physical sensation of hunger. Yet the universality of hunger does not render it funny. The comedy of hunger in the narrative is derived largely from the futility of the desire to realize satiation and the absurdity of this search.

The basely physical becomes a conduit through which the social element enters the text. The degree of the social resonance of hunger is not easily discerned, but the text once more moves beyond its comic predecessors in this area. As in the case of Apuleius, an important contrast presents itself: namely that between the famous encounter between Panurge and Pantagruel in Rabelais. Panurge, a cousin of sorts to the picaresque, accosts the giant and petitions him in thirteen different languages (some invented) and with great rhetorical effort—all to express one basic idea: “I’m hungry.” Yet Panurge’s hunger is a mere comic means to an end, and in no way is the hunger theme motivated by a depiction of abject social circumstance (on the contrary, much of Rabelais celebrates excess, both verbal and gastronomical). To be sure, the preoccupation with poverty and hunger in *Lazarillo* and its picaresque offspring is primarily not intended to raise social awareness, though the degree to which these texts obey a logic of realism unthinkable in either Apuleius or Rabelais transforms hunger from a literary prop to an issue of genuine social relevance.

The Social Dimension and the Comedy of Power

The social dimension of comedy is far more difficult to define than the physical. Whereas physical comedy explicitly engages the senses, social comedy is fraught with implicit behavioral norms and power relations. Theories of comedy have defined the social dimension in a variety of ways. Donatus, in his fourth-century *Ars grammatica*, quotes Cicero in seeing comedy as “imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis.” Comedy is truer in its mimetic function than tragedy, and becomes, in addition to imitation of life, a mirror of customs and image of the truth. Much of comic theory from Antiquity to the nineteenth century emphasizes the social over the physical, and focuses almost exclusively on comedy in drama rather than prose. Yet even in Bergson’s classic treatise on *Le Rire*, still a touchstone of modern comic theory, the social is defined in terms of norms that the comic protagonist violates.¹⁴ Bergson’s favorite example is the Molière protagonist whose dogged resistance to social niceties alienates him as an object of ridicule by his peers. A more expansive view of social comedy is present in Bakhtin. In his theory, the carnivalesque subverts social hierarchies and allows a culture of laughter (associated with the lower classes) to hold sway over the overly serious aristocracy, if only on festive occasions.¹⁵

A full discussion of the problem of the social dimension on comedy cannot be offered here, for it would entail an extensive historical analysis of power relations in sixteenth-century Spain, not to mention a sociological account of the problem of poverty. Important studies such as those of Maravall and Cruz represent a large step in this direction, though their focus is clearly not comedy.¹⁶ My focus here will be on one

prominent aspect of the social in *Lazarillo*, namely power relations as a catalyst for comic effect.¹⁷ To characterize power relations in *Lazarillo* as inverted would be to misinterpret the picaresque's behavior. A reader with only a superficial understanding of a text like *Lazarillo* (or of the picaresque in general) might jump to the conclusion that *Lazarillo* represents, like Touchstone in *As You Like It* a "comic hero" whose low upbringing and general disregard for behavioral norms in courtly society generate comic chaos amid overly sober propriety, a lightning bolt of irrationality cast into the sunny sky of rationality. Yet this is not the case in *Lazarillo*. *Lazarillo* may resent his masters, but he never asserts himself through vituperative protest. He remains, in his explicit interaction, more or less quietly subordinate to their will on the surface, though he consistently devises ways to subvert it when they are absent. *Lazarillo*'s "transgressions" are rebellions of the belly, not of the tongue. He is no rogue, but a likable trickster, and the castigation he receives from the blind man and the priest remains private. The great exception to *Lazarillo*'s general obedience is of course the revenge he takes on the blind man, and it functions so beautifully that there is no need for social accountability for his deed. Having left the blind man lying "medio muerto" after his collision with a column, *Lazarillo* absconds without any trace of guilt: "Y dejéle en poder de mucha gente que lo había ido a socorrer, y tomé la puerta de la villa en los pies de un trote...No supe más lo que Dios dél hizo ni curé de saberlo." (46) [I left him to the many people who had come to aid him and I dashed through the town gate on a trot...I never learned what God had done with him nor did I care to find out.] To subvert power relations and to do so without the knowledge of society at large--herein resides the malicious pleasure of the picaresque. Yet *Lazarillo* is a marginal figure, not just because he is unable to establish himself in

respectable society but because society fails to take account of his importance as an individual. Indeed, the attitude towards Lazarillo taken by society at large is, to rephrase a term applied to Britain's treatment of the American colony, a neglect not altogether salutary.

Yet Lazarillo, ignored by society until his eventual appointment as town crier of Toledo (that new occupation is mentioned only in the final *tractado*), manages to attain importance not as an individual acting in society but as a narrator operating in the realm of the literary. A problematic relationship is established in *Lazarillo* between the social and the literary. On the one hand, social marginalization is to be overcome through literary achievement. The prologue to *Lazarillo* is rich evidence of this:

¿Quién piensa que el soldado que es primero del escala tiene más aborrecido el vivir? No, por cierto; mas el deseo de alabanza le hace ponerse al peligro; y, así, en las artes y letras es lo mesmo. (6)

[Who thinks that the soldier is the first to scale a wall is he who hates life the most? Certainly not; it is the desire for praise that leads him into danger, and it is the same in arts and letters.]

On the other hand, the literary does not exist in cool and tranquil solitude. It is, rather, embedded in the cauldron of the social, and for Lazarillo, the image here of the literary artist putting himself in danger, like a soldier in search of glory, is significant not just because of perceived literary failure might lead to personal ignominy, but due to the fact that the narrative itself is rooted in a pre-existent degradation that is now broadcast to a public that previously had ignored lowly Lazarillo.

Yet things are not so bad after all for the impoverished boy turned author. In the struggle between master and servant, which can be recast as a struggle between author and reader, it is the latter who is seduced by the narrator's rhetoric into siding with the servant. The comic payoff of seeing Lazarillo's blind master smash into the column springs from a sense of relief at seeing the wicked man receive his proper comeuppance, and in this respect it is not unlike the catharsis of tragedy. But unlike the catharsis, which entails a purging of emotions and a return to normalcy, the cycle regenerates itself immediately in *Lazarillo*, and a new power relation is established in which Lazarillo must once more devise means of asserting himself without transgressing the will of society at large.

Lazarillo is not a loud social protestor (though he is no practitioner of Gandhi's passive resistance either). The head-splitting *engaño* perpetuated against the blind man is the only incidence of physical violence against a master. Lazarillo resents his second master, the miserly priest, far more than the first ("Escapé del trueno y di en el relámpago, porque era el ciego para con éste un Alejandro Magno" 47) [I escaped from the thunder and ran into lightning, for the blind man was like Alexander the Great compared to this fellow], yet the only violence in this second relationship is wrought on poor Lazarillo, and when the two part company, the master maintains control: "Lázaro, de hoy más eres tuyo y no mío. Busca amo y vete con Dios..." (71) [Lazaro, from now on you are yours and not mine. Find another master and go with God.] The third master, the least domineering and most cordial of the three, has predicated his existence on the visual trappings of authority and wealth, when in actuality he is but a well-dressed picaro in his own right. As Sieber brilliantly argues, the language of the third *tractado*, particularly the

forms of address employed by Lazarillo towards his master in thought, undermine the master's authority and reverse the power dynamic between the two.¹⁸ At the end of the third *tractado*, it is not the servant who flees the master but the master the servant.¹⁹

Comic theories have repeatedly identified incongruity as a principal agent of the comic. Fielding, for one, in his famous preface to *Joseph Andrews*, emphasizes that hunger and infirmity are never ridiculous unto themselves, but only when they afflict those putting on noble airs (or noblemen themselves). Yet as Schaeffer astutely points out, not all incongruity is unto itself comic, as in the case of poetic metaphor.²⁰ Comedy thrives for Schaeffer not solely on incongruity, but on the combination of incongruity and comic context. In the case of *Lazarillo*, quite clearly, both comic context (the well-worn techniques and anecdotes of late Middle Ages) and comic incongruity are finely laced together. Beyond the brute physical humor described above, the power relations between master and servant provide ample occasion for both context and incongruity. The comic motif in question would appear at first glance to be a well-worn one—the sly servant subverting the will of his master or basking in a knowledge that his social superior lacks. Yet the archetypal master-slave interaction, most commonly seen in the *Amphitryo* of Plautus (and re-workings of the theme by the likes of Molière and Dryden) is not an adequate model to explain the dynamics of *Lazarillo*.

Two important things separate Lazarillo from the long tradition of the comically unruly servant. First, the masters in question here, as much as they differ in their respective status in the eyes of society, are, from a moral perspective, less noble than their servant. This is the great irony of the text, and Gogol's *Dead Souls* (arguably a Russian cousin of the picaresque) follows *Lazarillo*'s example, as the protagonist

Chichikov's meanderings through the steppes bring him into contact with a host of corrupt landowners whose base amorality makes them (not their serfs) the real dead souls. Secondly, unlike a Plautus play or medieval folktale depicting the unruly servant, all of the information transmitted to the reader in *Lazarillo* is filtered through (or tainted by) the picaro's consciousness. Hence, the rhetoric is flavored in such a way that servant will, in the court of the reader's mind, win the case.

To appreciate this second point, it is worth turning our attention back to the prologue, which initiates the comedy of power relations. The prologue is a fascinating piece of rhetoric, aiming to persuade an unknown party, addressed as *Vuestra Merced*, to take action on behalf of the narrator in what very likely is a legal problem:

Suplico a Vuestra Merced reciba el pobre servicio de mano de quien lo hiciera más rico, si su poder y deseo se conformaran. Y pues Vuestra Merced escribe se le escriba y relate el caso muy por extenso, parecióme no tomalle por el medio, sino del principio, porque se tenga entera noticia de mi persona; (11)

[I beseech Your Honor to accept this poor handiwork of someone who would make you richer if only his power and desire were in tune. And since Your Honor has written that I write and relate to you the case in great detail, it seemed I should not start in the middle but from the beginning, so that you might have a full account of me.]

Two things stand out from this passage. First, there is an explicit appeal to servitude. Just as the protagonist is servant of many masters in the text to follow, so is he offering a "pobre servicio" to a social superior. The relationship between master and servant is, like that in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, not simply a matter of the exertion of one will over

another, but entails a dynamic mutual interaction. The master can only be master if he has a slave to lord over, and this dependency ultimately renders him a slave of a different sort. The power relation that Lazarillo aims to establish is therefore far from a straightforward one. The act of narration is a subtle means of grasping power where there is none to be obtained in the rigidly defined social structure outside.

The second aspect of relevance here is the last line, where “entera noticia de mi persona” is promised in the text to follow. Given the fragmentary character of the text that follows, especially the highly truncated quality of the final four *tractados*, this claim could hardly be taken seriously. The claim to wholeness in autobiography is of course not unique to the picaresque, but it represents a special problem in the genre, given the unreliable status of a narrator whose existence is predicated on *engaño*. An obvious comic incongruity results from a text that promises much and that is *ipso facto* doomed to failure. Moreover, the relationship between Lazarillo and “Vuestra Merced” is fraught with the same ambivalence characteristic of all Lazarillo’s relationships to authority figures. As Hitchcock points out, the narrative as we come to read it may be a heap of extraneous material for a reader, “Vuestra Merced,” whose only real concern is the “caso” involving Lazarillo’s triangular relationship with his unfaithful wife and the archpriest of Toledo (I will discuss the details of this towards the end of the essay).²¹

The comedy of social relations might represent a higher level of comic vitality, an advanced stage in the text’s comic evolution. A text like *Lazarillo* renders problematic the very notion of firmly established authority, and the comic techniques it employs are of the “low” physical and the “artistic” literary/rhetorical sort.

Picaresque Self-Pity

Of the three varieties of comedy outlined in this essay, it is the comedy of self-pity which is most properly the domain of the picaresque. This is largely due to the picaro's peculiar need as narrator to rehash the sordid details of his childhood and formative years, or, as in the case of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the many sins of his adult life. As argued above, the desire to recount trauma from childhood, particularly violent trauma (as in the case of the wine jar episode), and to do so with such obvious pleasure, can be read as either a form of masochism, or of rhetorical embellishment. The case of *Lazarillo* leads us clearly in the direction of the latter.

At first, it would appear that effusions of self-pity, particularly those that entail the narration of past trauma (often intensely humiliating or violent), would have little to do with the "spirit" of comedy. It has been pointed out in numerous theories of the comic, most notably perhaps by Bergson, that comic protagonists often exaggerate to the point of absurdity a character flaw such as miserliness (as in Molière's *L'Avare*) or an anachronistic obsession with chivalry (as in the infamous case of *Quijote*), and that they do so without self-knowledge. In other words, the comic protagonist is quite often the greatest flouter of the Delphic admonition to know oneself. Yet this is not the case with *Lazarillo* and his picaresque descendants. The picaresque narrator knows himself well perhaps for his own good. His narrative is therefore to be read with great suspicion and with an eye to the ulterior rhetorical motives behind the narration.

One prominent example of *Lazarillo*'s self-pity occurs during his gastronomically disappointing sojourn with the squire:

Y acostase en la cama, poniendo por cabecera las calzas y el jubón; y mandóme echar a sus pies, lo cual yo hice, mas maldito el sueño que yo dormí, porque las cañas y mis salidos hueso en toda la noche dejaron de rifar y encenderse; que con mis trabajos, males y hambre, pienso que en mi cuerpo no había libra de carne; y también, como aquel día no había comido casi nada, rabiaba de hambre, la cual con el sueño no tenía amistad. Maldíjeme mil veces, Dios me lo perdone, y a mi ruin fortuna, allí, lo más de la noche; y lo peor: no osándome revolver por no despertalle, pedí a Dios muchas veces la muerte. (80-81)²²

[He lay down on the bed, using his breeches and doublet as a pillow. He ordered me to lie at his feet, which I did. But damned the dream if I slept, since the reeds and my protruding bones did not stop fighting and getting rouled up, since with all my labor, misfortunes and hunger there was not a pound of flesh, and more still, since I had eaten next to nothing that day, I was ravaged by hunger, which is no friend of sleep. I cursed myself a thousand times (may God forgive me for it) and my ruinous fortune, throughout the night, and the worst thing is that I didn't dare turn over so as not to wake my master, asking God many times to bring death.]

Again, the emphasis here is on physical suffering. But the physical is not an end in itself but a means to a more subtle comic strategy. Lazarillo experiences here a different version of the mind-body conflict that became the philosophical *bête-noire* of Descartes, though there is no evil being plaguing him in his sleep. Indeed, there is little sleep to be had because of the awful grating sound his bones make as his fragile body flails about

vainly in the arms of Morpheus. Hunger is of course to blame, but strange in this case is the self-chastisement that occurs. In most cases where blame is to be placed, it is on the shoulders on one of Lazarillo's wicked masters. Such effusions of self-pity could on the one hand be read, as Jauss does, as parodies of the spiritual auto-biographies of saints such as Augustine or Teresa of Ávila.²³ Whereas the saint celebrates poverty and suffering as imitation of the sufferings of Christ, Lazarillo is more concerned with "paraíso panal" (56) here on earth than with celestial bliss.²⁴ While the martyr would praise the divine for suffering, Lazarillo implores the God to whom he otherwise shows no allegiance for a quick death. Yet regarding moments of self-pity in the text as mere travesties of spiritual autobiographies reduces one of the key comic and rhetoric techniques to the status of mere burlesque and fails to take proper account of the innovation of picaresque comedy.

The comedy generated by such passages results from a process more complex than the Hobbesian model of Schadenfreude allows. It of course derives some of its bite from the Schadenfreude of the presumably comfortable literate aristocrat of 16th century Spain, contemplating perhaps with malicious pleasure into an impoverished boy's struggles to assert himself in a hostile world. Yet Lazarillo has graduated from the blind-man's school of self-pity, has learned how to elicit Christian compassion from callous passersby in the street (and readers as well), and at one critical point in the narrative, he makes quite explicit his knack for embellishment: "Finalmente, allí lloré mi trabajosa vida pasada y mi cercana muerte venidera. Y con todo, disimulando lo mejor que pude." (76) [Lastly, I bewailed my hard past life and my imminent death. And throughout, faking it as best I could.] Any "discreto lector" of the text should comprehend the

disconnect between the great lengths gone to create some form of pathos and the revelation of the falsity of these claims.²⁵

In other words, Lazarillo's comic strategy would seem to undermine itself, or at least its ulterior rhetorical aims. It operates at least in part on the *engaño* of narration, the primary condition of any emotional interaction with art (verisimilitude and identification). To be sure, theorists of comedy are not wholly off base in their emphasis on distance and superiority. Yet Lazarillo's highly personalized style of narration (at least in the first three *tractados*), enriched by the autobiographical quality of the text, the sensual appeal of his hunger narrative, the social resonance of the problem of poverty, the appeal to Christian *agape*, and of course the frequent invocations of self-pity, aim to establish an intimacy between comic protagonist and reader that persists throughout much of the text.

Any reading of the text is thus a test of sorts—both of the reader's degree of empathy and astuteness. Yet empathy and astuteness are opposing terms in this test. The former relies on certain expectations of Christian benevolence, whereas the latter is a measure of discretion and perspicuity. Whether Lazarillo's reader fails or passes this test depends on the criteria set. Either one is Lazarillo's dupe, the servant of his rhetoric, or, like the priest in the second *tractado*, discerns the *engaño* at work and undermines the pity it endeavors to evoke. In other words, Lazarillo's reader becomes, depending on the outcome of the test, either a benevolent simpleton or a heartless cynic.

Yet there may be a way out of the impasse, and that way out may be the function of laughter. This laughter is at once an appeal to an instinct to attain superiority and a swallowing of the bait that the narrator has laid out for the reader—a rise to power and a submission to authority. Aristotle famously asserts in his *Parts of Animals* that man is the

only laughing animal (echoed later by Rabelais' famous phrase "le rire est le propre de l'homme"), and in this sense, laughter is an expression of the human triumphing over the animalistic. Yet laughter also implies a temporary suppression of both opposing terms above—namely Christian empathy and astute reading, not to mention rationality.²⁶ Laughter in *Lazarillo* is therefore the third term that leads to an *Aufhebung* of these two contraries in the Hegelian sense, not a negation of either but an incorporation of both into something greater. Yet as I will argue in the next section, that "something greater" must undergo a moment of suppression in the text, a kind of death, in order to establish itself in a different form in the final section of the text.

Comic Death and Resurrection

The conclusion of the third *tractado* marks a significant shift in the tone of the text. In the first place, the final four sections of the text are considerably shorter. But the differences do not stop there. *Lazarillo* recedes largely from the focus of the narrative, and with him the comic energy that had permeated the text for the first three parts.²⁷ Indeed, the final four *tractados* represent, like the prologue, a problem for any critic. On the one hand, they are a necessary step towards the prologue's promise of "entera noticia de mi persona." Yet quite obviously they fail to fulfill this promise. The fourth *tractado*, scarcely a page long, ends with cryptic brevity: "Y por esto y por otras cosillas que no digo, salí dél." (111) The contrast here is startling. If we recall the passages discussed above, particularly the wine jar scene, the narrator relishes in a seemingly masochistic desire to recount every detail of the encounter, every "cosilla" is included.²⁸ Yet with the fourth segment of the text, "le plaisir du texte" has altogether been sapped, and what

remains is an almost perfunctory treatment of the remainder of Lazarillo's life. Much has been made of the strong sexual innuendo of this fourth *tractado*. Sieber expends tremendous intellectual energy in a detailed analysis of the possibilities in this fourth *tractado*, appealing at once to linguistic and psychoanalytic theory. As attractive as his and other arguments can be on a purely intellectual level, the tired but trustworthy voice of common sense calls us back with the admonition that curious textual gaps in sixteenth century prose are not always gold mines of psychoanalytic speculation.²⁹ Constructing an argument on what the fourth *tractado* does not contain would seem analogous to making large purchases on credit when one's bank account is dwindling.

The fifth segment appears equally out of place. It recounts a stay with a *buldero*, or seller of papal indulgences, but it devotes nine-tenths of its content not to Lazarillo's struggle to fill his belly or the means he devises to escape, but to an account of his master's double-dealing, which has little direct impact on Lazarillo. It is as if the fifth *tractado* loses sight of the auto-biographical project which had motivated the writing of the text.³⁰ Again, the narrator appears to hurry in his presentation of the content. When discussing the misdeeds of the *buldero*, he writes "...y porque todos los que le veía hacer sería largo de contar..." (115) After having switched the narrative focus temporarily from first to third person, Lazarillo concludes the puzzling fifth *tractado* as he had the fourth: "Finalmente, estuve con este mi quinto amo cerca de cuatro meses, en los cuales pasé también hartas fatigas." (125) Yet just as the "cosillas" of the last segment evade narration, so are these "hartas fatigas" beyond the scope of the written text. Before, such mishaps furnished the text with a deep reservoir of comic energy. Here, the real "harta fatiga" appears that of narration.

Given the rather marked lag in narrative energy that sets in after the conclusion of the third *tractado*, it would be no exaggeration to speak of Lazarillo's death. Stephen Gilman does as much, and his argument is quite convincing.³¹ For Gilman, evidence of this death is present not just in the rather macabre descriptions of physical degradation and torment that sprinkle the text, but more cogently still, in the symbolic description of the squire's squalid bed, the legs of which might represent sarcophagi. Perhaps one could build on Gilman's argument and describe a death of a different sort. Lazarillo maintains a certain existence after this critical point, but the comic energy that had defined him before has waned considerably, and what results in the following segments is a lifeless Lazarillo, a sort of picaresque zombie.

The seventh and final *tractado* marks a return to narrative energy, but the source of the energy has changed. Whereas the physical reality of hunger had driven the narrative forward before, the issue has been effectively swallowed up. Now, at last, emerges the social element. To be sure, the "social" had already been present, insofar as the picaresque's dogged individualism and resistance to authority had been shaped by the neglect rather than the influence of society. The life of the picaresque is defined in opposition to society, and this final section of the text represents a rather sudden integration into "respectable" society. The first *tractados* represent the itinerary of the peripatetic picaresque, which unlike the wandering of Odysseus is devoid of any heroism and partakes of what Lukács would call a "transcendental homelessness."³² Before, the focus had been on master/servant relations. Now, though, it is the eyes of society that matter most, and light is finally shed on the "caso" discussed in the prologue. Lázaro—namely that the now married and respectable citizen and town crier of Toledo is a cuckold: "Mas malas

lenguas, que nunca faltaron ni faltarán, no nos dejan vivir, diciendo no sé qué y sí sé qué de que veen a mi mujer irle a hacer la cama y guisalle de comer.” (132) The supposed recipient of these extra-conjugal visits is none other than the archpriest of Toledo, another master getting the better of a servant. Yet here, Lázaro is powerless to inflict secret revenge on the master. And of course, comic effect is generated by the incongruity between Lázaro’s occupation as a maker of public announcements in the streets of Toledo and his rather heavy-handed threat to anyone who fails to keep their mouth shut about his wife. While the prologue celebrates the heroic act of literary creation as a social act, the final *tractado* folds the text back into the private.

The brand of humor present in this final *tractado* is of a more refined and intellectual sort than that presented earlier in the narrative. Having transcended the realm of the physical, the narrative now celebrates irony as its principal comic technique.³³ The most memorable line of the *tractado* is that which ends the narrative, namely that Lázaro has reached “la cumbre de toda buena fortuna.” (135) [the height of good fortune.] Remarkably, the self-pity so prominent earlier in the narrative has faded, having been replaced with a new comic hubris. Lázaro is like an adult whose childhood trauma in the schoolyard renders him fragile and excessively defensive in his demeanor. His overweening attitude compensates for his obvious psychological and social fragility. Though he appears to have attained some sense of social stability, the stability remains on shaky ground. Lázaro remains firmly under the sway of a social superior who could, upon provocation, cast him down to the lowly realm of the picaresque, back to the world of Lazarillo.

Chapter Two

The Neurotic Picaresque: *Guzmán de Alfarache*'s Guilty Comedy

One critical problem underlying the assumption that the picaresque tradition emerged in late sixteenth-century Spain is the fact that the two foundational picaresque texts—*Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Guzmán de Alfarache* have rather little in common. In addition to the obvious difference in size and scope (*Lazarillo* fills around sixty modern pages, *Guzmán* around a thousand), there is a free-spirited quality in both the textual organization and the ludic comic adventures of *Lazarillo* that *Guzmán* allows into its textual domain, but only to enslave the comic spirit and put it to work for more weighty moral and ideological purposes.³⁴ Whereas *Lazarillo* is the dialectical interplay of competing comic forces, *Guzmán* depicts picaresque comedy caught in the maelstrom of dour Counter-Reformation ideology. If *Guzmán* is not a wholly schizophrenic text, then it is a neurotic one, divided against itself, constantly calling into question its own progression and reasons for existence as it trudges onward through the very metaphysical haze of *engaño* which it so frequently denounces.³⁵

There are of course significant historical reasons to consider in confronting the contrast between the two foundational picaresque novels. The period between the initial publication in 1554 and *Guzmán*'s first appearance in 1599 witnessed emergence of a more rigid attitude towards jest and literary tomfoolery, and the culmination of this new attitude was the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. The first index, approved by Inquisitor General Valdés, appeared in Madrid in 1559, just five years after *Lazarillo*, and not surprisingly, the subversive and anti-clerical undertones of *Lazarillo* brought it to the list. And naturally the Counter-Reformation's efforts to re-define Catholic dogma against the

nascent tide of Protestant fervor made comedy, the most morally dubious of the arts, an easy target for censorship. The situation of the comic writer in 1599 was understandably a good deal more precarious than in 1554. And yet with the accession of Philip III just a year before the publication of *Guzmán* in 1598, the ban on the *comedia* was lifted. Indeed, one would best characterize the intellectual climate of Alemán's Spain as nervously repressive.

In addition to the orthodox religious assault on comedy, an important shift in literary aesthetics was beginning to take shape around the end of the sixteenth century. The newfound preoccupation with Aristotle emerging from Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century brought special attention to the question of literary propriety. Literary composition was no longer a matter of free adaptation of folk traditions and occasional interjections of authorial inspiration, but was subject to rules of comportment.³⁶ The same "civilizing process" that Elias describes with regard to table manners was taking place within the realm of the literary. As Burckhardt observes with regard to Renaissance Italy, the State emerges as a work of art of its own, and all forms of cultural production, especially literature, became expressions of national character.³⁷ The commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* emerging in the decades between *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán* by the likes of Robortello, Maggi, Castelvetro, and Riccoboni offer for the first time since Antiquity a genuine concern for the rules of artistic composition and the norms of literary propriety. As we saw earlier in the introduction, comedy for Aristotle and his Italian commentators is a second-class citizen of sorts. Whereas Aristotle's rather terse definition of laughter describes it in terms of a response to ugliness (*tou aischrou*) and as a distortion of the face without pain, his Renaissance commentators fill in the gaps with explanations that

throw into high relief the “baseness” at the root of laughter.³⁸ Castelvetro offers the following description:

For, as we have already said, our nature has been so corrupted by the sin of our first parents that we delight in seeing defects in our fellow men, either because the knowledge that others too are imperfect gives us the assurance that we are not as imperfect as we thought or because the perception in others of defects which we do not possess ourselves makes us feel superior and fills us with pride and joy.³⁹

Laughter becomes for Castelvetro not merely a means of castigating vice, but an expression and indeed an affirmation of our innate corruption and of the sinfulness of mankind. As in the case of *Lazarillo*, the model of laughter as means of expressing superiority over an inferior is rendered problematic by the intimate relationship established between the picaresque narrator and the reader in the *Guzmán*. The more the master rhetorician and master trickster seduces the reader, the more problematic such a one-sided model of laughter becomes.⁴⁰ As in the *Lazarillo*, the narrator/reader relationship is fraught with ambivalence, but the ambivalence in Alemán is of a different sort. What makes *Guzmán* problematic in light of Castelvetro’s equation of laughter and sinfulness is the fact that the novel maintains a highly problematic relationship to the comic. As we will see, Alemán’s novel, very much unlike *Lazarillo* and the *Quixote* which follows it by just a few years, engages in a kind of literary self-flagellation. It introduces comic content, gives in to the prurient tastes of its readership, but it also suppresses this content through constant questioning of its own picaresque content.

Before we get into the inner tension of the Alemán’s novel, it is worth dwelling for an instant on the critical reception of the novel (and indeed of the picaresque more

broadly). The contrast established here between the comic innovations of *Lazarillo* (which I introduce under the rubric of picaresque comedy) and the complex response to that comedy in *Guzmán* has not properly been accounted for in critical literature on the picaresque. Bakhtin, whose focus of course goes beyond the picaresque, paints the history of comic prose fiction in rather large brushstrokes:

In the Renaissance, laughter in its most radical, universal, and at the same time gay form emerged from the depths of folk culture; it emerged but once in the course of history, over a period of some fifty or sixty years (in various countries at various times) and entered with its popular (vulgar) language the sphere of great literature and high ideology. It appeared to play an essential role in the creation of such masterpieces of world literature as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the novels of Rabelais and Cervantes, Shakespeare's dramas and comedies, and others.⁴¹

In contradistinction to the carnivalesque spirit of the Renaissance, where high and low are inverted and folly has free reign, Bakhtin posits a Middle Ages entrenched in a dogma and frighteningly sober. The obvious problem is not just the far-reaching historical generalization, nor the 250 years separating Boccaccio from Cervantes, but the particular problem of a writer like Alemán, who by no means can be categorized in the same way as Rabelais or Cervantes. And even Anthony Close's recent and marvelously erudite study of the problem of comedy in the Spanish Golden Age comes to a similarly generalized conclusion. For Close, comedy is generated by the same sociogenetic process which Norbert Elias associates with table manners, and the texts of the period share a fundamental comic ethos, which in turn leads to the conclusion that despite the apparent differences between the likes of Alemán, Cervantes, Quevedo, Espinel, and Úbeda, their

approach to the problem of comedy is basically uniform. Close recognizes the ideological tension in Alemán, but he nonetheless characterizes Alemán as a “superb comic novelist.”⁴² Yet as we will see, there are significant problems with such broad categorization, and if anything, Alemán’s idiosyncracies underscore the fact that Spanish comedy of the seventeenth century is better compared to finely textured layers of sedimentation than to the rock of Gibraltar.

To better express the contrast between the two foundational “picaresque” novels and hence to highlight the shakiness of the picaresque’s foundation (due largely to the problem of comedy), it is worth considering a contrast in two central comic passages in the *Lazarillo* and the *Guzmán*. Let us recall the example quoted from the previous chapter in which Lazarillo describes how a wine jar is released and crushes his face. We may recall that the source of the humor in this passage is attributable not simply to the theme of the clever blind man avenging himself on the young picaro by dropping a wine jar over his face as he steals. The anonymous author of *Lazarillo* has carefully crafted the language of the scene so as to provide something like a comic build-up. We have since come to know the same technique in cartoons for example—the overweening action of a character guilty of a kind of comic hubris, on the verge of an impending comeuppance yet altogether unaware of what awaits. Here, this comic pay-off is prepared as Lazarillo describes his every action in meticulous detail, turning his face upwards, closing his eyes so as to better savor the taste, and then the comic disaster unfolds. On a linguistic level, two elements stand out: extensive use of present progressive forms (which enhance the illusion of presence and continuity of action created in the scene) and hyperbole to raise the comic stakes one notch further: “me pareció que el cielo, con todo lo que en él hay,

me había caído encima.” The sense of continuity gained in this passage (it is, after all, one very long sentence) is essential for the comic to attain its purpose. The comic relies heavily on a sense of build-up, and the slightest interruption in this build-up, as seemingly insignificant as a dot at the end of a sentence, could kill the momentum and defuse the bomb about to explode.

Now let us reach into the thousand pages of *Guzmán de Alfarache* and cull out one of its most comically vibrant scenes. Here Guzmán, while lodging with one of his early masters (in this case a cook), is torn from his sleep by a dreadful sound outside. A rather interesting nocturnal encounter with his master’s wife ensues:

Oyó el mismo rebato, debiósele de antojar que yo soñaría, y en buena razón así debiera ello ser. Parecióle que no lo oyera. Ella, aunque se acostaba vestida, siempre andaba en cueros, y esta vez lo estaba, sin tener sobre los heredados de Eva camisa ni otra cobija. Y así desnuda, sin acordar de cubrirse, salió corriendo, desvalida, con un candil en la mano a reparar su hacienda. Su pensamiento y el mío fueron uno, el alboroto igual, y la diligencia en causa propia, el ruido de ambos poco, por venir descalzos. (323)

[He heard the same uproar, and it seemed as if I was dreaming, and that would have been appropriate. It seemed to him that he didn’t hear it. She, though she went to bed dressed, often pranced about nude, and this time there was neither sheet nor shirt covering the body of Eva’s descendant. And thus nude, without thinking of covering herself, she went out running with a lamp in her hand to check out the premises. Her thought and mine were one, the commotion the same,

and the due diligence deserved, but the noise of us both was scant as we both walked barefoot.]

As in the wine jar passage quoted in the previous chapter from the *Lazarillo*, the syntax here contributes to a sense of comic anticipation. Just as Lazarillo tilts his head back and closes his eyes as the blind master prepares to send the wine jar crashing down on his face, the mature and supposedly repentant narrator here takes curious pleasure in recounting each detail of past torment and humiliation. Though this scene is governed by comic happenstance of the sort one might witness on stage in farce, there is a sense of underlying control in the syntax that is at odds with the chaos depicted. And there is an erotic charge to this passage altogether absent from the *Lazarillo* –an eroticism that recalls the sensual comedy of Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*.⁴³

Veisnos aquí en el patio juntos, ella espantada en verme y yo asombrado de verla. Ella sospechó que yo era duende: soltó el candil y dio un gran grito. Yo, atemorizado de la figura y con el encandilado, di otro mayor, creyendo sería el alma del despenser de casa, que había fallecido dos días antes, y venía por ajustarse de cuentas con mi amo...Dieron los gatos a huir; trompecé con un mansejón de casa en el primero escalón. Asíóme a las piernas con las uñas; pensé que ya me llevaba el que a redro vaya, pareció que me arrancaba el alma. (323)

[We saw each other together on the patio, she frightened to see me and me shocked to see her. She mistook me for a goblin, tossed away her candlestick and let out a great cry. I was horrified by the candlelit figure that I shouted even louder, believing it to be the soul of the landlord who had died two days before and who was coming to settle up with my master...the cats began to flee, and I

stumbled over one on the first step. It seized onto my legs with its claws and I believed that it was leading me down to hell; it seemed as if it was tearing out my soul.]

A number of comic tropes converge in this marvelous scene—mistaken identity, comic incongruity between the mundane and the supposedly supernatural, a trivial cause (the fighting of cats) leading to an outrageous brouhaha, the exaggerated bodily response of physical comedy (what Bergson would term “du mécanique plaqué sur le vivant”).⁴⁴ One can read this scene as a parody of the medieval morality play for its union of exaggerated physical response and supernatural intervention in mundane affairs, present in Guzmanillo’s intense and exaggerated fear that he is being dragged down to hell by a demon. Or the scene could represent a moment of self-questioning, indeed a parody of the novel’s own excessive moralizing. As in the *Lazarillo*, the comic here is of an intensely physical sort, and laughter is generated by the infliction of physical violence (as in the wine jar episode) or the degradation of the body (hunger and emaciation). And yet there is a new dimension here, a sophistication of syntax and yet a baseness of content that dips far below the physical comedy of *Lazarillo*. For one, this scene blatantly violates the sort of propriety that the novel’s two prologues esteem. And were the erotically-charged comedy not enough to ruffle the feathers of the self-proclaimed “discreto lector” to which one of the novel’s prologues are addressed, the base scatological comedy that follows certainly would:

Con esta alteración, si el fresco de la mañana no lo hizo, a la señora mi ama le faltó la virtud retentiva y aflojándosele los cerraderos del vientre, antes de entrar en su cámara, me la dejó en portales y patio, todo lleno de huesezuelos de guindas,

que debía de comérselas enteras. Tuve que trabajar por un buen rato en barrerlo y lavarlo, por estar a mi cargo la limpieza. Allí supe que las inmundicias de tales acaecimientos huelen más y peor que las naturalmente ordinarias. (324)

[With this incident, and if the freshness of the morning didn't do it, my master's wife lacked the virtue of restraint and spilled out the contents of her stomach before returning to her chamber, and she left these for me on the portal and patio, all chock-full of sour cherries which she probably had eaten whole. I had to work for quite a while in mopping this up, as I was charged with cleaning. I learned then that the filth of such droppings smell worse than normal ones.

For a moment here in the novel, we can discern the ironic tone of *Lazarillo*, the wry smile offered in confronting the sordid aspects of existence and the self-profession of ignorance, the dual charge of picaresque comedy.⁴⁵ Guzmanillo, for this brief passage in the novel, has the upper-hand over his older, more dour master—the mature and repentant Guzmán. And yet for all of the comic exuberance in this passage, the novel as a whole beats down its own impulse to picaresque comedy. Indeed, whereas the night encounter with his nude mistress might rouse a seventeenth-century reader's erotic antenna, that same erotic impulse would be suffocated by the brutal inclusion of such scatological detail here. One is reminded here of Kant's definition of the comic in the *Critique of Judgment* as an expectation that ends up amounting to nothing, and here, the lascivious inclinations of the indiscreet reader are turned upside down by the low bathroom humor that follows. A number of other comic possibilities present themselves throughout the novel, but few are given this sort of unfettered expression. For all of the transgressions of this passage, the novel is constantly eager to suppress its own comic impulses.

An example of such repression occurs just pages before the scene above. The raucous tone is altogether absent. The narrator employs a similar verbal virtuosity not in the service of unfettered comic mayhem, but of stern moralizing, and a sweeping indictment of *ociosidad* ensues:

Perdíme con las malas compañías, que son verdugos de la virtud, escalera de los vicios, vino que emborracha, humo que ahoga, hechizo que enhechiza, sol de marzo, áspid sordo y voz de sirena. Cuando comencé a servir, procuraba trabajar y dar gusto; después los malos amigos me perdieron dulcemente. La ociosidad ayudó gran parte y aun fue la causa de todos mis daños. Como al bien ocupado no hay virtud que le falte, al ocioso no hay vicio que no le acompañe. (318)

[I lost myself in bad company, that are hangmen of virtue, stairs of vice, wine that intoxicates, smoke that chokes, incantation that mystifies, the sun of march, the deaf asp and the voice of the siren. When I began to serve, I put myself to work and enjoy myself, and in time my friends cajoled me into corruption. Leisure was a big part of it and was the cause of all the harm. Just as the busy person does not lack any virtue, so does the idler not lack any vice.]

Guzmán's message here is clear enough: leisure time is the mother of all vice, and virtue springs from gainful employment. The flexibility of Alemán's far-reaching chain of metaphors highlights the polymorphous nature of vice. The obvious problem here is that leisure is the necessary condition of any engagement with novels, particularly with one of the size and scope of *Guzmán*.⁴⁶ As we shall see a bit later in the chapter, there is a curious imbrication of leisure and guilt in Alemán, but before we can get to that problem, the novel's two prologues must be considered.

The Archangel's Scale: *Guzmán's* Two Prologues

The comic spirit in *Lazarillo* bubbles up from the very beginning, both in the linguistically and rhetorically playful prologue and in the ludic and sexually charged description of the picaresque's early life. *Lazarillo's* prologue is notable above all for its obsequious supplication of an unnamed *Vuestra Merced* (and of course the implied reader). One of the fascinating features of *Lazarillo* is the mercurial protagonist-narrator and his ambivalent relationship to *Vuestra Merced* which, very much like the power relations dramatized in the text, is a perpetual interchange between assertion of power and subversion (through rhetoric and comical rhetoric in particular). Here as before, the contrast to *Guzmán* could hardly be more pronounced. *Guzmán* begins on a far more ominous note than *Lazarillo*. It offers two prologues rather than one, and neither is rhetorically playful or comic.

A fitting visual representation of *Guzmán's* prologue might be Rogier van der Weyden's powerful triptych on the Last Judgment.⁴⁷ The first is addressed to the "*Vulgo*," which is not the presumably private readership of *Lazarillo* but rather the *hoi polloi* of early seventeenth-century Spain, loose with their morals and their words:

No es nuevo para mí, aunque lo sea para ti, oh enemigo vulgo, los muchos malos amigos que tienes, lo poco que sabes, cuán mordaz, envidioso y avariento eres; qué presto en difamar, qué tardo en honrar, qué cierto a los daños, qué incierto en los bienes, qué fácil moverte, qué difícil en corregirte. (108)

[It is not new for me, even though it may be for you, you vile throng, the many coarse friends you have, the little you know, how spiteful, envious, and avaricious

you are; how quick to malign, how slow in honoring, how certain in harm, how uncertain in good, how easy it is to incite you, how difficult to correct you.]

The great irony of these opening lines is that the very qualities here ascribed to the scurrilous reading populace unfit for the text to follow are present in the protagonist. Indeed, the novel to follow, for all of its moralizing digressions, offers ample occasions for the hedonistic reader to get his kicks (the raucous comic scene above is a powerful example of this contradiction). From a rhetorical point of view, this prologue is a far cry from Lazarillo's obsequious tone in addressing *Vuestra Merced*.⁴⁸ *Guzmán's* first prologue sprays verbal venom on his unwanted readership:

No quiero gozar el privilegio de tus honras ni la franqueza de tus lisonjas, cuando con ello quieras honrarme, que la alabanza del malo es vergonzosa. Quiero más la reprehensión del bueno, por serlo el fin con que la hace, que tu estimación depravada, pues forzoso ha de ser mala... Libertad tienes, desenfrenado eres, materia se te ofrece: corre, destroza, rompe, despedaza como mejor te parezca, que las flores holladas de tus pies coronan las sienes y dan fragancia a el olfato del virtuoso. (109)

I do not want to enjoy the privilege of your honors nor the candor of your praise when you wish to honor me with it, for the praise of an evil person is embarrassing. I prefer the rejection of a good person being the means for which it is done than your depraved judgment which certainly is bad... You have frivolous liberty, you are unrestrained, you are being offered material: go ahead and run, destroy it, break it, take it apart as you are inclined; may the flowers stomped on by your feet crown the temples and give fragrance to the virtuous man's smelling.

The *vulgo* is, as Riley and Gilbert-Santamaría point out, a loaded term.⁴⁹ Alemán is far from the first Golden Age author to employ it. Even in a society as rigidly hierarchical as early-seventeenth century Spain, one was not born with the word “vulgo” stamped on one’s forehead, particularly if one is fortunate to come across a novel such and have the education sufficient to read it. This prologue is not just an indictment, but a challenge. And the challenge here is to the unnamed’ reader’s self-knowledge. The Delphic Oracle’s admonition to ‘know thyself’ is here the necessary precondition of a reading experience which demands at its very outset an inner-probing of motives. The narrator is here calling on the unnamed reader to demonstrate a self-knowledge superior to that evinced by the novel’s protagonist. The novel to follow is itself an agonistic search for self-knowledge, a coming to grips with selfhood through reflections on past malfeasance and a healthy (or perhaps unhealthy) measure of self-reproaching. The sort of reader here denounced is eager to consume novels for meretricious pleasure rather than work through them for moral and religious betterment. Today, some cultural critics might hold similar contempt for the masses that spend their empty hours with drugstore pulp with its characteristic covers featuring phantasmagoric imagery and bulging letters. The readership of seventeenth-century Spain was, suffice it to say, only a fraction of the society as a whole, and this, along with the very limited availability of novels, makes Alemán’s vitriol here all the more remarkable. The *vulgo* was in fact what we today might think of as an elite educated class.⁵⁰

An additional point is worth making about the readership which constitutes the *vulgo*. Its purported preference for *delectare* to the absolute exclusion of *prodesse* leads us clearly to the assumption that such a group of unruly literati would prefer the

picaresque mischief of a text like *Lazarillo* over the more serious lucubration of a Juan Luis Vives (or the refined satire of an Erasmus for that matter). We might therefore read *Guzmán* not as an affirmation of the picaresque style first celebrated in *Lazarillo* but rather an indictment of its comic excess. *Lazarillo* offers rather little in the way of moralizing and quite a lot in the area of picaresque comedy. There are sociological and even religious dimensions to the laughter generated *Lazarillo*, which endows picaresque laughter with a serious quality not found in Antiquity, but for the narrator of *Guzmán*, no laughter is socially or morally responsible.⁵¹ The few comic interludes that the novel permits itself are framed by moments of intense self-castigation (as the longer comic passage quoted above). Rather than constituting the foundation for all later picaresque writing, *Guzmán* becomes a massive anvil weighing heavily over *Lazarillo* and its offspring. The fault line which severs the picaresque “genre” begins here.

Guzmán propels itself through contradiction. The very prologue is evidence of this dialectical tension between contrary terms, and the second prologue is targeted at a much more selective group of readers, the so-called “*discreto lector*.” If the chief characteristics of the *vulgo* are an unbridled hedonism and a propensity to plunder the literary text for tawdry entertainment, the discreet reader distinguishes himself from the horde through restraint and a willingness to submit to authority:

Mucho te digo que deseo decirte, y mucho dejé de escribir, que te escribo. Haz como leas lo que leyeres y *no te rías de la conseja* y se te pase el consejo; recibe los que te doy y el ánimo con que te los ofrezco: no los echas como barreduras al muladar del olvido. Mira que podrá ser escobilla de precio. Recoge, junta esa

tierra, métela en el crisol de la consideración, dale fuego de espíritu, y te aseguro hallarás algún oro que te enriquezca. (111)

[I will tell you much of what I want to tell you, and I stopped writing what I am writing you. Act as if you read what you may read and do not laugh at the fable and miss out on the message: receive those that I give you and the spirit with which I offer them to you: do not toss them out like garbage to the waste dump of oblivion. Look at what could be a valuable brush. Gather, merge this soil, put it in the melting pot of consideration, give it the fire of inspiration, and I assure you that you will find gold that will make you rich.]

A number of practitioners of picaresque comedy write highly ironic prologues, but that is not the case here. Alemán is speaking with grave and dire purpose to his “discreet reader.” As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Quevedo and Úbeda will parody Alemán’s self-righteousness. But later works aside, the question arises how any reader is to react to two such prologues. Of great significance here is the injunction not to laugh. Laughter is infectious and self-perpetuating, and just as importantly, it suffocates the kind of serious rational and moral reflection that the novel that follows is to inspire. As the late Renaissance moralist Juan de Aranda writes: “El reír mucho arguye poco juicio y liviandad de corazón.” (178)

And yet there this leads to an obvious problem. *Guzmán* may take what is in *Lazarillo* an essentially comic theme and rework it into a serious novel on the metaphysics of *engaño* and the struggle with one man against himself, indeed nature divided against itself. But the novel’s seriousness is likewise undermined by its comic impulses. There remain in the novel a number of scenes in which the comic spirit of

Lazarillo rises through the dense rhetorical and ideological fog of the text.⁵² One might think of, the pranks that Guzmán plays on the Cardinal's secretary in I. 3.8 , or Guzmán's disguising himself as Don Juan de Guzmán in Part Two in order to get back at his wealthy and haughty uncle in Genoa. And then there is the protagonist's one seemingly legitimate friend in Part Two, Sayavedra, whose identity crisis and descent into madness and suicide amounts to a parody, if not a literary assault on the author who had composed a spurious sequel to Alemán's novel.⁵³ The list could go on, but few of these scenes develop naturally and uninhibitedly, as they do in Apuleius, Rabelais, or *Lazarillo*. Rather, they are consistently disrupted or even suffocated by moralizing digressions. The comic cannot exist on its own terms but only in relation to its contrary—moral sobriety and spiritual ataraxia. But the flipside of this is that ataraxia is never attained in a novel beset with such inner turbulence.

To properly appreciate the novel's sense of guilty comedy and its fundamental duality, it is worth considering the metaphysics of *engaño*. One chief characteristic of picaresque writing is its preoccupation with *engaño* in both its literal and its metaphysical dimensions. In *Lazarillo* and in its various picaresque descendants, *engaño* becomes the principal means of survival in a hostile world which subjects a young protagonist to sordid affairs and roguish companions. And yet the picaresque preoccupation with *engaño* is manifest not only in the protagonist's many encounters with rogues and mountebanks, but as several critics demonstrate with respect to *Guzmán*, it is very much present in his very manner of narration, fraught as it is with rhetorical posturing and with a perpetual struggle for power between master and servant, author and reader.⁵⁴ And yet

there is an added dimension to the problem of *engaño* in *Guzmán*—a metaphysical one namely.

Guzmán belongs to a philosophical tradition begun by Plato and culminating in the German Idealists in which reality is in fact only known to us as a reflection of something beyond it. Early in *Guzmán*, the narrator makes his alliance with Plato apparent: “Por no ser contra mi padre, quisiera callar lo que siento; aunque si he de seguir al Filósofo, mi amigo es Platón y mucho más la verdad, conformándome con ella.” (134) [Not to oppose my father, I would prefer to remain silent on what I feel, even if it is necessary to follow the philosopher, my friend is Plato and even more the truth, reconciling me with it.] Plato, who posits envy as the root of laughter in the *Philebus*, famously identifies truth not in the realm of appearance, but in the transcendent reality of ideal forms.⁵⁵ The world as perceived through the senses is mere illusion. Plato’s metaphysical dichotomy establishes itself through a long tradition running through Plotinus (for whom all reality is inextricably caught in the vortex of the Good) and the Christian Neoplatonists. The instincts and inclinations of the body, the excitement of the senses, the frills of material consumption, all for Alemán is empty *engaño*, not a palliative of pain but a perpetuation of it:

De manera que podría decirse del alma estar compuesta de dos contrarias partes: una racional y divina y la otra de natural corrupción. Y como la carne adonde se aposenta sea flaca, frágil y de tanta imperfección, habiéndolo dejado el pecado inficionado todo, vino a causar que casi sea natural a nuestro ser la imperfección y desorden. Tanto y con tal extremo, que podríamos estimar por el mayor vencimiento el que hace un hombre a sus pasiones. Mucha es la fortaleza del que

puede resistirlas y vencerlas, por la guerra infernal que se hacen siempre la razón y el apetito. (II. 434)

[It could be said that the soul is composed of contrary parts: one rational and divine, the other of natural corruption. And just as flesh might be loose, weak, and so imperfect, having been thoroughly tainted by sin, it came to be that imperfection and disorder were almost natural to our being. Such is the extremity of sin that we could deem it the case that it fully vanquishes he who gives himself over to his passions. Great is the strength of he who can resist them, given the internal war that always takes place between reason and appetite.]

The opposition between reason and appetite is nothing new. It goes back directly to the *Phaedrus* offers the metaphor of the three-horsed chariot to articulate his theory of the tripartite soul (which Freud re-writes in different terms as id, ego, and superego).⁵⁶ Yet whereas the internal turmoil in Plato is part of a larger ontological/metaphysical scheme, for Alemán it is the “natural” consequence of postlapsarian man.⁵⁷ Interesting here is the choice of qualifiers and the subjunctive: “casi sea natural.” This harks back to the image of the monster of Ravenna earlier in the novel (approximately eight hundred pages back). The infernal war between reason and appetite, like the internal contradictions of the monster invoked earlier, is replayed within the text itself, particularly in the internal opposition between picaresque comedy (appetite) and rational suffocation.

The contrary terms appetite and reason come to the fore earlier in the novel in a scene in which Guzmanillo encounters one of the many disreputable fellows who find their way into the novel and makes the following observations:

Él, sin dejar la risa—que pareció tenerla por destajo, según se daba la priesa, que, abierta la boca, dejaba caer a un lado la cabeza, poniéndose las manos en el vientre--, sin poderse ya tener en el asno, parecía querer dar consigo en el suelo. Por tres o cuatro veces probó a responder y no pudo; siempre volvía de nuevo a principiarlo, porque le estaba hirviendo en el cuerpo. (176)

[He, without ceasing his laughter—it seemed to hold him in its thrall and spur him onward, and with his mouth agape, he let his head fall to one side, putting his hands on his belly—without being able to hold onto his donkey, he seemed to want to drop down to the ground. Three or four times he tried to answer but couldn't; he kept starting this process over again because his body was cooking.]

In his *Essay on the Comic*, Marcel Gutwirth associates laughter with a “mild seizure,” what the French are fond of calling *le fou rire*. The *fou rire* is laughter that possesses the body, but here laughter entails a temporary but devastating suspension of all rational functions.⁵⁸ The language of this passage, particularly the final line about “cooking in his body” conveys the sense of helplessness that the subject in the throes of laughter experiences. For Alemán, comic literature induces this state of suspension of all rational workings, and very much in contradistinction to Cervantes, who becomes the champion of rational laughter, Alemán denounces it as irrational bestiality. The “guerra infernal” between reason and appetite is fought in the midst of laughter, and it is clearly decided for the latter.

On the Problem of Freedom in the *Guzmán*

Nietzsche offers in *Twilight of the Idols* a way of understanding the problem of free will that may help illuminate the inner turmoil in *Guzmán* (and indeed the ideology that informs Alemán's novel).⁵⁹ For Nietzsche, free will is in fact a trap, an insidious means of enslavement. The naïve believer in free will is guilty of bad faith—he believes himself in control of his status as a free agent, but in fact, free will ultimately becomes the condition for the possibility of guilt. Guilt is predicated on the notion of agency, and to the extent that a subject can be considered free agent, he or she can be tarnished with guilt. A similar relationship exists in *Guzmán* between the liberties of the picaresque and the inevitability of sinfulness.⁶⁰ What is fascinating in the case of Alemán's novel is the internal dynamic between the free course of the picaresque and the anvil cloud of sinfulness (and indeed of predetermination) hanging over Guzmanillo. Indeed, a central concern of all picaresque narrative is the tension between servitude and liberation. The picaresque is the servant of many masters and yet the obedient subordinate of none. At one point in Alemán's novel, the picaresque narrator dwells merrily on the blessed yet elusive state of liberty:

Mas después que me fui saboreando con el almíbar picaresco, de hilo me iba por ello a cierraosjos. ¡Qué linda cosa era y qué regalada!...Era bocado sin hueso, lomo descargado, holgada ocupación y libre de todo género de pesadumbre. (214)

[Later on I was savoring the picaresque nectar, and I hurried onward to it with my eyes closed. What a lovely thing it was and how easily it came! It was a bite without a bone, a load lifted, a leisurely occupation, free from all kind of distress.]

Fascinating again is the contrast between this encomium of picaresque liberty (narrated of course by the elder, supposedly enlightened narrator, looking back on his prior

malfeasance as a youth) and the passage quoted earlier in the chapter on the evils of leisure. The dialectic of picaresque comedy and the suppression of such comedy through moral introspection is therefore complemented by another dialectic between leisure (which allows for the reading of any novel) and the condemnation of this very leisure as sinful. The novel therefore inculcates itself.

Guzmán propels itself forward through dialectical interaction of contrary principles. And yet its propulsion is of the problematic sort. In stark contrast to Hegel's dialectic, the trajectory of *Guzmán* is not a heightened sense of Absolute but a permanent sense of self-division. Brancaforte quite rightly declares Sisyphus the defining metaphor of the protagonist's miserable trajectory.⁶¹ Yet what makes the novel so compelling with regard both to its ancestor *Lazarillo* and the later picaresque texts of Cervantes, Quevedo, and Úbeda (all of which respond more to *Guzmán* than *Lazarillo*) is its ambivalent treatment of the problem of comedy and of picaresque comedy in particular. Rather than solidifying the continuity of a nascent picaresque genre, *Guzmán* aligns itself on the opposite side of an axis. It severs the picaresque genre in its very incipient stages, and as we shall see in coming chapters, the fault line that begins with *Guzmán* runs through the genre for four centuries.

Chapter Three

Cervantes and the Problem of the Picaresque

The basic contrast that will guide the rest of this study has been established. On the one hand, we have the bristling comic energy of *Lazarillo*, the prototype of a genre that from its very origins is engaged with an internal struggle for self-definition. With this text and genre emerges a new comic sensibility. On the other hand, there is *Guzmán de Alfarache*, appearing on the scene some fifty years after *Lazarillo* and with a very different approach to the problem of comedy and indeed to the light-heartedness of its picaresque predecessor. *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, though intensely concerned with a new kind of realism and sensibility, are radically different in tone, rhetoric, and attitude towards the comic. The picaresque is from its very origins a problem, a genre in search of itself. Claudio Guillén describes the notion of genre quite aptly as an invitation to form, but the form is not the whole story in the picaresque.⁶² Which is to say that the writer accepting this invitation must also decide which sensibility to favor—the comic spirit of *Lazarillo* or the neurotic picaresque of *Guzmán*.

This chapter considers Cervantes' critical engagement with the picaresque, and in particular, the picaresque experiments of two *novelas ejemplares*, *Rinconete y Cortadillo* and the *Coloquio de los perros*. These picaresque experiments confront in different ways the problem of picaresque point of view (and the comedy that results from that unique narrative perspective).

Cervantes of course never wrote a full-fledged picaresque novel, but he nonetheless demonstrates an awareness of the nascent genre's limitations.⁶³ The focal

point of the Cervantine critique of the picaresque in these novellas is the picaresque narrator. For Cervantes, the picaresque narrator lacks the multi-dimensional quality of the epic narrator. Indeed, Walter Reed constructs a theory of novelistic composition on the opposition of Cervantine and picaresque modes.⁶⁴ The problem of narrative mediation is of course a major preoccupation in the *Quixote*, where the ingenious artifice of Cide Hamete Benengeli creates layers of mediation between narrator and protagonist (and by extension between reader and protagonist). In the two *Novelas ejemplares* discussed in this chapter, Cervantes problematizes the narrative point of view and teases out the contradictions in the picaresque enterprise.

We may recall how in Chapter 23 of *Don Quixote* Cervantes calls into questions the very presuppositions of picaresque autobiography in the character of Ginés de Pasamonte. Ginés is a picaro who authors presumably tedious volumes of his life in prison. He boasts that his autobiography will outshine *Lazarillo* and all other picaresque tales of “that genre” (aquel género).⁶⁵ Ginés substantiates this claim that it “trata verdades, y que son verdades tan lindas y tan donosas, que no pueden haber mentiras que se le iguallen.” [deals with true facts, and facts that are so attractive and entertaining that no fiction can possibly equal them.]⁶⁶ Ginés, like all picaros, perpetuates engaño and falsehood rather than the truth, and the emphasis on the truth being “attractive and entertaining” beyond the level of fiction is an ironic commentary on the picaresque audience’s interest in lurid detail. Moreover, when asked how he plans to end his great novel, Ginés offers the following reply: “¿Cómo puede estar acabado...si aún no está acabada mi vida.”⁶⁷ [How can it be finished if my life is not yet finished?] Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that the great success of *Guzmán* in the literary marketplace of Golden

Age Spain (it outsold the *Quixote* with some margin) did not summon some sort of resentment in Cervantes—a resentment given voice to in the Ginés episode.⁶⁸ As Peter Dunn astutely points out, Ginés' very name has the same number of syllables and stress pattern as Guzmán.⁶⁹

Cervantes offers at least two highly original literary re-workings of picaresque material in the *Novelas ejemplares*.⁷⁰ In the first part of the chapter, I will consider how the earlier novella *Rinconete y Cortadillo* delves into picaresque content but without adopting picaresque form. *Rinconete* involves in its final page a curious passage that sheds light on its prior content and that intimates the possibility of an end that in fact never presents itself. In the process, the novella demonstrates a comic sensibility very much unlike that of *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán*. The second half of the chapter will approach another exemplary novella that at least with regard to the picaresque seeks to set its own example. The *Coloquio de los perros* approaches the same problem of the picaresque narrator, but here the introduction of two would-be narrators (and the narrative instability that ensues) leads to an ironical reflection on the tendencies and shortcomings of the picaresque and its new comic idiom.

Rinconete's Rejection

No menos le suspendía la obediencia y respeto que todos tenían a Monipodio, siendo un hombre bárbaro, rústico y desalmado. Consideraba lo que había leído en su libro de memoria y los ejercicios en que todos se ocupaban. Finalmente exageraba cuán descuidada justicia había en aquella tan famosa ciudad de Sevilla, pues casi al descubierto vivía en ella gente tan perniciosa y tan contraria a la

misma naturaleza, y propuso en sí de aconsejar a su compañero no durasen mucho en aquella vida tan perdida y tan mala, tan inquieta, y tan libra y disoluta. (272)⁷¹

[Nor was he bound to the obedience and respect that all had for Monipodio, being a barbaric, rustic, and and soulless man. He reflected on how he had read from his book from memory and the activities in which they had all involved themselves with. Finally he was astonished by the faulty justice in that famous city of Seville, since such nefarious people lived there in violation of nature itself, almost completely in the open, and he resolved to advise his mate that they not stay long in a life so debauched, so wicked, so unstable, so fibertine and dissolute.]

These lines constitute a critical moment at the end of *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, and given the severity of the condemnation, it is hard to imagine them as a coda to an essentially comic novella. They reflect at first glance the dour quality of *Guzmán* rather than the sprightly mischief of *Lazarillo*. But Cervantes' picaresque novella assumes this self-righteous quality only in this final passage. Most notable here is the absence of the picaresque narrator, and as we observed before, the ambivalent feelings and comedy that arise with the narrator account for the new comic sensibility in the picaresque. In *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, we remain as in the same ironically detached third-person form that animates *Don Quixote*—a detachment that both Blanco Aguinaga and Reed distinguish from the picaresque.⁷² The figure whose thoughts are on display here is Rinconete, who along with his companion Cortadillo has been serving the crime lord Monipodio as interns in his Sevillian underworld. This passage marks a rejection on multiple counts. First in this chain of repudiation is Monipodio. Monipodio is one of Cervantes' ingenious comic creations—a character whose identity is predicated on

incongruity. He assumes a central role for most of the narrative, and though he is revered by a horde of lackeys and criminal apprentices, he seems in Rinconete's eyes "barbarous, rustic, and cruel." To be sure, Rinconete, like his picaresque ancestor Lazarillo, only outwardly conforms to the authority of his master; inwardly, he impugns it. Yet while Lazarillo's subversion is based more on the emptiness of his belly than the intellectual lapses of his master, Rinconete clearly deems himself the intellectual, moral, and indeed social superior of his would-be master.⁷³

The second sweeping indictment in this passage is of the city of Seville, which was, as Ruth Pike has shown, the bastion of picaresque mischief and civil corruption in early seventeenth-century Spain.⁷⁴ Seville is here condemned with spite for its lack of "civilization." Rinconete, whom we know up to this point only as a swindler and master of card tricks, achieves in this final passage a new sensibility, and though he has hardly maintained gainful employment or a respectable trade, he indicts Seville and its wicked citizens for living pernicious lives that subvert human nature "contraria a la misma naturaleza" and dare to do so almost out in the open ("casi al descubierto"). That a picaro could reform so suddenly and so dramatically is one of the strangest of a narrative already enshrouded in uncertainty. As I will argue later in the essay, this final passage signals not merely a rejection, but a radical reformation of Rinconete's role in the novella.

The third element here rejected is the picaresque lifestyle, but since Rinconete has spent his life engaged in disreputable behavior, rejected here is also an expression of Rinconete's former self, which had come into being independently of those agents of corruption. Yet the rejection goes further still. In a coup of Cervantine irony, this final rejection of Monipodio, Seville, and the picaresque lifestyle is tantamount to a rejection

of the narrative itself—which is to say that the novella calls into question its very value as a literary work in these final lines. That is, Rinconete’s sweeping rejection indicts the narrative content itself. Whereas the standard picaresque framework calls for a justification of prior narrative content (insofar as recounting past mischief is the *sine qua non* of the narrator’s present worldview), Rinconete’s rejection of the world of the narrative is likewise an indictment of the purpose of narrating the picaresque to begin with.

But there is a greater irony still: Rinconete and his companion decide, despite this sweeping rejection, to hang on to the picaresque life with Monipodio a bit longer. This final ironic twist calls into question the significance of Rinconete’s rejection, just as Rinconete’s rejection had called into question the narrative itself up to that point. What results is an impasse, and the narrative brilliantly cuts off at this moment. The novella celebrates discontinuity.⁷⁵

To better understand the stakes of Rinconete’s rejection and its relationship to the larger question of Cervantes and the picaresque, it is worth considering the vital question of point of view in the novella. Point of view in the picaresque is problematic because of the unreliability of the picaresque narrator. In the case of the novella, we face a different challenge—namely negotiating between the subjective experiences of the title characters (from whose point of view the narrative seems at times to derive, especially in the final scene) and the more objective view into the criminal underworld offered after Rinconete and Cortadillo are invited into the Sevillian *cofradía*. And what is surprising on this count is that the main figure in the novella is neither title character, but the lord of the criminal *cofradía* that envelopes the two youths. Monipodio is defined through comic

contradiction. We know nothing of his birth or upbringings, but it can be assumed that he made his career in the backstreets of Seville, stealing and swindling his way into infamy and ultimately authority as head of a *cofradía*.

What is really at stake in the novella is point of view. The picaresque point of view is initially tossed out in favor of the third-person. For Anthony Close, the novella is a powerful illustration of the principle “*esse est percipi*,” but Close fails to consider that this perception is constantly being toyed with in the novella.⁷⁶ Perception is no reliable guide in a novella where ostentatious trappings of order and religiosity are at odds with underlying action and character. The comedy of incongruity is essential to the novella. We observed before how picaresque comedy in the *Lazarillo* distinguishes itself from earlier comic forms due to its subtle negotiation of pathos and scorn, agape and ridicule, Cervantine comedy also strives to overcome tradition, but in a different way than the picaresque. It of course draws on the physical humor of farce (particularly in the violent physical comedy so prominent in the *Quixote*), but it nonetheless surpasses this base physicality. It anticipates an important shift in comic theory that finds full fruition in Fielding and eighteenth-century Britain (a shift namely from the brutality of misanthropic laughter to the polite humor of incongruity). The crux of Cervantine comedy is the principle of laughable incongruity. Like the incongruity evident in the yawning gap between Quixote’s megalomania and the recalcitrant reality of the exterior world, Monipodio is rendered ridiculous by the discrepancy between his pretensions to piety and his scabrous deeds. What this means in the case of *Rinconete y Cortadillo* is that reality, though presented ostensibly through the “objective” lens of a detached third person narrator, is in fact tinged with uncertainty. For Cervantes, perception is never a simple

affair, but is colored by multiple-perceptions, and perception could hardly be said to constitute a stable ontological foundation. Identity is not established in the novella in terms of absolutes, but is acquired through perception, interaction, struggle; it is constant evolution, not essence. In this sense, Cervantes is more akin to Hegel than Descartes, and insofar as identity undergoes constant revision, his conception of selfhood is not inconsistent with the picaresque enterprise.

We have described the signal feature of picaresque comedy as ambivalent laughter—which is not the one-sided laughter of Antiquity that functions solely on distance from laughing subject to the butt of the humor, but a concomitant pathetic identification with the picaro, whose fundamental likability and rhetorical savvy invite such pathos. In this sense, picaresque comedy departs from all prior comic theory and establishes an artful oscillation between jocular and serious modes. Laughter of course often establishes distance and perhaps even disdain, but picaresque laughter can be guilty laughter, since the butt of the joke is often the exploited youth, the victim of a hostile and corrupt world. The case of Cervantes is different, however. The novella never allows for the natural intimacy that emerges from a protagonist communicating personally to his reader a life full of misfortune. Given this emotional detachment from the two picaros in the novella (partly because of the third-person narration, partly because of the very truncated autobiographies we get at the beginning), it would be improper to speak of picaresque comedy in *Rinconete*. Moreover, the picaresque narrator is the conduit of picaresque comedy, the maker of mischief and quite often the butt of the joke. But here, *Rinconete* and *Cortadillo* are shoved into the background for most of the novella. They act as straightmen rather than as comic eccentrics.

The comic incongruity that drives the novella is largely channeled through the laughable figure of Monipodio. Despite the caustic indictment of him as a deformed rustic, he is not as barbarous as he looks. He maintains, despite his inclination to malfeasance, quite a few traits of the more civilized man of the age. He affects a good deal of social niceties, despite his occasional outbursts of cholera, and though his *cofradía* defines itself against the norms of civil society, it prizes order and obedience to rules above all things: “¡Nadie se burle con quebrantar la más mínima cosa de nuestra orden, que le costará la vida!” [No one shall joke with violating the slightest thing in our order, for it will cost him his life.] (247) Another aspect of the criminal organization’s comical blend of “righteousness” amid waywardness is its adoration of the Virgin. Attached to Monipodio’s door is an image of the Virgin, and the boys are told by one of the boss’ lackeys that religious devotion is serious business in the society: “Tenemos más: que rezamos nuestro rosario, repartido en toda la semana, y muchos de nosotros no hurtamos el día del viernes, ni tenemos conversación con mujer que se llame María el día del sábado.” (236) [We have more: we pray our rosary, spread out over the whole week, and many of us do not steal on Fridays, nor do we have relations with a woman named María on Saturday.] In the *Quixote*, a fundamental comic incongruity that originally is material only for a novella becomes the catalyst of innumerable humorous episodes. A character trait exaggerated to an extreme comes to define one’s whole being against the perceived normalcy of society. The slight contradiction, the crack in ideology or internal consistency, does not remain as such to generate a slight smile, but continues to rupture into comic absurdity.⁷⁷

How are we to classify this novella and its comic artistry then? What is clear is that Cervantes' novella does not follow Lazarillo's picaresque comedy, nor does it pursue the grand spiritual journey of *Guzmán*. Rather, it eschews the picaresque point of view by rejecting the subjectivity of the picaresque narrator, which is in fact the *sine qua non* of picaresque comedy. And though it functions, like the *Quixote*, on a central comic incongruity, it never evolves organically into a comic epic. Perhaps one reason for this is Rinconete's rejection and its implications. Rather than expanding from an acorn into an oak, the novella demonstrates a self-conscious distaste for its own picaresque content. As we saw in the prior chapter, *Guzmán* likewise resents and militates against its own picaresque content, but the coping mechanism is different in Cervantes than in Alemán. In Alemán, every picaresque action propels an equal and opposite moralizing reaction. The text swells as a result of this constant inner turmoil. Cervantes, by contrast, favors truncation over expansion, the ironic smile over long-winded moralizing. Indeed, the very names of the protagonists suggest this sense of fragmentation. Rinconete suggests confinement, cornering, marginality, and Cortadillo reminds us of how the novella cuts itself short.

The novella therefore plays with picaresque content without any attempt to follow, as *Guzmán* does, the full possibilities of picaresque peregrination. Rather, there is a claustrophobic quality to *Rinconete*, an increasing sense of confinement. From *Lazarillo* to *Augie March*, the picaresque is fond of open spaces, confused itineraries, the whims of *fortuna*, but *Rinconete y Cortadillo* retreats into itself to exploit its own insufficiencies. It cuts short the picaresque possibility it offers in its incipience. In *Rinconete* and elsewhere in the picaresque, the "center" of the text often comes at the end.

Lazarillo, we recall, reveals in the last chapter of his narrative the peculiar circumstances of “the matter” (presumably the infidelity of his wife with the Archbishop) that has spurred him to draft the long explanation to *Vuestra Merced*. But what is peculiar in *Rinconete* is that the narrative shifts the spotlight away from the protagonists for the lion’s share of the story. With the introduction of the crime boss Monipodio, a rather drastic displacement of focus away from the two protagonists occurs. The happenings of the Sevillian underworld become the focus of the novella, and the two title characters become mere spectators. In the standard picaresque situation, the narrative only goes as far as the consciousness of the picaresque. Of course, this foundation can be a shaky one. The picaresque narrator’s reliability is not merely a question of his accuracy in recalling the mischief or trauma of youth (or his willingness to do so), but the way in which he organizes this material in the service of rhetoric. *Rinconete* seems ready to present himself as a picaresque narrator, but his ambitions are effectively cut off by Cortadillo, who in his own right is just as eager to narrate his autobiography. As Cortadillo interjects:

Sea un hora—dijo el otro--, y en merced muy grande tengo la que vuesa merced me ha hecho en darme cuenta de su vida, con que me ha obligado a que no le encubra la mía, que, diciéndola más breve, es ésta: Yo nací... (224)

[The time is right—said the other--, and I take it as a great favor that Your Honor has given me an account of your life, whereby you have obliged me not to conceal mine from you, which narrated more briefly, is this: I was born...]

Cortadillo cuts his new and dear friend short, effectively seizing, if only for a moment, the reins of narration, only to have them snatched back after a concise summary of his own life. The mini-autobiographies offered in this initial encounter hardly reflect the

“entera noticia de mi persona” promised by the cryptic Lazarillo, or of the seemingly endless series of Sisyphean struggles and self-reproaching that constitute the narrative material of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Rather, they illustrate the point that for Cervantes, such picaresque monologues exhaust themselves quite quickly and can veer precipitously towards the tedious (again we are reminded of Ginés de Pasamonte in the *Quixote*, whose literary megalomania has him filling volumes of material not fit to be read). Neither Rinconete nor Cortadillo has the patience to sit through the other’s stories, and instead of maintaining their status as passive listeners, they venture out into the world together. In the forthcoming discussion of the *Coloquio de los perros*, we will see how Cervantes favors the dialogic over the monologic. For now, it is sufficient to point out that in Cervantes’ view, the problem of the picaresque narrator is that he is quite interested in himself and often uninterested in others. In other words, the picaro is *ipso facto* a bad listener (and evidently in Cervantes’ mind, not too good of a storyteller either). The critical point is that Cervantes eschews picaresque subjectivity because it is far too narrow a medium for his world.

To better appreciate the move at the end of the novella, we have to examine more closely Rinconete’s development within the *cofradía*. In a group that defines itself through lawful attention to rules of lawlessness, it is Rinconete who assumes the role of guardian of the language. Even before correcting Monipodio’s malapropisms, he had already corrected a page for a similar offense to good language. After Cortadillo questions how a group of thieves could still affect Christian piety, the page replies “Pues, ¿qué tiene de malo? –replicó el mozo---. ¿ No es peor ser hereje o renegado, o matar a su padre y madre, o ser solomico?” (236) [“Well, what is wrong with it? replied the page. Is

it not worse to be a heretic or renegade, or to kill your father or mother, or to be a sodomite?" Rinconete quickly chimes in to correct the verbal error: "*Sodomita* querrá decir vuesa merced." (236) [You wish to say "sodomite", your honor.] And when Monipodio reveals himself illiterate and hence incapable of reading aloud from the *libro de memoria*, a register of the society's roguish activities, it is the new initiate Rinconete who assumes the role of narrating the group's activities to the audience of thieves. In the course of the novella, Rinconete emerges because of his penetrating intelligence and natural linguistic skill, as a detached observer, a marginal outsider even in an underworld composed of marginal outsiders. Rinconete's literacy means that he has enjoyed access to an educational level far beyond that of the other picares in his midst. This in turn confers a sense of superiority not altogether unlike the imbalance between Don Quixote and Sancho. Right after the sweeping rejection that introduced our reading, the novella concludes on this curious note:

Pero, con todo esto, llevado de sus pocos años y de su poca experiencia, pasó con ella adelante algunos meses, en los cuales le sucedieron cosas que piden mas lengua escritura; y así, se deja para otra ocasion contar su vida y milagros, con los de su maestro Monipodio, y otros sucesos de aquéllos de la infame academia, que todos serán de grande consideración y que podrán servir de ejemplo y aviso a los que las leyeren.

[Nevertheless, given his youth and his lack of experience, Rinconete spent a few more months with them in which things happened to him that call for a longer tale; and thus, we leave it for another occasion to recount his life and miracles, along with those of his teacher Monipodio, and other doings of the members of that

infamous academy; and that all this will be of great importance that shall serve as an example and warning to all those who chance to read it.]

Indeed, the final passage of the novella offers a new way of approaching its prior content. The whole narrative can, on the basis of Rinconete's rejection, be re-read in terms of the problems of point of view with which it struggles. Indeed, a further irony of the text is that this final rejection signals Rinconete's readiness to achieve that which had been denied him earlier in the narration (when his autobiography was cut short by Cortadillo)—namely a full-fledged picaresque narrator. And yet Rinconete never becomes this narrator, for the novella cuts off just as he seems prepared to continue it. Cervantes ties matters up with another splendid bit of irony. Just when Rinconete appears poised to leave behind the criminal underworld, we are reminded that the necessary resolve is somehow lacking. Similarly ironic here is the mention of "life and miracles."⁷⁸ Moreover, the shining example of behavior to serve the reader's moral development is promised but never fulfilled.

The question now becomes how Rinconete's rejection can be connected to the larger questions in play in this study—namely the picaresque's early lack of self-definition as a genre based on the problem of picaresque comic broached in the *Lazarillo*? The moralizing tone of Rinconete's rejection echoes that of *Guzmán*, but it is worth asking how seriously such moralizing can be taken when Rinconete decides, in spite of his vitriol, to spend a few more months alongside Monipodio. The final ironic move in *Rinconete* highlights the ambiguous status of any picaresque narrator, his moral irresponsibility (which for Cervantes is laughable unto itself) and the picaresque's inability to cope with its own ideological contradictions. Which is to say that for

Cervantes, the picaresque strives to achieve a moral high ground (such as that achieved in Rinconete's rejection), but that it cannot ever occupy this high ground without delving back into its own prurient picaresque content.

II. *El Coloquio de los perros*

El Coloquio de los perros involves a similar shift away from picaresque subjectivity, and yet it is bolder than *Rinconete y Cortadillo* in its experimentation with the picaresque framework.⁷⁹ Whereas *Rinconete* revels in the gritty realism of the picaresque, the *Coloquio* embraces this same gritty detail in parts but adds to it the magical (thereby undermining one fundamental precondition of the picaresque—namely its new appeal to realism). As in *Rinconete*, we have in the *Coloquio* a tale of two picaros rather than one. There, first-person picaresque narration seems a possibility waiting to emerge at the end of the novella, though it is, ironically enough, adumbrated but never realized. Here, the reins of narration are at last handed over to the picaros, but the dialogic quality injects a comic chaos into the text. Cervantes' principal objection to the picaresque is the one-sidedness of the first-person and the tendency to expatiate ad nauseam on topics of little interest (namely the uninspired life of a picaro). As García López points out with regard to Ginés (and presumably Cervantes' indictment of the picaresque):

De hecho, las palabras de Ginesillo precisan un programa literario que Cervantes desarrollará y concretará en años posteriores...Esos extremos aparecen deslindados con claridad en la enunciación de lo que no puede ni debe ser una narración: por un lado, el simple recuento biográfico; por el otro, la univocidad

del punto de vista, la identificación de narrador y personaje sin solución de continuidad.⁸⁰

[In fact, Ginesillo's words outline a literary programme that Cervantes will develop and realize in subsequent years. These extremes appear delineated clearly in the pronouncement concerning what cannot nor should not be a narrative: on the one hand, a simple biography; on the other, monological point of view, the conflation of narrator and character and without any resolution of its continuity.]

The *Coloquio* responds to both of the points García López addresses here—it avoids being a mere biographical tale of a picaresque by transforming picaresque monologue into dynamic dialogue. It likewise solves the problem of Ginés' problem of continuity (namely, how a running autobiography by a living narrator is brought to an end if the picaresque's life is still going) by including in its rational plan the idea that a time limit has been set. Yet these formal devices complicate the problems of the picaresque.

On the theme of comedy, the first and most obvious observation is that the premise of the novella embraces the incongruous mixture of the ridiculous (talking dogs) and the rational (the dialogic negotiation of truth).⁸¹ The comical theme of metamorphosis is present in an important picaresque predecessor of Antiquity, Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, where the protagonist is transformed into a donkey and engages in a narration of the comically desultory misadventures that ensue from this transformation.⁸² But we saw in our earlier discussion of *Lazarillo* that the physical torment to which Apuleius' donkey is subjected never approaches the kind of comic pathos we get from *Lazarillo's* tale. In other words, Apuleius endorses the traditional understanding of

comedy as the “ugly” (proposed by Aristotle), which engenders laughter as scorn, laughter that never approaches the ambivalent laughter of picaresque comedy.

The great irony of the dialogue is that this magical gift of speech is wasted on desultory association of past picaresque experience, descriptions of hunger, beatings, biting, and prurient behavior, the spreading of nasty rumors (what both interlocutors refer to repeatedly as *murmuración*) and bickering over what to narrate and how to narrate it. As Cipión remarks to Berganza, “si tú fueras persona, fueras hipócrita, y todas las obras que hicieras fueran aparentes, fingidas y falsas, cubiertas con la capa de la virtud, solo porque te alabaran, como todos los hipócritas hacen.”⁸³ (266) [If you were human you’d be a hypocrite, and all your deeds would be blatant, fake, and false, cloaked in the cape of virtue, all so that you might be praised as hypocrites do] The *ad hominem* (or *ad canem*) attack here is really a blatant instance of the same hypocrisy, for throughout the narrative Cipión chastises Berganza for slandering (*murmurar*). After Cipión interrupts to deliver his own kind of aesthetic moralizing, Berganza admonishes him that “Todo eso es predicar, Cipión amigo.” (258) [This is all preaching, my friend Scipio] (preaching of course is a signal feature of *Guzmán*). Further on, Cipión chides Berganza for spreading malicious rumors (*murmurar*) and urges him to clean up the narration and move onward: “y por tu vida que calles ya y sigas tu historia” (268) [for your life’s sake be quiet and continue your story.] To which Berganza responds .—“¿Cómo la tengo de seguir si callo?” (268) [How can I continue it if I am quiet?] One of the great comical ironies of the dialogue involves the unchecked tendency towards *murmuración*, and despite Cipión’s admonitions against it, neither dog is capable of reeling in the inclination to *murmurar*. Indeed, if *Lazarillo* is propelled by the search for food, the *Coloquio* is a string of

condemnations and slander. Like Rinconete, Berganza indicts the world around him in the most scathing fashion, but unlike that earlier picaresque, his indictment is not a final revelation but runs steadily through the narrative. After his merciless depiction of masters, Berganza lapses into a rant about the immorality of Moors:

¡Oh cuántas y cuáles cosas te pudiera decir, Cipión amigo, desta morisca canalla, si no temiera no poderlas dar fin en dos semanas! Y si las hubiera de particularizar, no acabara en dos meses. (272)

[Oh how many things I could tell you, my friend Scipio, of this Moorish rabble, if I didn't fear not being able to finish in two weeks. And if I had to be specific about it, I wouldn't finish in two months.]

Again, the fuel on which the narrative runs is spite, and yet the miracle of speech is employed for dubious purposes. Hazlitt describes Quixote and Sancho's comic brilliance in their "consistency in absurdity."⁸⁴ A similar observation might be made with regard here to Berganza, whose unchecked tendency towards slander runs counter to the putatively noble gift of speech.

The novella's comedy results not just from this contradiction; it likewise has a great deal to do with the desultory style of narration. The comic of course thrives on happenstance and the sudden, jolting incongruities that result from it. Forcione describes quite well the kind of chaos that emerges on this front:

If we inspect the anatomy of Cervantes' literary monstrosity closely, we observe that it is swollen and bursting with objects, that there is tremendous variety in its substance, narrative shapes, subject matter, character types, ideas, styles, tones,

and voices. Saturation and narrative chaos would appear to be its dominant general features.⁸⁵

Yet the “narrative chaos” described here is unto itself a liberation from the intrinsic limitations of picaresque subjectivity. Cervantes manages in a narrative less than a tenth as large as *Guzmán* to approach the baroque complexity of that earlier work, but he does so without fully embracing the picaresque or its characteristic comic ethos. Cervantes insinuates in both narratives that no audience really wants to be subjected to expatiation on the life of a socially isolated and wayward fellow, and even if there were interest in such material, then there would be little to gain from a moral, intellectual, or aesthetic perspective from the confused and digressive rant of a rogue (even a reformed one). Rinconete and Cortadillo bring their respective autobiographies to quick ends long before they can become the thousand- page textual monster of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Berganza and Cipi3n, for their part, make an agreement: the former is granted a day to talk his tongue off, and the latter is granted the rather dubious right to indulge his own narrative inclinations on the following day (assuming of course that the two hounds still retain their special powers). Interestingly enough, it is Cipi3n who first proposes this:

Sea 3sta la manera, Berganza amigo: que esta noche me cuentes tu vida y los trances por donde has venido al punto en que ahora te hallas, y si ma1ana en la noche estuvi3ramos con habla, yo te contar3 la m3a; porque mejor ser3 gastar el tiempo en contar las propias que en procurar saber las ajenas vidas. (244)

[Let it be like this, my friend Berganza: that tonight you will tell me your life story and the stages you have arrived at until your present circumstance, and if by chance we still have the gift of speech tomorrow, I will tell you my story, for our

time is better spent narrating our own lives than in trying to learn about others' lives.]

The problem of continuity in the picaresque that confronts Ginés appears solved by this arrangement, and yet the narrative is not guided by rational order. Language is here not a tool for chiseling rational awareness into the mind but rather the froth of thought, the desultory wandering of words. Significant here is Cipi3n's simultaneous acceptance of the passive status of a listener and his obvious lack of interest in the lives of others.

Despite his initial offer of goodwill, Cipi3n is not the most obedient of listeners, and it is this disobedience that accounts for the comic dissonance in the dialogue. Rather than offering us his take on picaresque comedy (which is defined through its internal dissonance), we are instead presented with explicit external dissonance. Not surprisingly, Cipi3n does not surrender altogether to his master of the day, but asserts himself in his role as critic and commentator throughout much of the dialogue. The narrative's initial promise of a rational ordering of narration is therefore undermined through the presence of Cipi3n. It is transformed into a comic power struggle between Berganza, eager to fill in the innumerable details of his picaresque meanderings and of the corruption of his many masters, and Cipi3n, who oscillates between annoyance and enthusiastic interest, aesthetic pedantry and repressed delight in picaresque detail.

Another significant aspect of the *Coloquio* has gone unmentioned, and that is Cervantes' marvelous play with mediation—a salient feature of course in the *Quixote* as well. In the case of the *Coloquio*, what we experience is not direct access to the conversation between Cipi3n and Berganza, but rather Campuzano's transcription of the incident, which in turn is read aloud by Peralta. Again, the layers of mediation here in

the *Coloquio* (and the tinkering with mediation in *Rinconete*) can be understood as a Cervantine response to the perceived tedious straightforwardness of first-person picaresque narration. Again, the picaresque for Cervantes is guilty of bad faith of sorts. Rather than highlighting its own quality as literary mediation, the picaresque presents an illusion of language as presence. Cervantes, by contrast, self-consciously exposes the *engaño* of linguistic and literary signification. In both novellas under consideration here, the standard picaresque framework is eschewed in order for more layers of mediation to present themselves. We saw before in *Rinconete and Cortadillo* how the novella quickly tosses out the possibility of a standard picaresque narrative point of view in order to play games with narrative voice (and even, as I argue, present the possibility of *Rinconete* emerging as a picaresque narrator at tale's end). In the *Coloquio*, the dialogic aspect is privileged over the picaresque monologue.

But what is to be made of this new dialogic quality of the *Coloquio*? The implied critique of the picaresque here is that the dialogue constitutes an important modification of the standard picaresque narrative, where the textual material is shaped and presided over by a tyrannical consciousness. True, this consciousness is often at odds with itself, as in the case of *Guzmán*, or it is guided by the implicit influence of an intended addressee such as Lazarillo's *Vuestra Merced*.⁸⁶ Yet no prior picaresque narrative highlights to the same degree as the *Coloquio* the dialogical aspect of narration. Ong's dictum that the writer's audience is always a fiction has limited applicability to Berganza and Cipi3n, whose mixture of narration and repartee throw into high relief the dialectical interaction between author and audience in literary production.⁸⁷ Berganza's tale is incomplete without Cipi3n's interjections, just as a text is not complete without an

addressee. As in the famous case of Quijote and Sancho, Berganza and Cipi3n represent contrary principles clashing in comic fashion. Though Cervantes can never be pinned down too easily, as such it negotiates a balance between the intense verbal/comic energy of Rabelais and Quevedo and the self-reproaching didacticism of Alem3n.⁸⁸ Whereas Quevedo's comedy might be described as a verbal bacchanalia in which the polysemousness of the signifier is raucously celebrated, the comic in Cervantes entails a higher degree of rational awareness. Cervantes, so goes the argument of several critics, exploits time and again the comedy of rational incongruity, not just to generate laughter for laughter's sake, but a sense of proper aesthetic laughter that is tame and rational.⁸⁹ Indeed, the common understanding of Cervantine humor put forth by Riley, Murillo, and Close among others is that it privileges rational order and propriety, maintaining a sense of comic dignity and aesthetic refinement against the temptation to lunge into verbal debauchery. Yet one should be careful not to overemphasize Cervantes' sense of comic propriety. After all, the *Quixote* is not exactly lacking in physical, often violent comedy and oblique references to lower functions of the body. Nabokov, for one, describes the Quixote as "an encyclopedia of cruelty" and states further that it "is one of the most bitter and barbarous books ever penned."⁹⁰ And Forcione rightly points out in the quote above that the *Coloquio*'s dialogic quality and overwhelming complexity render it more chaotic than self-contained, and a number of passages in the narrative hardly come across as tame and proper. Consider for instance the following celebration of picaresque prurience, not altogether unlike Rinconete's scathing rejection:

La codicia y la envidia despert3 en los rufianes voluntad de hurtarme, y andaban buscando ocasion para ello: que esto del ganar de comer holgando tiene muchos

aficionados y golosos; ...los unos y los otros no salen de los bodegones y tabernas en todo el año; por do me doy a entender que de otra parte que de la de sus oficios sale la corriente de sus borracheras. Toda esta gente es vagamunda, inútil y sin provecho; esponjas del vino y gorgojos del pan. (252)

[Greed and envy inspired in those ruffians the desire to steal me, and they kept looking for an opportunity to do it: for the idea of earning one's bread by doing nothing has many adherents and addicts; and none of these folks leave the inns and taverns the whole year; from which I assume that the source of their drunken binges comes from something other than their duties. All these folks are vagabonds, useless and worthless, sponges of wine and weevils of bread.]

As in the *Guzmán*, moralizing of the most intense sort goes on here. But whereas Alemán's protagonist includes prurient picaresque detail ostensibly in order to demonstrate the pitfalls of such an existence, Berganza's vitriol stands in ironic contrast to his and Cipión's reflections on the importance of avoiding slander.⁹¹ Indeed, if *Lazarillo* is propelled by the search for food, the *Coloquio* is a string of condemnations and slander. And to further appreciate how the theme of slander complements the novella's appeal to lascivious detail, Berganza's depiction of the witch Cañizares should be mentioned:

Ella era larga de más de siete pies; toda era notomía de huesos, cubiertos con una piel negra, vellosa y curtida, con la barriga, que era de badana, se cubría las partes deshonestas...las tetas semejaban dos vejigas de vaca secas y arrugadas...Quise morderla, por ver si volvía en sí, y no hallé parte en toda ella que el asco no me lo estorbase. (274)

[She was over seven feet tall, skin and bones, covered with black, hairy, and weathered skin; her belly was flabby and covered her pubic region...her breasts resembled two dry and wrinkled cow bladders...I wanted to bite her, to see if she'd pull herself together, but I did not find a single part of her where disgust did not hold me back.]

Passages like these make it hard to accept the argument that Cervantes is a great advocate of comic *bienséance*. This level of spite is not reached even in the *Guzmán*, and in the picaresque tradition, only Quevedo will surpass it. Of course, in Cervantes things are rarely straightforward, and we must consider the source and butt of this scorn—a “learned dog” and a witch respectively. To speak here of the comedy of misanthropy (as I will in the following chapter) would therefore be inaccurate.

Just as *Rinconete* provides in its final pages a possible solution to the riddle of the narrative situation, the *Coloquio* contains in its latter half an important revelation regarding the supposed miracle of speech that invites a similar reevaluation of narrative content. In this case, the great revelation (at least in the eyes of a good number of important critics, including Forcione, El Saffar, and Sánchez) is one of witchcraft—namely that Cipión and Berganza were in fact victims of a spell cast by the witch Cañizares.⁹² As in *Rinconete*'s revelation, this insinuation is not a *deus ex machina* nor a final rational explanation of things, but a moment inviting speculation and ambiguity. As elsewhere in Cervantes, the “truth in the matter” is not of the absolute sort, but rather a teasing possibility never to be attained, the inherent delight in textual *aporía*. If we continue with the theme of “*esse est percipi*” broached in the discussion of *Rinconete*, we see that the Cervantine notion of identity is a constantly evolving, constantly shifting

form that emerges only through the kaleidoscope of perception. That is, perception for Cervantes is never a simple, straightforward affair. Truth is multi-perspectival and dialogic, no apodictical assertion of tyrannical consciousness (be it that of Quixote or the picaro) but rather the hard-fought negotiation of divergent possibilities.

Concluding Remarks

Cervantes underscores in the *Coloquio* and in *Rinconete* the fissures in the picaresque enterprise and proposes alternatives to the limitations of picaresque point of view (and to the new comic sensibility, picaresque comedy, that evolves from the picaresque point of view). The contradictions in the *Coloquio*, to be sure, are of the explicit sort, for the gritty picaresque detail is comically at odds with the supernatural preconditions of the narrative. Whereas the absence of the picaro's voice suppresses the emergence of picaresque comedy in *Rinconete*, the realism that is a necessary condition for the kind of pathetic identification with the plight of the picaro is absent in the *Coloquio*. The picaresque comedy of *Lazarillo* is not so much criticized as it is avoided. The critique of the picaresque in both novellas appears directed less at the playful spirit of the *Lazarillo* than at the serious rhetorical posturing of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. For Cervantes, the meaningless meandering of criminal autobiography is devoid of hermeneutic excitement and doomed to triviality, for its very premise is the comical incongruity of an individual of social marginality and dubious morals attempting to assume the status of the hero.⁹³ Cervantes' picaresque experiments illustrate the inner strife of the picaresque genre, but as we shall see, they do not lead directly to further picaresque offspring in the Spanish tradition. In a later chapter on Fielding and Smollett,

we will revisit some of the basic concerns of this chapter—namely the contrast between the layers of mediation in Cervantine (or what Fielding terms “epic comedy”) and picaresque comedy. Yet as we will see in the following chapter, a different kind of critique of the self-righteous qualities in *Guzmán* is present in Quevedo’s *Buscón*. The genre, in search for a definition, continues to be at war with itself.

Chapter Four

Picaresque Comedy and Misanthropy in Quevedo's *Buscón*

Up to this point in the study we have considered the picaresque genre in terms of a fundamental problem—namely, is the genre to reflect the ebullient comic spirit of *Lazarillo* (and its new brand of socially responsible picaresque comedy)? Or is it rather to follow the model of *Guzmán* and present a probing reflection on the nature of human sin (and indeed a suffocation of those comic inclinations which subvert this higher purpose)? Cervantes dabbles with picaresque content but ultimately rejects its form (and indeed the comic possibilities that arise from that form). Quevedo's *Buscón* situates itself in the minds of some critics as the last great “canonical” picaresque novel, and it has divided critics rather sharply into two camps. The first set of critics, represented by Lázaro Carreter, Lida, and Rico, assert that Quevedo's novel constitutes little more than a showcase of verbal dexterity.⁹⁴ Quevedo's novel, as Rico famously asserts, is a work of linguistic genius, but nonetheless a bad picaresque novel.⁹⁵ In Lázaro Carreter's estimation, any critical attention to the sociological circumstances shaping the novel is unnecessary, for it is to be appreciated first and foremost as linguistic play.⁹⁶

The opposing camp, represented by Parker, Iffland, Cros, Ricapito, Maravall, Read, Cruz and others, has aimed to identify more than just linguistic play and comic excess in the novel. Both Parker and Iffland, for example, take the novel quite seriously, offering psychological readings of the *Buscón*. Parker's well-argued psychological reading focuses on the protagonist Pablos' early childhood trauma, particularly his repeated humiliation at the hands of peers and his picaresque existence as a means of

overcoming this trauma.⁹⁷ Richard Bjornson asserts that Pablos is guilty of a lack of self-knowledge, indeed of what he calls “moral blindness,” and that this lack of a moral compass furthers the satirical ends of the novel.⁹⁸ Cros, Read and Cruz are intrigued by the scatological element in Quevedo and the way in which this base detail can be related to the motif of social isolation in the novel.⁹⁹

The problem in the split separating critics is that it fails to appreciate the fact that the *Lazarillo* and other picaresque texts embrace contradiction in their comic artistry. The *Buscón* is suffused with much of the same comic self-pity as *Lazarillo*. Yet in *Lazarillo* the misanthropic impulses of comedy described by Castelvetro and Hobbes are offset by the amiability of the picaresque narrator and indeed the invitation to empathize with his plight. Quevedo is far less compromising in his approach, and the comic in Quevedo might best be described as unabashedly misanthropic. Further, there is in Quevedo a sensitivity to language, a conscious layering of signification (indeed a consciously comic layering of signification) that is lacking in the more forthright *Lazarillo*.¹⁰⁰ There is likewise, as in Cervantes, a frontal assault on the self-righteousness of the *Guzmán* and the notion of the picaresque as a tool of moral betterment.

We discussed the confluence of comic traditions in the *Lazarillo* in terms of dialectical interaction, a confluence of comic traditions and the emergence of picaresque comedy. Quevedo’s novel is driven by a similar comic dialectic, set in motion through constant interplay between contrary forces. In Quevedo, we witness an exuberant oscillation between comic modes, a celebration of the comic signifier on its own terms (evident in the nearly constant introduction of *conceptos* and wordplay) and yet a genuine pleasure in recounting physical and digestive torment. Linguistic excess is wed to

scatological excess in the *Buscón*, and through it all runs a caustic comic indictment of mankind.

The *Buscón* and Problems of Categorization

Claudio Guillén's essay on the picaresque remains the best attempt at a concise definition of the genre.¹⁰¹ Guillén outlines the most consistent features of the genre in terms of eight critical elements: 1) the unfavorable psychological experiences in childhood experienced by the picaresque protagonist, exacerbated by poor parentage and adverse sociological circumstances; 2) as the pseudo-autobiographical mode of narration of a single protagonist; which leads to 3) a necessarily restricted view of the world; 4) the picaresque protagonist's status as an outsider who calls the world into question; 5) emphasis on material need and the exigencies of existence (we are reminded here of the intense descriptions of hunger in *Lazarillo* and in the *Buscón*); 6) the picaro's movement from master to master, city to city, which in turn opens the door to wide-reaching social satire; 7) horizontal movement in space and vertical movement in society; 8) an episodic mode of narration, which makes it possible for X number of elements to enter the narrative.

Yet Guillén's model, as useful as it is, fails to pinpoint at least two significant aspects of the picaresque that come into play in Quevedo's novel. First of all, Guillén's paradigm, like so many discussions of the picaresque, lacks emphasis on the comic as a problem within the genre's writhing with self-definition. Indeed, the critical bias against playing up the comic aspect of the picaresque can be connected to the more general bias against the comic literature—a bias that Quevedo among others militates against.

Secondly, though Guillén correctly identifies material want, hunger, poverty, and delinquency as typical of the genre, he does not adequately address the complex relationship between these low subjects and the often lofty rhetorical language of picaresque novels. It is this discrepancy between the earthy detail of the picaresque and the pretensions to something like literary language that often generates picaresque comedy.

The problem with defining picaresque comedy in the same way that Guillén defines the picaresque is not just that the early picaresque texts align themselves along opposite sides of an axis. As we saw in the case of the *Lazarillo*, picaresque comedy is more than the *Schadenfreude* described by Castelvetro and Hobbes as constitutive elements of laughter, for it operates according to an inner contradiction. On the one hand, it involves debasement of the pizaro and an invitation to *Schadenfreude*. On the other, the pizaro/narrator invites the reader to commiserate with his cause (*Lazarillo*, we are reminded, is really the only likeable person in a text of rogues). But the case of Quevedo is trickier than virtually any other picaresque text on this account. Quevedo is the most misanthropic of picaresque authors. The scorn he heaps on characters in the *Buscón* and elsewhere in his bitter satirical polemics (most notably the *Sueños*, where he lambastes his rivals sans merci) is compelling evidence of this misanthropic bent.

But as we saw in the case of the *Lazarillo*, the fact that a number of picaresque novels employ *Schadenfreude* is clear enough, but not necessarily in similar ways. Some, like *Lazarillo*, offer an intensely physical and slapstick brand of comedy, almost meant more for the stage than for prose. Others, like Úbeda's verbal masterpiece *La pícaro Justina* (to be discussed in the following chapter), employ an intentionally grandiose

language to depict the baseness of the picaresque, and much of the comedy is generated from the incongruence between the elevated style of narration and the baseness of the narrative content. In the least overtly comic of picaresque novels, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, comic Schadenfreude is inspired by the picaresque narrative, only to be suppressed by the narrator's moral recriminations and an appeal to higher ideals. And then there is the *Buscón*, which employs a verbal artistry that is overwhelming at times in its complexity, yet that is nonetheless offset by the base physical reality of the picaresque existence.

On Shallowness and Depth in the *Buscón*

It has become common in theorizing of the comic to distinguish between lowbrow and highbrow. A significant example of such a tendency is George Meredith, whose eloquent essay on the spirit of comedy betrays a concern for thoughtful laughter over the meaningless giggling of the hypergelast.¹⁰² The true test of comedy for Meredith is that it awakens “thoughtful laughter.” Schopenhauer distinguishes between humor and jest, stating in his characteristic blend of acerbity and wisdom that the designation of humor “arises from the miserable desire to give things a more distinguished name than what belongs to them.”¹⁰³ An even more marked dichotomy is present in the comic theory of Etienne Souriau, who posits a distinction between crude and aesthetic laughter.¹⁰⁴ For Souriau, crude laughter is an infantile response to stimuli and is wholly independent from the higher rational and aesthetic faculties. For Souriau, “the comic is the direct opposite of the risible.” It exorcises “the demon of laughter..., yanking out its viper’s fangs, teaching it to dance—at the end of a stick.”¹⁰⁵ It is interesting to ask what a theorist like Souriau would make of Quevedo, who so artfully combines the comic and the risible. In

the case of *Guzmán*, we observed a similar turning of the text's forces against itself, but there the crude impulses of picaresque comedy were repressed by the imperatives of ideology and the belief that the picaresque text can enact something like a metanoia in the mind of the *discreto lector*. Misanthropic laughter gives way in that novel to misanthropy as admission of postlapsarian human sinfulness. Things are quite different in Quevedo, for no anvil of ideology weighs over the text, and the text undermines the notion of moral education through picaresque example. Language exists, it would seem, to celebrate its own excess, and the comic is the most boisterous celebration of that excess. But the excess in Quevedo is not purely linguistic, but thematic. Quevedo's scatology is a genuine problem because it persists even in the midst of the most dazzling verbal artistry. To appreciate the baseness of Quevedo, it is worth considering a prominent scene early in the narrative involving a prank played on Pablos by his classmates. This is not a prank of the innocent sort, however. It involves a beating of the protagonist by a gang of juvenile delinquents by a cat'o-nine-tails and wedding physical violence to base degradation:

Pero menudeaban tanto los azotes sobre mí, que ya no me quedó, por haberme tirado las frazadas abajo, otro remedio sino el de meterme debajo de la cama...Entre tanto, aquel maldito que estaba junto a mí se pasó a mi cama y proveyó en ella, y cubrióla, volviéndose a la suya...Acostéme y cubríme, y torné a dormir, y como entre sueños y revolcase, cuando desperté halléme sucio hasta las trenzas. (117)¹⁰⁶

[But the blows fell so thickly on me that nothing was left for me to do—the covers had been pulled off me—but to get under the bed...Meanwhile the devil who slept next to me came over to my bed and relieved himself in it and pulled up

the covers over the mess...I lay down, covered myself, and soon fell asleep; and as in my dreams I wallowed about in the bed, I awoke to find myself covered with filth to the very hair of my head.]

Were this not already enough, the passage continues accumulating force for another two pages or so, and when the wretched odor of this scatological ambush invades the room, Pablos is surrounded by his classmates and the headmaster Don Diego. Personal humiliation becomes public degradation:

Yo, que veía poco remedio en el negocio y que me iban a echar la garra, fingí que me había dado mal de corazón. Agarréme a los palo, hice visajes; ellos, que sabían el misterio, apretaron conmigo diciendo: “¡Gran lástima! Y al alzar las sábanas fue tanta la risa de todos, viendo los recientes, no ya palominos, sino palominos grandes, que se hundía el aposento. Quien dirá lo que yo sentía, lo uno con la vergüenza, descoyuntado un dedo y a peligro de que me diesen garrote! Al fin, de miedo de que me diesen, que ya me tenían los cordeles en los muslos, hice que había vuelto. (118-119)

[Seeing there was no remedy to the business and that I was wholly in their clutches, I pretended that I was having a heart attack and grabbed the sides of the bed, grimacing with pain...On raising the sheets they all laughed so hard at the sight of my nest of pigeons, little and big, that they almost brought down the house...No one can imagine what I felt inside, with such shame, a finger disjointed, and the danger I ran from their tourniquet. At last from fear of this

latter—the cords were already biting into my thigh—I acted as though I had just come to].

One of the great curiosities of any picaresque narrative is the motivation of the narrator to delve into these kinds of past experiences. *Lazarillo's* tale is ostensibly motivated by the desire to clear up a legal matter (referred to cryptically as “el caso”). Pablos, on the other hand, composes this tale presumably from the New World (his story cut off as he falsely promises a continuation of his adventures at novel's end). And when we consider the character of a passage like that above, it becomes clear that Pablos' narrative has little of the rhetorical flavor of *Lazarillo* and far less still of the acrimonious self-chastisement that runs through Guzmán's tale. There is rather a delirious quality in this passage and others, an eagerness to overwhelm with mischief and an embrace of masochism (both in the wedding of humor and violence and in the eagerness and pleasure with which this debasement is recounted).

The coexistence of shallowness and depth in Quevedo has led critics into opposing camps. Francisco Rico for one has famously written off the *Buscón* as a very bad picaresque novel; Alexander Parker lauds it as the zenith of the genre. The basis of the former argument is that the novel deals with caricatures rather than characters and is too deeply infused with satirical misanthropy to approach the good natured humor of *Lazarillo* or the rich psychology of the *Guzmán*. Parker makes precisely the opposite point. For him, Quevedo arouses a sense of pathos and a psychological depth unprecedented in either earlier Spanish text and indeed never equaled thereafter in the picaresque writings of England, Germany, or France. Parker bases this argument on passages like that above in which we become privy to Pablos' misery in childhood and

the intense scorn that has deformed his *Weltanschauung*. The misanthropy which runs through the narrative would be, on this account, the result of this early humiliation.

But both critics make the mistake of approaching Quevedo's text in too one-sided a fashion, and both likewise are guilty of the standard bias against comic literature of any sort—namely that its value is determined in direct relation to its purported depth. Alemán strives to accept the picaresque premises of *Lazarillo* but seeks to overcome that prototype's perceived shallowness. The comic is introduced, incorporated, and overcome. We witnessed in the prior chapter how Cervantes performs a similar operation. But in Cervantes, the picaresque is introduced in order to be overcome by a less straightforward comic mode. Cervantes teases out the ideological and formal contradictions in the picaresque project, exposing in comic fashion how picaresque narratives never fail to live up to Ginés' promise. For Cervantes, the literary pleasure of *Lazarillo* and the spiritual weightiness sought in *Guzmán* are undermined by the contradictions inherent in the picaresque framework. Quevedo, unlike Cervantes, sees this picaresque framework as richer in possibility, not because it is sincere but precisely because it is not. The picaresque for Quevedo is self-consciously literary, and he takes the comic contradiction in *Lazarillo*'s prologue a step further. The comic for Quevedo is, in a sense, serious business, insofar as it entails a self-conscious celebration of its own literary qualities. So often, the picaresque is celebrated for its greater sense of "realism" with regard to earlier farcical literature. As Giddings writes in his otherwise fine book on Smollett:

The object that made picaresque novelists lay pen to paper, and one that is maintained from the beginnings of the tradition in the sixteenth century right through Defoe and on to Smollett, is not merely to amuse the reader with rough-

and-tumble comedy, but to expose the corruption of society through the suffering of an individual, and to improve by example.¹⁰⁷

The bias here is clear enough, and it has persisted from Quevedo's time to ours. And yet it is hard to read through the dense verbal constructions of a novel like the *Buscón* or the *Pícara Justina* and gain the impression that the text is first and foremost an instrument of social criticism aimed at the moral improvement of the individual reader. The preface to the *Buscón* is an indictment of this very logic and hence a slap in the face to the enemies of picaresque comedy (and to agelasts of all sorts for that matter). The preface is neither the long-winded rhetorical construct we have in *Lazarillo* nor the dual indictment of the *vulgo* and the *discreto lector* in Alemán. Rather, it undermines the moral propriety of Alemán's and all other prefaces of its sort. Whereas Alemán browbeats his audience, Quevedo ridicules his:

Qué deseoso te considero, lector o oidor (que los ciegos no pueden leer) de registrar lo gracioso de don Pablos, príncipe de la vida buscona. Aquí hallarás en todo género de picardía (de que pienso que los más gustan), sutilezas, engaños, invenciones y modos, nacidos del ocio...y cuando no lo hagas, aprovéchate de los sermones, que dudo nadie compre libro de burlas para apartarse de los incentivos de su natural depravado. (70)

[I consider you eager, reader or listener (for the blind cannot read) to take note of the amusing story of Pablos, prince of the scavenging life. Here you will find all sorts of picaresque mischief (which I think you like most), cunning, deceit, innovations and means born of leisure...and if you do not, take advantage of the

sermons, as I doubt that anyone buys books of jest in order to rid himself of the yearnings of his natural depravity.]

There of course are no sermons to follow in this novel. The dour moralizing of Alemán has been thoroughly sloughed off so that free rein can be given to picaresque knavery. And this knavery begins right here in the preface. Even an author like Úbeda, who as we will see in a subsequent chapter is every bit as contemptuous of Alemán's sermons in the *Guzmán*, at least goes through the motions of declaring his intentions to employ comedy as a means of correcting vice. Quevedo, by contrast, goes on in his preface to indict picaresque readers who sponge books like food (“que hay gorriones de libros, como de almuerzos,” 71). And the moral injunction we encounter at the end of the preface is of the most irreverent sort: “Dios te guarde de mal libro, de alguaciles, y de mujer rubia, pedigüeña y carirredonda.” (71) [May God protect you from the bad books, from sheriffs, and blonde, gold-digging and moon-faced women.]

On the subject of bad books, the preface implies that the best books hold true to what they promise rather than engaging in the double-dealing *engaño* of Alemán and other hypocrites. The implication is that such authors sell books by introducing debauched picaresque filler and yet rationalizing the content of these books as means of moral improvement. The nature of the book trade in Golden Age Spain and the prurient taste of readers have been well documented by the likes of Chevalier and Gilbert-Santamaria.¹⁰⁸ Quevedo is an unabashed advocate of the comic as an end in itself, not as a sugar-coated pill. And unlike Alemán, who subjugates his reader to the guiding beam of the lighthouse (*atalaya de la vida humana*) and indeed to the heavy-handed injunctions that punctuate each comic episode in the *Guzmán*, Quevedo invites the reader to celebrate

the comic impulses of the book without any tinge of compunction or guilt, and to praise the author behind them: “cuando te rías de sus chistes, alaba el ingenio de quien sabe conocer, que tiene más deleite saber vidas de picaros descritas con gallardía, que otras invenciones de mayor ponderación.” (70) [when you laugh at its jokes, praise the genius of the person who understands that there is more pleasure in hearing of the lives of picaros described with panache than with other, more ponderous matters.] Quevedo’s preface reads like a manifesto of picaresque literature, an extension of the laissez-faire comic spirit that pervades *Lazarillo* and a rejection of the “ponderous matters” that hamper *Guzmán*.

Misanthropic Laughter in Quevedo

One important distinction between the comic dialectic in the *Buscón* and that of the *Lazarillo* is the greater emphasis on language for its own sake. What we have in Quevedo is the coexistence and dialectical interaction between two distinct forms of comic energy: the brutal/ physical and the abstract (the purely linguistic). One might object to this as a false dichotomy from the outset, asserting on the basis of both Saussure’s distinction between signifier and signified and Derrida’s undermining of language’s claims to present reality that all linguistic signs are fundamentally immaterial, incapable of conveying something like brute force. Nevertheless, the sheer number of references in the novel to the functions of the body, to smelling, touching, indeed laughing (which itself represents somewhat of a synthesis between the mental and the corporeal), as well as the intense description of hunger for the greater part of Book I would make it difficult to deny the presence (or at least the strong illusion of a presence)

of the physical in Quevedo. For example, in Book II, we get Pablos' highly physical description of the olfactory onslaught inflicted upon him by deadbeat vagabonds:

Mas, viendo que olían mal, eché de ver que no eran truenos de buena casta. Olían tanto, que por fuerza detenían las narices en la cama...Al fin, yo me vi forzado a decirles que mudasen a otra parte el vedriado. (220)

[Moreover, seeing that they stank, I grew aware that they were not reputable folks.

They smelled so bad that my nostrils shrank together while in bed. In the end, I was forced to tell them to go away.]

The idea of not being able to get to sleep at night because of stench is unto itself fairly amusing, as much in our times as it was in Quevedo's. There is nothing particularly overwhelming about this description on a linguistic level. The prose is remarkably tame by Quevedo's standards. Indeed, it is base physical reality in all of its ugliness (*to aischros*), which for Aristotle and for his Italian Renaissance commentators was the essence of the comic, that appears to have the upper hand here. Vincenzo Maggi's argument in particular that laughter arises not merely from the base but from a union of the base and the unexpected applies here to the shock value of this and other passages in the *Buscón*.¹⁰⁹

The comic energy churning in the *Buscón* is in fact generated by the picaresque's characteristic brand of dark, at times violent physical comedy and the element lacking in large measure in *Lazarillo*—consummate verbal artistry and linguistic polysemy. This means that the boundaries are never clearly defined between realism and outright caricature. No equilibrium is found between a realistic portrayal of the protagonist's plight (i.e. the adverse material circumstances that plague him, the ugly side of society,

psychological and physical trauma, the latter usually intestinal)--and the tendency towards comic excess and hyperbole in the language (which distorts but does not altogether dissolve the realistic element). In other words, Quevedo's text appears to attempt something like a reconciliation between the tradition of popular humor and the more sophisticated *agudeza* prevalent in the age of *conceptismo*.¹¹⁰

The *Buscón* not only derives much of its comic energy from the repeated humiliation of Pablos, but through Pablos' reaction to this humiliation. Indeed, following Freud's theory of wit as a means of psychological compensation and exercising masked aggression, we can argue that Pablos' venomous and yet ultimately comic indictment of his world is a means of employing humor as a tool of covert aggression.¹¹¹ No work in this study can rival the *Buscón* in terms of its outright misanthropic comedy. *Guzmán de Alfarache*, profoundly pessimistic in its own right, is narrated by a man who professes to have reformed himself and whose ostensibly benevolent desire is to redeem the reader through telling his sordid story. In Quevedo, humanity appears irredeemable. No character in the novel inspires any significant degree of pity. If Pablos seems lacking in fundamental human virtues, society at large is no better off. Pablos' personal narrative knows no compassion. Love and personal attachment of any sort do not register with him on any level, and whether he is describing the violent death of his parents (his father is executed by his uncle, his mother, herself a witch, falls victim to the Inquisition) or the death of Cabra, his indifference to human emotion is startling: "pasé por la casa de Cabra, tuve nueva de que ya era muerto, y no cuidé de preguntar de qué, sabiendo que hay hambre en el mundo." (183) [I passed by Cabra's house and I heard news that he was dead, but I did not care to ask of what, knowing that there is hunger in the world.]

Quevedo's text appeals to a misanthropic impulse in each reader—an impulse not just to experience comedy through Schadenfreude (as is the case in nearly all picaresque comedy), but to join the narrator in delighting in this process of universal judgment and condemnation. One important example of merciless description in the novel is the description of Cabra in I.3:

Él era un clérigo cerbatana, largo, sólo en el talle, una cabeza pequeña, pelo bermejo (no hay más que decir para quien sabe el refrán), los ojos avvicindados en el cogote, que parecía que miraba por cuévanos, tan hundidos y oscuros, que era buen sitio el suyo para tiendas de mercaderes, la nariz, entre Roma y Francia, porque se le había comido de unas búbas de resfriado, que aun no fueron de vicio porque cuestan dinero; las barbas descoloridas de miedo de la boca vecina, que, de pura hambre, parecía que amenazaba a comérselas; los dientes, le faltaban no sé cuántos...(100)

[He was a tubiform clergyman, liberal only in height and with a small head, bright red hair (there's nothing left to say to anyone who knows what I mean), his eyes were sunken so deep that it seemed like he was peeping out of caves, they were so sunken and dark that they would have been a good place for merchants, the nose, between Rome and France, because it had been eaten up by cold sores that were not from the vice because they cost Money; his beard discolored by fear of the mouth nearby that, from pure hunger, seemed to threaten it; the teeth, I don't know how many he was missing...]

What makes this particular description special is not merely its absolute lack of pity for the poor soul described, but its unique blend of the high and the low, a dense, stylized,

multi-layered description of the base and the physical. Descriptions such as this which exaggerate physical traits to the point of caricature crop up in Smollett, Balzac, Dickens, Mann and Bellow, but what is unique in Quevedo is the degree of misanthropy implicit in this jest. This is, after all, a first description of a character heretofore unknown to us (and presumably Pablos), and yet Pablos releases all of his rhetorical venom on his victim. Spitzer offers a fine close reading of this passage.¹¹² What interests Spitzer most here is the relationship of part to whole, the dissection of Cabra through the individual accentuation of his constitutive body parts, and of course the means employed to produce this description. One is reminded of the tradition of *blason* in French Renaissance poetry and indeed the conventions of Spanish poems in which similar dissections of the body are performed. But in those French and Spanish Renaissance poems, such dissections are meant to heighten the sense of praise and exalt language over the realm of the bodily.¹¹³ Quevedo, himself more celebrated in the literary realm for his poetry than his prose, no doubt employs this same technique here towards a wholly different end. Rather than exalting an object of eros, this description of Cabra is an expression of unmitigated scorn.

As in the description of Monipodio in *Rinconete y Cortadillo* discussed in the previous chapter, Cabra's face is emblematic of his wicked character, *monstrum in fronte*, *monstrum in animo*. And yet where Cervantes was unforgiving, Quevedo is merciless. Aristotle defines the comic in terms of the ugly, and here the base physicality of the face in all of its ugliness is augmented, perhaps even overshadowed, by the language of the passage. The notion of the mouth desiring to eat the beard out of overwhelming hunger is grotesque, as is the arcane reference of the nose being situated between Rome and France

(Rome symbolizes the ruined nature of the nose, France the fact that this disfiguration is to be attributed to syphilis, known as “el mal francés.”)¹¹⁴

As the description gains momentum, the absolutely damning portrait of avarice present here extends to objects in the room, and the comic element is intensified:

Cada zapato podía ser tumba de un filisteo. Pues su aposento, aun arañas no había en él. Conjuraba los ratones de miedo que no le royese algunos mendrugos que guardaba. La cama tenía en el suelo, y dormía siempre de un lado por no gastar las sábanas. (101)

[Each shoe could have been the tomb of a philistine. As for his room, there weren't even spiders in it. He put fear into the mice for fear that they might eat up whatever crumbs he hoarded. His bed was on the floor and he always slept on one side in order to preserve the sheets.]

Again, the narrative material here is base to the point of absurdity, and yet the diction employed sends most readers looking downward in their critical edition to the footnotes to understand the use of the word “filisteo” in this context. As Spitzer remarks, the sense of totality, otherwise lacking here in this somewhat aleatory description of poverty and miserliness, is reinforced by the very terse summary we get at the end of the passage: “Al fin, él era archipobre y protomiseria.” (101) There is in this succinct *coup de grace* a measure of outright scorn for the underclass of society that separates Quevedo's brand of picaresque comedy from the agape-tinged laughter of *Lazarillo*. If *Lazarillo* represents, through its heightened degree of verisimilitude and social responsibility, a moment of progress from Apuleius and Rabelais, Quevedo might well be seen as a regression.¹¹⁵

An important incongruence exists in the *Buscón* on the level of language. That is, the level of language employed in the narrative, exemplified by a verbal dexterity that knows few equals in Spanish letters, is entirely unbecoming of a man of lowly stock like Pablos.¹¹⁶ True, Pablos, unlike Lazarillo, receives something of a formal education (why his impoverished parents would desire this is another question altogether), but after the humiliation he endures at school, he composes a letter to his parents, declaring his wish to make haste and find a new life for himself elsewhere:

Escribí a mi casa que no no había menester más ir a la escuela porque, aunque no sabía bien escribir, para mi intento de ser caballero lo que se requería era escribir mal.(96)

[I wrote home that it was not necessary to go to school for, although I knew well how to write, my intention to be a knight required me to write poorly.]

This provides more than just an occasion for another joke on knights being dullards; it illustrates an important problem—the fundamental disconnect between Pablos the narrated and Pablos the narrator.¹¹⁷ This problem presents itself in the level of sophistication in the language. In the *Guzmán*, the rhetorical skill of the narrator is at least partially plausible. Guzmán, despite his common origins and picaresque lifestyle, does receive training in foreign languages during his stay with the Cardinal in Rome, and moreover, in Part II of that novel, he appears to take great pleasure in his studies at Alcalá. Pablos never reveals how he has achieved such a high degree of verbal dexterity. Though he discusses late in the novel time spent with so-called poets, and even his own ambitions to become a poet, the image of the poet presented in the novel is derisive to say the least.¹¹⁸ If anything, the penultimate chapter's heading alone is evidence of the

absurdity of Pablos' poetic calling: "en que se hace representante, poeta y galán de monja." (239) Pablos never really indicates an interest in reading. On the contrary, he disavows in the quote above the literary lifestyle. It would therefore appear that an interpretation of the novel in terms of Pablos as an author in the making, offered for example by Epstein, is problematic to say the least.¹¹⁹

Another intriguing aspect of the novel's point of view involves Pablos' self-professed lack of moral betterment. Whereas his intellectual leap from semi-literate street urchin to practitioner of verbal thaumaturgy raises questions that the text does not furnish sufficient answers to, the text makes it rather clear that Pablos never achieves the sort of moral change that might incite him to reflect on his past life, as for example Guzmán does. In the case of the *Guzmán*, the supposedly reformed narrator is endowed with a moral sensibility clearly lacking in his earlier analogue. In Quevedo's novel, there is no reform, no metanoia in Pablos' worldview. Pablos begins a picaro and remains one until the moment of writing. For this reason, there is no genuine self-condemnation on the part of a second, writing self. Instead, the novel ends rather tersely:

...determine, consultándolo primero con la Grajal, de pasarme a Indias con ella, a ver si, mudando mundo y tierra, mejoraría mi suerte. Y fueme peor, como v.m. verá en la segunda parte, pues nunca mejora su estado quien muda solamente de lugar, y no de vida y constumbres. (256)

[I determined, consulting first with La Grajal, to run off to the Indies with her to see if, changing our surroundings would not improve my lot. It turned out worse as Your Honor will see in the second part, for no one can change his character by changing place rather than life and habits.]

There is, of course, no second part to the narrative, and whether one chooses to read the promise of a second part as a comic jab at Alemán's penchant for long-winded, unending narration in *Guzmán* (Cervantes does as much with Ginés de Pasamonte) or as just another incidence of unreliable narration, the final lines emphasize that Pablos has failed to secure for himself a noble form of existence.

Laughter and Society in Quevedo

Up to this point in the essay, I have attempted to argue for an understanding of the comic in Quevedo's novel that incorporates not just the verbal wit (*agudeza*) that Spitzer, Chevalier, Iffland and others have highlighted, but also the very physical humor that the novel offers—an aspect generally underplayed by critics. Yet the comic in the novel is more complex than the mere opposition between the physical and the intellectual, for it draws into its vortex the social element. Just as there is a dialectical tension between the physical and the intellectual in the narrative, so too is the will of the protagonist at odds with the bleak social reality. What is of primary interest on this count is less the archetypal picaresque antagonism between lone picaro and hostile society, but rather the dialectical interrelations between these two opposing principles. Critics such as Chevalier and Cros have been right in diagnosing the rigidly aristocratic character of Quevedo's text and of the social order it appears to endorse.

A helpful model for understanding the social dimensions of the comic dialectic in Quevedo's novel is Bergson's theory of comedy. Bergson's essay *Le Rire* remains, a good century after its conception, one of the most influential examinations of the comic. Bergson's theory is predicated the tension between two contrary principles—tension and

elasticity. The collision of these two principles is exemplified in slapstick comedy, where the excessively mechanical movements of the comic figure are in conflict with the elasticity of the world. In more sophisticated social comedy, such as Molière's plays, this tension is expressed in character. For example, one defining character attribute, accentuated to an extreme degree, renders a character ridiculous in the eyes of society, which prefers to maintain something like an equilibrium. Writes Bergson:

Toute raideur du caractère, de l'esprit et même du corps, sera donc suspecte à la société, parce qu'elle est le signe possible d'une activité qui s'endort et aussi d'une activité qui s'isole, qui tend à s'écarter du centre commun autour duquel la société gravite...¹²⁰

[All stiffness of character, spirit and body are thus suspect to society because it is the possible sign of an activity which wanes and becomes isolated and which tends to veer away from the common center around which society is drawn together.]

Laughter for Bergson is an instrument of punishment and castigation of eccentricity. That is, it is the laughter of society that makes the comic protagonist aware of his shortcomings and initiates a process of reconciliation: "Le rire doit être quelque chose de ce genre, une espèce de geste social. Par la crainte qu'il inspire, il réprime les excentricités..."¹²¹ [Laughter may be something of this sort, a kind of social gesture. Through the fear it inspires it suppresses eccentricities.] Indeed, if we recall the function of laughter in the scene quoted above involving Pablos' humiliation at the hands of his fellow students: "fue tanta la risa de todos," then we might be tempted to see in that gesture what Bergson identifies as a social impulse against eccentricity. Bergson's model,

insofar as it is predicated on the assumption that society instantiates positive virtues, a sense of equilibrium that the comic protagonist has lost, stands in direct opposition to Rousseau's notion of culture as inherently corrosive to the naturally good individual. Clearly, such a model does not apply as neatly to the picaresque as to Molière, who throughout the essay remains his touchstone. If society stands for the principle of equilibrium in Molière (and Bergson), it is rotten to the core in the picaresque. Rather than acting to reel in the picaresque protagonist's extreme qualities, society in the picaresque novel makes his behavior extreme in the first place.

And yet Bergson's model, despite this obvious problem, still proves useful in analyzing the dynamics of the *Buscón*. Rather than understanding the relationship in the novel between comic individual and society in strictly Bergsonian terms, it might behoove us to reverse the relationship. That is, society assumes the role of the mechanical, and the comic protagonist Pablos is the element of elasticity. Indeed, if this extravagantly digressive novel has anything like a consistent theme, it is Pablos' darkly comic failure to change places and identities in hope of securing for himself superior social status. In the already quoted letter to his parents, Pablos expresses a desire to rise in society by deserting his sordid background. "Con estas vilezas e infamias que veía yo, ya me crecía por puntos el deseo de verme entre gente principal y caballeros." (183) [With these vile and infamous deeds that I saw, I felt a desire grow inside to see myself among decent folk and gentlemen.] Yet despite Pablos' naïve wishing for social betterment, his efforts are futile. The aristocratic order, altogether lacking in the elasticity necessary to let Pablos into its ranks, throws him back time and again into the realm of the ridiculous.¹²² Such is

the fate of the Spanish picaresque, but in Quevedo, this failure to ascend socially is dramatized in a uniquely mean-spirited way.

The theme of the upstart attempting in vain to achieve noble status is naturally not unique to Quevedo. It is a common comic theme in sixteenth and seventeenth century comic literature. One example is Lazarillo's third master, the squire, who dons knightly garb but whose home (and stomach) are empty. Indeed, Lazarillo himself authors his narrative ostensibly to better his social predicament, but at the end of *Lazarillo*, we are left with a similar sense of inevitability. Lazarillo's assertions in the prologue of being a self-made man are comically at odds with his dubious social status at the end of his tale. Many of Shakespeare's comedies (and his tragedies, for that matter) deal with the theme of social ambition, and the comedies often render ridiculous those whose ambition to ascend to nobility is not grounded in some immutable internal qualities (virtue, intelligence, good breeding, etc.). What stands out in Quevedo is the virulence with which Pablos and the naïve push toward social ascendance he embodies are rejected. In Shakespeare and Molière, as well as in the *Quixote*, the comic protagonists are generally depicted with some degree of compassion, and the comic vices that they embody are often corrected to some extent in the comic tradition of castigating vice. The signal feature we have observed of picaresque comedy is the ambivalence generated by the narrator's self-portrayal—which most often oscillates between a denunciation of society's wickedness and a masochistic delight in describing past trauma. The *Buscón* is particularly rich in the latter element, and unlike the comic self-pity of Lazarillo or the contrite self-castigation of Guzmán de Alfarache, Pablos's self-condemnation through narration has no blatantly rhetorical or religious end. Bauer's notion of picaresque

narration as a means of stigma management remains an interesting thesis, but despite the efforts of Parker and Bjornson to find a moral message in the novel, stigma management as a catalyst of picaresque authorship fails to account for the callous protagonist of Quevedo's novel.¹²³ Rather, Quevedo celebrates in the novel the rich comic possibilities in the picaresque framework, embracing the very contradictions that Cervantes exposes.

Laughter in Quevedo is of a different sort than what we have virtually anywhere else in the picaresque tradition. The verisimilitude and opportunities for pathetic identification in the *Lazarillo* and the *Guzmán* are far more limited in the *Buscón*. Pablos does not invite the same degree of commiseration as earlier picaros, nor does the *Buscón* approach the same degree of verisimilitude as those earlier novels. And yet Quevedo's picaro does attain a degree of comic *agudeza* lacking before, a blend of linguistic artistry and wit within the framework of a complex social system that at once evinces properties of flexibility and rigidity (to use Bergson's terms). The multi-layered aspect of Quevedo's comic idiom, the dual appeal to the creatural and rational faculties, and the pungent blend of comic forces in the novel make it a fascinating case study in the inner contradictions of the picaresque and of picaresque comedy. Quevedo, unlike the anonymous author of *Lazarillo*, self-consciously operates within what had emerged as an acknowledged genre, and he likewise celebrates the picaresque as a self-consciously literary form (rather than the illusions of presence and intimacy in both *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*).¹²⁴ And yet like every work read thus far, the *Buscón* complicates the notion of the picaresque and indeed that of picaresque comedy. In the following chapter, I will show how the introduction of a false feminine presence creates further cracks in the genre.

Chapter Five

Picaresque Comedy and the Pícaro

One curious feature of the early Spanish picaresque is its tendency towards exclusion of the feminine. The earliest picaresque texts in Spain arise out of a famously misogynistic culture, but the actual treatment of the feminine is less virulently misogynistic than indifferent. Pícaros such as Lazarillo, Guzmanillo, and Pablos, for all of their pubescent energy and propensity for mischief, are remarkably unconcerned with the sorts of lascivious leanings one might expect from young men their age.¹²⁵

This chapter is devoted to counterexample. I consider here picaresque texts from three national literatures, and each presents unique approaches to the problem of the female pícaro and the larger problem of picaresque comedy. My readings of López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina*, Hans Grimmelshausen's *Courasche*, and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* will demonstrate that the critical tendency to valorize the notion of the anti-heroine as a unified cultural concept is problematic.¹²⁶ What we have in these three texts are three distinct takes on the picaresque from a female viewpoint, not three restatements of the same theme. More importantly still, I will argue how the false feminine "presence" in these works contributes to the pervasive sense of ambivalence that already runs through the picaresque genre and its characteristic brand of comedy. But the greater question here is whether picaresque comedy of the sort we have come to know in *Lazarillo* and Quevedo is possible, given that the conduit for presumed pathetic identification is no longer a man. In the case of the two seventeenth-century novels in this chapter, the question becomes whether a largely masculine readership can bridge this gap. In *Moll Flanders*, a special case even within this subcategory of the feminine picaresque,

a different set of questions emerge—namely, how is the curious admixture of potentially comic and tragic elements, coupled with an even greater and more self-conscious project of realism, to be understood in terms of the problems sketched thus far in the study.

***La pícaro Justina* and the Destabilization of Genre and Gender**

The picaresque defines itself through contrary impulses, through actions and reactions, and above all through a sense of Sisyphean failure, ascent and decline. The trajectory of the picaresque, if represented graphically, would resemble a volatile financial market, and indeed a market in sad shape. López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina* is perhaps not the first example of a picaresque narrative told from the point of view of a woman (it is pre-dated by Delicado's *La Lozana andaluza* of 1527), but it is innovative in a number of significant ways.¹²⁷ Its approach to the problem of picaresque comedy is fresh, not merely because it approaches the picaresque from the feminine point of view but because it represents a literary assault on the heavy-handed didacticism of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. *Guzmán* can be regarded as an indictment of the light-hearted picaresque predecessor *Lazarillo*, insofar as it recast the earlier picaresque narrative into a richly interwoven baroque novel on the theme of *engaño* and *desengaño*, comic interlude and contrary repression of the comic. In a similar vein, the unabashed light-hearted verbal excess of Úbeda can best be understood as a negative response to the repression of the comic in Alemán. The agelast Alemán and his dour reformed picaresque are here confronted with adversaries in the elusive Úbeda and his quick-witted and frivolous pícaro.

To better appreciate *La pícaro Justina*'s retort to Alemán and its complex relationship to the nascent picaresque genre and its new comic sensibility, it is worth

considering the novel's richly emblematic frontispiece. The frontispiece depicts a boat sailing on the river of forgetfulness. Sleeping in the boat is an allegorical figure of leisure (ociosidad) and standing on the boat is an allegory of time, a rather eccentric looking woman whose skirt identifies her as the mother of Celestina (in reference to Fernando de Roja's comic masterpiece *La Celestina*). Next to her is a portly woman identified as La pícaro Justina and her groom to be, Guzmán de Alfarache. They sail on "la nave de la vida pícaro," towards the port of death, represented by a skeleton holding a mirror with the word "desengaño" written on it. A smaller rowboat beneath this image depicts Lazarillo and the Bull of Salamanca (the stone figure into which the young picaresco crashes early in his narrative and a general emblem of picaresco engaño/desengaño duality). And indeed, the novel's prologue makes clear the critical interrelation of these two contrary principles:

Aquí hallarás todos cuantos sucesos pueden venir y acaecer a una mujer libre; y (si no me engaño) verás que no hay estado de hombre humano, ni enredo, ni maraña para lo cual no halles desengaño en esta lectura. (Úbeda 77)¹²⁸

[Here you shall find how many events can entail a libertine (if I am not mistaken) and you shall see that there is no state of man, nor snag, nor vexation for which you will not find disillusionment in this Reading.]

This is a problematic promise on two counts. It promises *desengaño* and yet is itself ambivalent about its own claim to truthfulness. In Golden Age fiction, *desengaño* is the natural corollary of *engaño* (indeed Picasso's famous remark about art being the lie that allows discovery of the truth appears rooted in this Iberian tradition).¹²⁹ Yet here, the *engaño/desengaño* duality is complicated by the narrator's remark that the *desengaño*

afforded by this text is contingent on the narrator not being mistaken (“si no me engaño”). Moreover, the issue of gender is here raised, for the vicissitudes of fate that impinge upon the libertine woman are somehow to provide the basis for a masculine enlightenment. The duality engaño and desengaño finds then a natural parallel in that between female protagonist and male reader.

The starting point of most discussions of *La pícaro Justina* is the problematic notion of the feminine picaresque.¹³⁰ And what makes the feminine picaresque so problematic is that it is an oxymoron of sorts-- a wholly masculine construction.¹³¹ Its depiction of a liberated woman is not an endorsement but a condemnation of the libertine lifestyle of the *mujer libre*. Úbeda’s prologue throws into high relief the misogynist underpinnings of the text:

Porque en esto he querido persuadir y amonestar que ya en estos tiempos las mujeres perdidas no cesan sus gustos para satisfacer a su sensualidad (que esto fuera menos mal), sino que hacen desto trato, ordenándolo a una insaciable codicia de dinero; de modo que más parecen mercaderas, tratantes de sus desventurados apetitos, que engañadas de sus sensuales gustos. (Úbeda 75)

[For in this I have endeavored to persuade and admonish that already in these times wayward women do not desist in satisfying the urges of their sensuality (for that would be less severe), but in doing this, adding on an insatiable desire for money, so that they seem like merchants dealing with their wayward appetites rather than women deceived by their sensual urges.]

The problem, as in later examples of the feminine picaresque such as Grimmelshausen’s *Courasche* and Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, is that a male author imprisoned in patriarchal

conceptions of feminine comportment composes a narrative that is only artificially feminine.¹³² Which is to say that the familiar picaresque theme of *engaño* assumes here a new dimension. For Anne Cruz, the masquerading inherent in the female picaresque amounts to an expression of hegemonic control over the feminine, in culture and society:

As such, women's sexuality is a social factor to be repressed, bartered, and controlled by the male structures of power. In like manner, woman's voice is suppressed, dominated, and exchanged for the male's. In its mimicry of what the authors construe as female discourse, the female picaresque, while claiming to assume a feminine voice, in actuality bespeaks male prejudice, formulating a cultural strategy which sexual and social reality is created and maintained.¹³³

In other words, the so-called feminine picaresque in a genre that heretofore had exclusively taken into view the problems of upstart male picaros is less an expression of concern for feminine interests than a usurpation of the feminine by male authors to suit their ends. Yet Cruz's point here that novels such as Úbeda's serve the purpose of establishing and maintaining cultural hegemony begs the question, for sexual and social reality was already being shaped by male power structures in seventeenth-century Spain. The literary is less the instrument of control but rather an external manifestation of that control.

There is a second significant problem with Cruz's argument. Cruz is quite right to point out the insidious quality of the usurping male voice in the female picaresque, but her discussion does not account in any satisfying way for the disruptive influence of the comic. A traditional bias against comic literature (prevalent explicitly in Úbeda's time and implicitly in Cruz) is that laughter undermines the more serious and lasting emotional

effects of fiction (be they edification of the intellectual or the moral sort).¹³⁴ And what is especially relevant in the case of *La pícaro Justina* is that comedy functions as a destabilizing force; rather than establishing fixed hierarchies, it undermines them. If the female picaresque is inherently guilty of appropriating and falsifying the authenticity of woman and offering a disguised male discourse, the comic elements within Úbeda, Grimmelshausen, and Defoe problematize the very male dominance described above. To be sure, the comic, described by Castelvetro, Hobbes, and Marmontel in terms of its misanthropy, here is primarily allied with misogyny inherent in seventeenth-century Spain. The comic in *Justina* is not merely an internal element that is repressed (as in the case of *Guzmán de Alfarache*), but rather the central element of Úbeda's narrative, the driving force of the text. And yet picaresque comedy, as we have argued above, is by definition charged with ambivalence, and this is particularly true for the female picaresque of Úbeda.

Although Cruz is correct in identifying the ideological foundation of the novel as that of a firmly entrenched patriarchy, a certain destabilization of hierarchies takes place in the novel. Throughout the novel, comic happenstance impinges on the rational expectation of the reader and subverts normalcy. This unto itself is nothing extraordinary, but in the case of the female picaresque, the subversion of norms has in fact great significance.

The comic strategies of *La pícaro Justina* are more refined than one might imagine at first, especially considering that they are employed in a book that characterizes itself as a mere *Libro de entretenimiento* (book of entertainment). Whereas the very notion of a female autobiographer would lend itself quite easily to a lurid

depiction of wanton sexuality of the sort that Grimmelshausen allows his desiring-machine Courasche to obey slavishly, Úbeda's novel is, given the low comic tastes of the day, surprisingly free of gratuitous sexual or scatological detail. Úbeda shares with Quevedo (and to a certain degree Alemán) a fundamental contrast between high style and low subject matter.¹³⁵ The novel's highly-wrought literary language hardly befits the low happenings depicted. This is only one of two fundamental stylistic incongruities, however. Justina possesses a verbal dexterity and degree of erudition that is disconcerting, and though she is lax in her morals and devoid of the probing spiritual conscience of her male analogue Guzmán, she is every bit his equal in her literary and rhetorical skill. And yet with this verbal virtuosity comes a problem of verisimilitude and an issue of comic incongruity. The prologue offers a tenuous foundation for Justina's consummate verbal artistry: her father, an innkeeper, had hosted a humanist guest who left behind a small library of comic masterpieces such as Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, Roja's *La Celestina*, and *Lazarillo*. Justina from childhood on modeled her verbal consciousness on the picaresque and its comic literary precursors. The young Justina's voracious digestion of this reading material provides the foundation for her uncanny predilection for literary allusion as well as her effortless skill in punning.

But the real force of Úbeda's take on picaresque comedy is to be found in wit or *agudeza* rather than base picaresque detail. *Lazarillo*, it might be recalled, relies heavily on physical comedy, most significantly in its unique comedy of hunger. In *Lazarillo*, the misanthropic impulses of the comic are in tension with the contrary impulse of pathetic identification with a largely likable protagonist. Quevedo takes *Lazarillo*'s hunger a step further (or perhaps a step back), in indulging in highly ornate *conceptos* that sparkle with

puns and intense verbal energy. And yet Quevedo's sentences roll about unabashedly in the scatological. In Úbeda, there is no such descent, but rather a light and almost celestial quality to the language, as if the picaresque detail of earlier novels is lifted out of the cellars and dark alleys and transplanted to the ethereal realm of language for its own sake, of signifier liberated at last from the burden of signification. Damiani describes Úbeda's language quite aptly: "Úbeda's parody of the elaborate style of the picaresque narrative of *Guzmán* leads him to his own cultivation of obscurity of expression, lavishly indulging in a wide variety of linguistic 'exercises.'" ¹³⁶ Wellek has called this Baroque technique "the decorative overelaborations of a highly conscious, skeptical craftsman, the piling-up of calculated surprises and effects." ¹³⁷ The problem of Baroque obfuscation has important consequences for the readership. And the key to appreciating the proposed relationship between the novel and its reader is in the prologue. Early modern novels and Spanish picaresque novels in particular rarely disappoint in their prologues, and Úbeda's particular conception of picaresque comedy is illuminated. In the handful of picaresque texts examined in this study, the prologues fit no easy mold. *Lazarillo*'s prologue is a fine piece of rhetoric. It frames that narrative as an address to an anonymous reader, *Vuestra Merced*, and the relationship between *Lazarillo* and this figure oscillates between obsequious address and comic *engaño*, adding a marvelous comic ambiguity to the narrative. In *Guzmán*, obsequiousness is smothered under the weight of heavy-handed didacticism, and the novel's readership is divided into camps of "vulgo" and "discreto lector" (with the latter representing the select few capable of genuine moral reflection and responsible interaction with literature). In Úbeda, the prologue begins with an address at *Guzmán*'s more serious-minded readership:

Hombres doctísimos, graves y calificados, en cuya doctrina, erudición y ejemplo ha hallado el mundo desengaño, las Escuelas luz, la cristiandad muro y la Iglesia ciudadanos, han resistido varonilmente a gentes perdidas y holgazanas y a sus autores, los cuales, con apariencia y máscara de virtud, han querido introducir y apoyar comedias y libros profanos tan inútiles como lascivos, tan gustosos para el sentido cuan dañosos para el alma. (Úbeda 71)

[Most learned men, serious and discerning, according to whose doctrine the world has found disillusionment, the schools light, Christianity support, and the Church followers, you have resisted valiantly the lost and lazy people, and to those authors who have sought, with cunning and the pretence of virtue, to introduce and support profane plays and books as useless as they are lewd, as pleasurable to the senses as harmful to the soul.]

The first and most obvious point to make here is the direct address to the male readership, emphasized not merely in the first word but in the adverb “varonilmente” and obliquely by “virtud” (which stems from the Latin root “*vir*”). A divide is thus established in both novels between the individual female and a larger body of male readers. But what is just as interesting in this initial formulation is the description of the readership as erudite, grave, and discerning. The irony is that discerning readers who have presumably attained an enlightened state of *desengaño* and a distance from the cheap frills of the world and the vices of leisure, laziness, and lasciviousness, would bother even opening a volume such as this. Moreover, the latter part of this passage engages in an ironic restatement of the kind of moral indignation characteristic of *Guzmán de Alfarache*’s prologue (where the “vulgo”’s easy pleasure and resistance to responsible interaction with art is castigated).

The novel to follow is indeed guilty of the vices that it here ostensibly denounces, and unlike Alemán's novel, Úbeda's is not guilty of bad faith, because the denunciations of vice are perfunctory and largely ironic. *La pícaro Justina* is more akin to the orgiastic celebration of signification in Rabelais than the dour rejection of *engaño* present in Alemán.¹³⁸

La pícaro Justina, like its counterpart *Guzmán de Alfarache*, is structured in terms of contradiction. *La pícaro Justina* reproduces the basic duality of narrative and commentary, picaresque action and moralizing reaction, but in Úbeda, there is no bite to the moralizing. The novel is structured in discreet comic episodes of dense verbosity and the rhetorical panache of Baroque *conceptismo*, punctuated by laughably laconic moral "aprovechamientos." In *Guzmán*, the novel's very means of sustenance (that is, the prurient picaresque content) is undermined by its own moralizing. In *Justina*, a different sort of literary sabotage takes place. The *aprovechamientos* do not suffocate the larger picaresque narrative but rather demonstrate the futility of moralizing in the first place. Their pithiness and superficiality are meant not so much to make the larger text more palatable, but to illustrate the vapidity of the custom of literary moralizing. One prominent example of the narrative poking fun at its own putative high-minded aims takes place early in the narrative, where the following *aprovechamiento* is offered after a chapter of dazzling verbal virtuosity: "No hay perdición ni libertad cuyo principio y fomento no sea la demasiada parlería." (179)[there is no vice nor excess whose beginning is not excessive garrulity.]" Such blatant contradiction is evidence not only of this fundamental irony in Úbeda but also of the novel's self-conscious descent into perdition

and frivolity—the very vices castigated by Alemán and by the Counter-Reformation more broadly.

We have observed earlier a prominent feature of picaresque comedy is a first-person narrator engaging in self-debasement or pity to generate comic effect. Lazarillo is a master of this technique, as is Quevedo's Pablos and indeed later picaros ranging from Tristram Shandy to Oskar Matzerath in the *Tin Drum*. Justina, on the other hand, stands out from the group not merely because of her gender, but because of her uniquely problematic self-delineation. All picaresque narrators possess as writers of their own autobiographies a sense of distance from past trauma, an enlightened state of introspection. More importantly, picaresque narrators evince an erudition and verbal dexterity that belies their modest upbringing and criminal past. What makes Justina a fascinating case study is the intense ambivalence of her self-construction through writing. On the one hand, she exalts herself through linguistic artifice. On the other hand, this very eloquence is in the service of self-debasement. Form and content, as so often in picaresque comedy, are fundamentally at odds. Justina is a consummate writer, and her verbal fireworks are rivaled only by Quevedo's Pablos in the picaresque tradition. Yet the grandiose style of the narrative is offset by its base content, and in this way it represents a continued exercise in comic self-debasement.

A critical point is still to be made, and that is how well Úbeda's novel fits into the framework of what we have defined up to this point as picaresque comedy. Justina's formidable verbal talent constitutes a violation of the novel's verisimilitude. And indeed, by nineteenth century standards of novelistic verisimilitude, Justina's gift with words and facility with Classical allusions is implausible enough to disrupt the otherwise benign

willful suspension of disbelief at the heart of any pathetic identification with a literary character. But there is another way of understanding the obvious incongruity here. Incongruity is the critical element of comedy in seventeenth-century Spain (Cervantes generates a comic epic largely on the basis of a single comic incongruity), and as a slew of eighteenth-century English and German comic theorists would remind us (among them Addison, Fielding, Kant, Schlegel, Jean Paul, and Schopenhauer), incongruity is at the root of laughter.¹³⁹ In the case of *La pícaro Justina*, the comic incongruity is that a woman of ignoble origins, lacking in reason and humanist education, can deliver such dazzling array of courtly conceits. The predominantly male readership of seventeenth-century Spain, the very “hombres doctísimos” addressed in the prologue, would take curious delight in the sheer absurdity of a woman narrating her past mischief with such verbal panache.

The delirious syntactical constructions of Justina, rich as they are in cultural and mythological references, puns, *conceptos*, and *chistes*, prohibit the development of the kind of pathetic identification felt for Lazarillo. Ultimately, this verbal smokescreen may produce laughter, but not the dual-charged laughter we have come to associate with the picaresque. Úbeda’s novel is no doubt of the comic sort, but the picaresque comedy that begins with *Lazarillo* does not continue in its pages.

II. Grimmelshausen’s *Courasche*

In the case of Úbeda and Alemán, and indeed throughout the Spanish picaresque, the picaresque genre propels itself forward through adversarial intertextual relationships. The picaresque defines itself against its own norms. What is new in the case of

Grimmelshausen is how his *Courasche* invites such an adversarial relationship not to the text of some other picaresque author but to his own earlier *Schelmenroman, Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus*.¹⁴⁰

Grimmelshausen is the great German contributor to the picaresque. *Guzmán de Alfarache* was translated into German by Albertus Albertinus and attained a high degree of popularity in Grimmelshausen's Germany.¹⁴¹ As one might expect, important thematic parallels can be drawn between Alemán's *Guzmán* and *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus*.¹⁴² Both picaresque protagonists willfully resist the loose playfulness of earlier picaresque narratives. They recount with great rhetorical panache their meanderings, and both embark on spiritual journeys for fulfillment beyond the ephemeral and haphazard *engaño* (*Täuschung*) of the world. Both wander through a gallery of roguish aides and abettors and let malicious cooks victimize their digestive systems. And perhaps most significantly, both end their peregrinations as hermits, having renounced the empty trappings of "civilized" existence and embraced the ascetic ideal (though the luridly erotic and at times scatological detail of their former lives leads one to question the authenticity of this supposed conversion).

Yet the problem of the feminine picaresque broached above has a special resonance in Grimmelshausen. The *Courasche*, unlike *Simplicissimus*, eschews any hint of a spiritual quest. It advertises itself in the most modest of terms, as a treatise in miniature or "Traktätlein," which recalls the division of *Lazarillo* into *tractados* of greatly varying length and scope.¹⁴³ And quite unlike her male predecessor, *Courasche* renounces any semblance of conversion at the end of the novel. *Courasche* enriches the already complex picaresque narrative situation. In *Lazarillo*, the narrator/protagonist is

writing to an anonymous reader (addressed in the text as “Vuestra Merced”/“Your Honor”) in order to clarify what he cryptically refers to as “el caso” (“the case”). In *Guzmán*, the narration is told through the eyes of a hardened criminal turned convert who looks upon his prior mischief with grim and unforgiving eyes (and yet who nonetheless derives some measure of pleasure from his own narration of his past life’s wrongdoing). In Cervantes’ *Coloquio de los perros*, a miracle (or magic spell) has endowed two captious canines with the gift of speech, and one engages in aleatory picaresque narration while his companion interjects with critical commentary. If anything, the picaresque consistently introduces a seemingly straightforward act of communication (a first-person retelling of one’s past) only to render this framework problematic. In other words, each picaresque narrative accepts the genre in Guillén’s terms as an invitation to form only to undermine that form and pose its own unique narrative problem.

Courasche defines itself not as an autonomous literary creation but as a scathing rebuttal to Grimmelshausen’s far lengthier *Simplicissimus*:

Ich erzähle dir auch dieses nur zum Exempel, denn wenn ich dir alle Buben- und Schelmenstücke sagen sollte, die er mit mir zu Gefallen hat bewerkstelligen müssen, so dürfte ich wetten, es würde mir und dir, wiewohl es lustige Sachen sind, die Zeit zu lang werden. Ja, wenn man alles beschreiben sollte, wie du deine Narrenposen beschrieben hast, so würde es ein größer und lustiger Buch abgeben als deine ganze Lebensbeschreibung. Doch will ich dich noch ein kleines lassen hören. (102)¹⁴⁴

[I narrate you this only as an example, for if I were to tell you all of the tomfoolery that he had wrought to please me, then I would have to bet that,

although they are funny matters, they would take too much time. Indeed, were I to narrate everything as you did in your own autobiography, then the book that would result would be longer and more humorous book than your whole life's story. Yet I will only let you hear a little bit.]

And yet it is noteworthy not merely for this curious adversarial and intertextual relation, but also through its casting of a female protagonist, which naturally invites a second intertextual connection. In *La pícaro Justina*, Justina is a verbal seductress of the most extravagant sort, exercising a kind of witchcraft of words, using the picaresque framework only to indulge in verbal fireworks (Quevedo's Pablos performs a similar operation). Justina is in other words more literary magician than double-dealing pícaro. Yet we saw how the intense verbal energy in *Úbeda* creates a kind of alienation effect that ultimately disrupts the potentialities of picaresque comedy. The low comic realism with which the picaresque is often connected is largely abandoned in *Úbeda*, and instead we fight our way through a highly wrought narrative even more turgid than those of Alemán and Quevedo.¹⁴⁵ The pathetic identification with the picaro critical to picaresque comedy is largely absent from *Úbeda*'s novel, and the comic artistry cannot be classified as picaresque.

Grimmelshausen's approach to the problem of picaresque comedy initiated in *Lazarillo* is a unique one. On the one hand, there is in Grimmelshausen a concern for historical detail that is greater than in his Spanish predecessors.¹⁴⁶ The anonymous author of *Lazarillo*, Alemán, and Quevedo may name Spanish cities in their narratives, but history is only an idle prop, hardly visible on the stage. Quite naturally, part of the intense concern for history in Grimmelshausen can be connected to his firsthand

testimony to the carnage of the Thirty Years' War, which had brought about hardly imaginable levels of bloodshed (having decimated up to fifty percent of the population of certain German states). Yet it would be a mistake to characterize Grimmelshausen's novels solely as a bleak response to this bloodshed.¹⁴⁷ True, the realm in which Grimmelshausen's characters operate is largely an amoral one, and the landscape in which they wander is ravaged by war and a sense of omnipresent death, demonstrating more the topsy-turvy quality in Hieronymus Bosch than the placid order of Tintoretto.¹⁴⁸ In the Spanish picaresque, the scenes in which the protagonists operate are generally closed off. While the Spanish novels are set largely in the rougher quarters of cities like Toledo and Seville, there is, even in their picaresque peregrination, a certain sense that each incident of criminal mischief occurs in a neatly sealed realm. Grimmelshausen's novels take picaresque instability a step further, largely due to the undeniable force of historical relevance. His world is very much the opposite of the *locus amoenus* of the pastoral novel. And yet in the midst of the doom and gloom of Grimmelshausen's Germany, there is a prevailing sense of jocularitas, an inclination to wring wry laughter out of abject historical circumstance. One could perhaps attribute this to a peculiarly German sense of *Galgenhumor* (gallows' humor), or liken it to the blend of apocalyptic decrepitude and late Renaissance mischief present in the painting of Bosch and Brueghel. These paintings in particular seem to have been an influence for Mateo Alemán, but despite certain obvious structural similarities between *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* and Alemán's brooding storm of a novel (churning as it is with internal contradictions between comic impulses and heavy-handed moralizing), Grimmelshausen revels in a sense of comic waywardness and a genuine celebration of happenstance that is foreign to

the world of *Guzmán*. In other words, Grimmelshausen is to be located on *Lazarillo*'s side of the picaresque axis, not *Guzmán*'s.

Courasche advertises itself not primarily as an autobiography but rather as an exercise in self-abasement. And strangely enough, this self-abasement serves the power interests of a spurned lover. Grimmelshausen's pícara issues a challenge quite early to her erstwhile lover Simplicissimus, for whose eyes the narrative (with all of its aleatory episodes) is conceived. Indeed, the title of the narrative, absurdly long to our modern eyes (but more or less typical of Baroque logorrhea), frames the narrative act as *ressentiment*.

Trutz Simplex oder ausführliche und wunderseltene Lebensbeschreibung der Erzbetrügerin und Landstörzerin Courasche. Wie sie anfangs eine Rittmeisterin/hernach eine Hauptmännin, ferner eine Leutnantin, bald eine Marketenderin, Musketiererin und letztlich eine Zigeunerin abgegeben/Meisterlich agiert und ausbündig vorgestellt. Ebenso lustig annehmlich und nützlich zu betrachten als Simplicissimus selbst. Alles miteinander von der Courasche eigener Person dem weit und breit bekannten Simplicissimo zum Verdruß und Widerwillen dem Autori in die Feder diktiert, der sich für diesmal nennt Philarchus Grossus von Trommenheim auf Griffsberg. Gedruckt in Utopia bei Felix Stratiot. (3)

[In Spite of Simplex, or the thorough and fabulous life story of the infamous pícara Courasche. How she initially became a female cavalier, then a captain, then a lieutenant, a merchant, muscateer, and lastly a gypsy. Marvelously realized and informatively presented. As funny, pleasant, and as useful to consider as

Simplicissimus itself. All of this dictated directly from Courasche to the author's pen, to the distaste and vexation of the well-known Simplicissimus, the author calling himself Philarchus Grossus von Trommenheim auf Griffsberg, printed in Utopia at Felix Stratiot.]

The antagonism between two characters is paralleled in the antagonism between narratives. Naturally, this adversarial relationship serves both a comic and a practical purpose. Indeed, this and all further references to *Simplicissimus* advertise Grimmelshausen's former novel to the current readership of *Courasche*, establishing a link to that bestseller in an age of playfully anonymous authorship.¹⁴⁹ And yet just as *La pícara Justina* styles itself as a merry counterpart to the dire pessimism of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, *Courasche* cultivates a playful and self-consciously shallow approach to the picaresque that is, despite its self-advertisement, more “lustig annehmlich” than “nützlich zu betrachten.” The Horatian scale of *prodesse* and *delectare* here tips clearly in favor of the latter. *Simplicissimus*, for all of its own picaresque playfulness, is far more ambitious in its portrayal of character, and in particular, the protagonist's renunciation of the tawdry world of pleasure and decision to retreat into the world of a hermit parallels the *desengaño* of the reformed criminal Guzmán.

The opposition between the “depth” of *Simplicissimus* and the shallow playfulness of *Courasche* can be recast as that between the masculine and the feminine. In *La pícara Justina*, the feminine picaresque, for all of its latent misogyny, presents a problem of verisimilitude—namely how a bumpkin girl is capable of the most ornate verbal artistry. As we saw earlier in our discussion, Justina is highly conscious of herself as an author figure from the outset, as evidenced in her opening meditation on the pen

with which she composes her narrative and the inherent problem of linguistic and literary representation. Courasche, by contrast, is no natural writer, and in fact, her story is not written at all by her own hand but dictated. Hence, the basic incongruity of *Justina* is avoided. Grimmelshausen, like Cervantes before him, demonstrates a mode of literary representation that is self-consciously illusory.¹⁵⁰ As we will see in the subsequent section of the chapter, *Moll Flanders* likewise filters the dictation of a pícara through the voice of a masculine proxy narrator. However, Defoe goes a step further than Grimmelshausen in declaring in the prologue that Moll's narrative has been modified to conform to good taste:

It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be.¹⁵¹

Moll, to be sure, is a more complex character than the desiring machine Courasche. Though Courasche wears many hats in the narrative, she remains more a caricature of feminine flippancy than a genuine character capable of eliciting pity. Indeed, Courasche depicts herself in the most unflattering ways. Throughout the narrative, she repeatedly stresses that she is governed by her bestial instincts and irrepressible libido. Whereas Moll is the victim of circumstance, a once virtuous young woman cast downward into a series of unlucky relations with debauched suitors, Courasche is an unabashed hedonist uninterested in a last-minute conversion: “Ja, werdet ihr sagen, ihr Herren, wer sollte wohl gemeint haben, dass sich die alte Schell einmal unterstehen würde, dem künftigen

Zorn Gottes zu entrinnen?" (14) ["Yeah, you'll say, you men, who might have thought that the old hag would manage to escape God's coming scourge."] As such, the novel knows none of the seriousness of *Guzmán* or even *Simplicissimus*, but this fact alone makes it difficult to classify under the rubric of picaresque comedy. After all, the hallmark of picaresque comedy is a healthy measure of gravitas. Picaresque comedy thrives on coexistence of sympathy and repulsion. *Courasche* inspires ambivalent reactions, but for different reasons than most of her picaresque predecessors. The new element in Grimmelshausen's comedy is the element of eroticism. Before, we discussed how picaresque narrators are often brilliant rhetoricians engaging in a verbal seduction of the reader. Yet *Courasche* seduces less by dint of her narrative grace than by the erotic impulses that she sends out to a seventeenth-century readership composed predominantly of males.

A consistent comic strategy in the *Courasche* is the inversion of gender roles. Transvestitism is of special significance in a text as this where a woman steps into the arena of literary combat to take on a male adversary (just as it is in the case of a male author dressing up to produce a narrative from a woman's point of view). Indeed, the cross-dressing in Grimmelshausen's novel might on this count be connected to that in Shakespeare's comedies, where the female transvestism in plays like *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* is rendered all the more ironic by the fact that it is a kind of transvestism to the second power, that is as young male actors disguising themselves as females who in turn dress as men.

Just as her picaro forebears had made clever use of their wiles to advance themselves in a hostile world, so does Grimmelshausen's pícara don the mask of

masculinity in order to initially insure that her womanly virtue remain intact. Courasche's initial impulse to transvestitism is to protect herself from being raped by enemy soldiers.

But she soon takes a special liking to her newfound masculinity:

Damals wünschte ich ein Mann zu sein, um dem Krieg meine Tage nachzuhängen; denn es ging so lustig her, daß mir das Herz im Leibe lachte, und solche Begierde vermehrte mir die Schlacht auf dem weißen Berg bei Prag, weil die Unseren einen großen Sieg erhielten und wenig Volk einbüßten. (22)

[At that time I wanted to be a man in order to tally up my days tagging along in the war, for it was so delightful, that my heart laughed inside me, and the battle on the white mountain near Prague strengthened my desire, as our men achieved a great victory and only lost a few men.]

This leads to another prominent characteristic of *Courasche's* comedy--the connection between violence and the comic.¹⁵² There are again significant precedents here. Apuleius and the tradition of Juvenalian satire come to mind for their graphic descriptions of ludicrous violence (one might recall the episode in the *Golden Ass* where a donkey-man is beaten mercilessly to the point of spraying diarrhea on the perpetrators or the many times in Cervantes where Quijote is beaten to a pulp). But there is in Grimmelshausen a degree of comic violence not reached in either precedent, owing to the brutal relevance of history (the concrete reality of war) and the graphic detail that almost tips the scale from comic to tragic. A significant example of the pungent intermingling of violence and comedy occurs early in the novel, where Courasche recounts how she is gang-raped by soldiers and eventually rescued by an eventual husband, the captain:

Diese packten mich an und wanderten mit mir und meiner Kalesch dem Böhmerwald zu, als wenn sie der Teufel selbst gejagt hätte; ich schrie zwar, als wenn ich an einer Folter gehangen wäre, aber sie machten mich bald schweigen. Um Mitternacht kamen sie in eine Meierei, die einzig vorm Wald lag, allwo sie anfangen zu füttern und mit mir umzugehen, wie zu geschehen pflegt, welches mir zwar der geringste Kummer war; aber es wurde ihnen gesegnet wie dem Hund das Gras; denn indem sie ihre viehischen Begierden sättigten, wurden sie von einem Hauptmann, der mit dreißig Dragonern eine Convoy nach Pilsen verrichtet hatte, überfallen... (36)

[They took hold of me and led me and my barouche towards the Bohemian Forest, as if the Devil himself had chased them there; I cried out, as if I were being hanged and tortured, but they soon silenced me. At midnight they came to a dairy farm that lay at the foot of the forest, where they began feeding and having their way with me as they were wont to do, which was the least of my worries, but they were allowed this privilege as a dog is free to feed on grass, and while they were satisfying their animal urges, they were put to the rack by a captain who was traveling to Pilsen with a convoy of 30 dragoons...]

We have observed one of the signal features of picaresque comedy to be that of contradiction. Laughter is double-sided, at once scornful and compassionate. Another aspect of the dual-sided quality of picaresque comedy is the disjunct that exists between the humiliation of the narrating protagonist and the curious masochistic pleasure taken in recounting the past trauma. In this scene in *Courasche*, we have trauma of the most egregious sort, and yet the prevailing tone in this passage is more the happy-go-lucky

quality of comic narration than the plaintive voice appropriate to the circumstance. Indeed, there is comic irony in the extended analogy established between the rapists, who violate their victim in a dairy farm, and images of animal behavior (“they began to feed,” “like a dog can feed on grass,” “in satisfying their animal desires.”) Courasche might be interested in winning the reader over to her cause by evoking in detail the suffering she underwent at the hands of these brutes. And yet in picaresque comedy one is never on sure footing, for she undermines the dramatic intensity of the passage in indicating that the rape is a habitual practice (“as they are wont to do”) and though Courasche cries out as if being tortured to death, she curiously remarks that the rape is “the least of her worries.” Were this not enough, the passage is robbed of any further dramatic gravitas through the arrival of a comic *deus ex machina* in the form of the captain and the subsequent mini-catharsis afforded by the quick death delivered to the rapists.

The narrative presents itself initially as a means of righting a wrong, of Courasche saving face after her infelicitous liaison with Simplicissimus. And yet the irony of this is that in order to save face, Courasche must sully herself with a blow-by-blow description of her tumultuous and debauched existence. Indeed, for any reader who grows weary of the excessive feminine virtue of a Pamela, Courasche is the antidote.¹⁵³ The seventeenth-century reader of the novel could well have taken private (or even public) pleasure in the novel’s celebration of a woman’s libertine existence. One can naturally regard Grimmelshausen’s creation as the most misogynistic creation in a genre with little genuine concern for the feminine, or conversely as a celebration of female freedom from the moral strictures of the patriarchy.¹⁵⁴ Over and over in the text, allusions are made to Courasche’s irrepressible carnal urges. Early in the narrative, the same *Amadis* novel that

had inspired Quijote's anachronistic chivalry is lent to Courasche to inspire an amorous rather than an aesthetic education:

Das tat mir dann trefflich wohl und war Öl zu dem ohnehin brennenden Feuer meiner anreizenden Begierden. Sie lieh mir auch den lüsternen Amadis-Roman, die Zeit damit zu vertreiben und Komplimenten daraus zu ergreifen; und was sie sonst erdenken konnte, das zu Liebeslüsten reizen machte, das ließ sie nicht unterwegen. (32)

[It was just right for me and was fuel to the already burning fire of my stimulating desires. She likewise lent me the wanton Amadis novel in order to kill time and to pull out some compliments; and she didn't neglect to mention whatever else she could think up that would inspire amorous longing.]

Just as Courasche had felt a male lust for combat, she here embraces her feminine desire in reading a novel of chivalry—not for its battle description but in order to stimulate her erotic impulses. Briefly after this passage, she again makes mention of her carnal inclinations: “Meine Begierden zu sättigen.” (34) And later, she confesses that her proclivity for transvestism and male aggression on the battlefield is undermined by her insatiable female desire:

Es ist nicht zu glauben, wie ich nach dieser Schlacht sowohl von meinen Neidern wie von meinen Gönnern gelobt wurde; beide Teil sagten, ich wäre der Teufel selbst, und eben damals war mein höchster Wunsch, daß ich nur kein Weibsbild wäre; aber was war's drum? Es war null und verhunzt. Ich gedacht oft daran, mich für einen Hermaphroditen auszugeben, ob ich vielleicht dadurch erlangen möchte, öffentlich Hosen zu tragen und für einen jungen Kerl zu passieren;

hergegen aber hatte ich durch meine unmäßigen Begierden so viel Kerl
empfinden lassen, wer ich wäre. (46)

[It is unbelievable how I was praised after this battle by those who envied me and those who supported me. Both claimed that I was the devil himself, and it was indeed my greatest wish to no longer be a woman, but why was this so? It was trifling and base. I often thought about going out as a hermaphrodite and possibly being able to wear pants in public and to pass for a young fellow: however, I had let so many fellows know through my immoderate desires who I really was.]

Courasche expresses here both her wish to renounce her femininity and her recognition of the futility of such a hope. Hermaphrotism might enable proximity to the male soldiers for which she lusts, but she doubts her own capacity to keep her concupiscence in check. The comic incongruity that dominates her persona is here augmented by the erotic element of her irrepressible feminine desire for the men in her midst. This erotic/comic energy is absent from *Úbeda* and the Spanish picaresque. Grimmelshausen's principal contribution to the short but significant strain of the female picaresque is this erotic element, which if nothing else adds another layer of ambivalence to a genre already defined by contradiction and rhetorical deception.

***Moll Flanders* as Renunciation of the Wanton Pícara**

One significant strain in the picaresque tradition is perhaps best expressed in the metaphor of the monk flagellating himself. Whether one chooses to see in this monk a genuine instance of pathos or the sort of absurd fellow rendered ridiculous by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* or *Monty Python and the Search for the Holy Grail* depends

on which texts one considers as most representative of the tradition. The contrast I have drawn thus far in the study is one between the comic energy of *Lazarillo* and the largely anti-comic ideological forces of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. If *Guzmán* elevates the playfulness of its picaresque predecessor to the realm of serious moral introspection and even religious revelation (suppressing its own comic impulses in the process), later texts such as Quevedo's *Buscón* and Úbeda's *Pícara Justina* employ a highly-wrought and comically charged language to render such moralizing ridiculous.

But all picaresque texts involve problematic narrative situations, and they invite speculation into their own origins. *Moll Flanders* stands apart as one of the most difficult novels to classify in the present study. Formally *Moll Flanders* is a *mélange* of styles both popular and spiritual. As Watt, Davis, and Richetti point out, Defoe stands at the forefront of the development of the "novel" in England.¹⁵⁵ Richetti in particular is quite right to demonstrate *Moll's* relationship to popular narratives and in particular to the tradition of the criminal biography in England. The criminal biography was enormously popular in England, and as Reed rightly points out, the licentious quality of such biographies coloured how translations of the Spanish picaresque were received in England:

As the Spanish picaresque novel was received in England—indeed, even as it was continued in Spain in the seventeenth century---the paradoxical alliance of secular lowliness and high religious ideals effectively broke down. The lowliness of experience was presented in a more traditionally comic or satiric mode, while the religious spirit displayed itself in the moralistic condemnation of the rogue as criminal. The breakdown of the novelistic synthesis in the best of the Spanish

picaresque was facilitated in England by the presence of other literary genres for dealing with the life of the half-outsider, genres more purely popular in their isolation from the forms and themes of the classical tradition.¹⁵⁶

The picaresque and its cousin the criminal autobiography appeal to some of the same prurient appetites in a growing readership (indeed those denounced in *Guzmán's* prologue). While some scholars like Robert Alter have maintained that *Moll* descends directly from the line of the criminal autobiography, not that of *Lazarillo*, there is an important precedent for Defoe's contradictory work in the picaresque tradition—and that precedent is *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Indeed, for all of Watt's keen insights into the innovations in *Moll* in the larger context of an emerging realism, the impact of the Spanish picaresque on Defoe's work remains underappreciated in his account.¹⁵⁷

Like its picaresque predecessors, *Moll* is a loosely-constructed series of episodes drawn from the life of a morally ambivalent but generally repentant former criminal. It chronicles the protagonist's vain efforts in a hostile society to secure a firm footing, and the narrator takes particular care to shine a bright light on the misfortune that has beset her—from birth at Newgate through a series of scandalous and scabrous affairs that have rendered life a constant flirtation with darker forces. In *Moll*, an ideological tension exists between two wholly divergent traditions. On the one hand, there is the largely comic tradition of the English criminal autobiography and the Spanish picaresque (with the obvious exception of the weighty and largely anti-comic *Guzmán de Alfarache*) and the more direct influence of the comic pícaro in the novels of Úbeda and Grimmelshausen. On the other hand, Defoe's cultural backdrop was not one of mere merry mischief, for as

many critics have pointed out, the ideological shadow of Puritanism and the spiritual autobiography looms heavy over *Moll*.¹⁵⁸ *Moll Flanders* becomes then a kind of battlefield in which these contrary ideologies are at war with each other, and the result is a text that cannot decide which side it wishes to fight on. On the one side is the light-hearted comic spirit of the female picaresque, on the other the gravity of spiritual autobiography.

This inner tension comes to the fore already in the novel's title. The novel we conveniently label *Moll Flanders* has in fact the following title:

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, & C. Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent.

Written from her own Memorandums.

Titles of this extravagant length, as absurd as they might appear to the modern, are not altogether out of the ordinary in 1722. Nor is Defoe's even the longest of any picaresque novel; the title of Grimmelshausen's *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* is at least twice as long.¹⁵⁹ But Grimmelshausen does not dive into the same salacious detail, nor does he lay bare the story's skeleton in so scandalous a fashion. Striking here is the disregard such a title has for its own protagonist and for the more serious purposes of the narrative. Moll is dragged through the mud before she can vouch for herself. She is a whore, an inconstant and incestuous wife, a thief and exiled felon before she can claim any sense of decency and redeem herself. Whereas Grimmelshausen's title entices, Defoe's renders

ridiculous. The natural expectation that such a jumble of verbiage creates is one of a narrative that is as self-indulgent, as capricious, and as comic as the title that introduces it. Yet *Moll Flanders* is no such text. It is endowed with a seriousness of purpose that belies its self-advertisement and bears important characteristics of the spiritual biography.¹⁶⁰ The theme of the individual in isolation is prominent in *Moll* as well as in two of Defoe's other great novels, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*.¹⁶¹ But those novels do not match *Moll*'s characteristically picaresque sense of internal ambiguity and contradiction. *Moll Flanders* situates itself in a unique position along the axis of picaresque comedy traced up to this point. It occupies a netherworld between the capricious, jocular humor of its female picaresque predecessors and the densely-wrought novelistic edifice of *Guzmán*, and unlike its more free-wheeling predecessors in the tradition of the feminine picaresque, *Moll* confronts in a far more serious fashion the situation of women in British society.¹⁶²

In his classic study of eighteenth-century English literature, *To the Palace of Wisdom*, Martin Price includes among his many astute insights one rather provocative declaration—namely that Defoe is “a comic artist.”¹⁶³ Price goes on to point out how Defoe's novel parodies tragic situations. The haphazard organization of the novel, “its eager thrust from one experience to the next” undermines both emotional engagement on behalf of the reader and a sense of dramatic climax. Price writes:

Usually the writer who is content to give us the shape of the tale itself has a shapely tale to tell; a tale with its own logic, its awakening of tensions and expectations, its mounting repetition, its elaborate devices for forestalling too direct a resolution, and its satisfying—perhaps ingeniously surprising—way of tying all threads in one great stroke.¹⁶⁴

To better appreciate Price's point above of tragedy parodied (I prefer the word "disarmed"), it is worth taking a closer look at a critical dramatic episode in the heart of the novel:

I went out now by Day-light, and wandred about I knew not whither, and in search of I knew not what, when the Devil put a Snare in my way of a dreadful Nature indeed, and such a one as I have never had before or since; going thro' Aldersgate-street there was a pretty little Child had been at a Dancing-School, and was going home, all alone, and my Prompter, like a true Devil, set me upon this innocent Creature; I talk'd to it, and it prattl'd to me again, and I took it by the Hand and led it a long till I came to a pav'd Alley that goes into Bartholomew Close, and I led it in there; the Child said that was not its way home; I said, yes, my Dear it is, I'll show you the way home; the Child had a little Necklace on of Gold Beads, and I had my Eye upon that, and in the dark of the Alley I stoop'd, pretending to mend the Child's Clog that was loose, and took off her Necklace and the Child never felt it, and so led the Child on again: Here, I say, the Devil put me upon killing the Child in the dark Alley, that it might not Cry; but the very thought frightened me so that I was ready to drop down, but I turn'd the Child about and bade it to go back again, for that was not its way home...(151)

The starting point here is Moll as itinerant pícara, Moll *flaneur*, leaving behind home and hearth to venture forth into the city for idle strolling. Idleness becomes, as in the Spanish picaresque, the catalyst for criminal activity (it is likewise the *sine qua non* of any novelistic reading experience).¹⁶⁵ The opening lines of the passage promise a great deal—a dreadfulness hitherto unknown in Moll's life, which as we know by this point is full of

sordid stories, and moreover a level of vice that she never reaches afterward. In other words, this passage, occurring at roughly the halfway point in the novel, advertises itself as a climax. Yet the pay-off hardly corresponds here to the promise. To be sure, dramatic force is generated here—the image of the naïve child entrusting her hand and potentially her fate to a wolf in sheep’s clothing, Moll leading the poor child into an alley as it prattles affectionately and begins to sense that something is awry. And yet for all of this build-up, indeed for the devil’s dramatic intervention in this occurrence, the only thing here lost is a child’s necklace. Moll claims to sense an impulse to murder the child, presumably so that it would not cry, but the necklace is taken surreptitiously. No force is used, no harm inflicted, and the only real villainy here is in thought, not deed. The child makes its way home in blissful ignorance of any wrongdoing. And just as significantly, the tension here created is slowly dissipated in a string of rather uninspiring details that ensue. The denouement takes the form not of tragic death, expiation, or catharsis, but rather a humdrum description of the streets taken by Moll in moving away from this dark alley back to a more respectable public space.

This passage is revealing for another reason, for it offers evidence of a prominent stylistic feature of Moll’s narrative—its syntactical indecisiveness. Given the fact that the narrative as it reaches us is in fact an editor’s rewording of a presumable literary monstrosity, its syntax remains unusually clumsy. Here and in so many passages in the novel, the tendency is to heap detail upon detail without clear foresight. Indeed, just as Moll wanders about desultorily here in this passage, so is the novel guided by a similar aimlessness.¹⁶⁶ This unto itself is nothing revolutionary, given the Spanish picaresque’s preference for the episodic over the carefully constructed. Yet Moll (or more

appropriately her proxy) reveals a particular fondness for the word “and.” As evidenced in the longer passage quoted above, clauses are loosely bound, not as they might in a poetic conceit in Shakespeare or Donne, but in a way that lacks linear progression. Indeed, such a manner of storytelling recalls very much the haphazard narrative method of the child who is inventing a story as she or he goes along, supplying additional verbiage in response to each nodding of an eager listener’s head. The result of such indecisiveness is a petering out of tragic energy and a near lapse into the ridiculous. But the ridiculous is never really reached in *Moll*, only intimated.

Critics of Defoe’s have long sought to account for the curious lack of resolve in *Moll*. Watt, for all of his deep admiration for Defoe’s novel, nevertheless recognizes “his [Defoe’s] patent shortcomings—weakness of construction, inattention to detail, lack of moral or formal pattern.”¹⁶⁷ The negation of the tragic does not automatically equate to comedy. *Moll* creates just as many potentially comic situations as it does tragic. Yet just as it banishes the tragic Muse, so does it clip the wings of the comic spirit. *Moll Flanders* finds itself in a kind of limbo; it oscillates between comedy and tragedy potentialities without ever giving itself over fully to one mode. It defines itself through indecisiveness, never through realization but through possibility. The obvious question that arises is why *Moll* chooses oscillation and inconstancy over generic stability. In *Lazarillo*, the curious blend of pathetic identification and comic debasement calls for an appeal both for Christian agape and misanthropic self-assertion over the Other. Yet *Lazarillo* breaks away from the Antique comic tradition exemplified in Apuleius *Golden Ass* in endowing its protagonist with a great degree of amiability and rhetorical savvy, making the hunger theme as much a dramatic as a comic device. And just as importantly, *Lazarillo*

introduces for the first time a genuine moment of sociological concern into a comic tradition that had systematically rendered persons of low origin ridiculous and hence unworthy of sympathy. *Moll* picks up in a sense where *Lazarillo* had left off—but it brings the newfound concern for realism and for sociological relevance to a new level, and in so doing, it rejects the currents of comic forces in *Lazarillo* (namely the intersection of physical comedy, the unruly servant archetype, and the unique picaresque feature of comic self-martyrdom).

Our focal point in this study is the strange career of picaresque comedy, which is born in *Lazarillo*, tossed about in the thousand-page maelstrom of *Guzmán*, and injected with new venom in Quevedo. Defoe, for his part, unlike later apostles of the picaresque in English such as Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett, is no natural comic artist. Indeed, his treatment of the comic potentialities in *Moll Flanders* is as clumsy his handling of the feminine. Our question becomes again, as with the issue of syntax, whether this is intentional clumsiness. For Swift, Defoe was intolerable, not the least for his self-righteous style and lack of comic inspiration: “One of these authors (the fellow that was pilloried, I have forgot his name) is indeed so grave, sententious, dogmatical a rogue, that there is no enduring him.”¹⁶⁸ Swift of course bases his judgment more on personal distaste for a political opponent than on the actual literary merits of Defoe’s novels (which he may have never read), but when reading *Moll Flanders*, one can appreciate the point (without siding with Swift) that the book could have been much funnier if its potentially comic situations had not been disarmed. Indeed, had Defoe’s aim been laughter for laughter’s sake, he could have indulged the same low comic excess of its picaresque precursors *La pícaro Justina* and *Courasche*.¹⁶⁹ And yet when compared to

the dour moralizing of Mateo Alemán, Defoe is a bit of a lightweight. *Guzmán de Alfarache* is a dense fog of metaphysical pessimism, a marriage of Counter-Reformation theology and the aberrant mischief of Bosch and Brueghel. *Moll* might appear equally formidable from an ideological point of view, bringing together elements of the Puritan spiritual narrative, the criminal biography, and the Spanish picaresque. Yet the narrator in *Moll* is a great masquerader, and this makes the critical difference. *Moll Flanders'* characteristic feature is indecisiveness, not just in its inability to decide between the comic and tragic but on the fundamental level of plot organization and syntax.

To address the novel's characteristic indecisiveness, the problem of the narrator in *Moll* has to be confronted. One striking aspect of *Moll Flanders* that is perhaps easy to overlook when one considers the authentic appeal of the autobiography is that it is only an autobiography in disguise.¹⁷⁰ The preface reveals as much:

It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter'd, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be... The Pen employ'd in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read: When a Woman debauch'd from her Youth, nay, even being the Offspring of Debauchery and Vice, comes to give an Account of all her vicious Practises, and even to descend to the particular Occasions and Circumstances by which she first became wicked, and of all the progression of Crime which she run

through in threescore Year, and Author must be hard put to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage. (3)

As in *Úbeda* and *Grimmelshausen*, we are faced here with an illusion of *écriture féminine*. But what is new here is that the presumably male narrator draws attention to the fact that he is more an editor than an author, and that the original text represents a coarseness unfit for literary language. The image of putting the novel “into a Dress fit to be seen” plays on the notion that the narrator is a kind of literary transvestite. But the transvestite’s aim in this case is not to *épater le bourgeois* but to maintain its propriety. And yet there are glaring contradictions here. For one, the novel’s extravagant title promises a healthy dose of indecency—indeed indecency of the sort here repudiated, and the narrative that follows demonstrates a clear preference for salacious detail over domestic decency. Moll’s birth to a Newgate inmate is scandalous and hence worthy of narration; her adolescence, spent largely in presumably respectable ways, somehow does not make it into the novel. Later in the novel, we hear plenty of Moll’s shocking marriage to her brother, and this continues to haunt her even after escaping infamy in England and arriving with her new husband as a senior citizen in Virginia.¹⁷¹ Yet when it comes to the years spent harmoniously in bourgeois decency, we are told the following:

It concerns the Story in hand very little to enter into the farther particulars of the Family, or of myself, for the five Years that I liv’d with this Husband; only to observe that I had two Children by him and that at the end of five Year he Died: He had been really a very good Husband to me, and we liv’d very agreeably together; (47)

The “story in hand” is, in other words, only as good as the picaresque detail that fuels it. Watt may not be mistaken in celebrating a new “formal realism” in *Moll*, but this new realism, at least in this case, has little to do with bourgeois domesticity.¹⁷² The picaresque privileges the itinerant over the domestic, the “transcendental homelessness” of Lukács’ debased modern epic over the home and hearth of Dickens.¹⁷³ Not surprisingly, when *Moll* at novel’s end attains a measure of stability and respectability in Virginia, the narrator makes a similar excuse for the exclusion of material that diverges from the salacious:

In her last Scene at Maryland and Virginia, many pleasant things happen’d which makes that part of her Life very agreeable, but they are not told with the same Elegancy as those accounted for by herself; so it is still to the more Advantage that we break off here. (6)

The narrator, the rational voice of the literary who tames the beast of the feminine narrator whose voice never reaches us, here falls into a laughable contradiction. Though he reminds the reader in this very preface that *Moll*’s original tale was too indecent to reach the reader without being transformed into adequate literary expression, he here argues that *Moll*’s prior criminal life is related with greater “elegancy” than her more quiet days in Virginia and is hence worthy of inclusion. *Moll*’s eventual happiness in the New World is not fit to be told because it violates some tacit principle of literary decency and style. Yet when we consider that the narrator has taken it upon himself to transform the lewd into the literary (as he would have us believe), then it is difficult to conceive why the same editing procedure could not have been extended to encompass these inappropriate happenings. In an age when the novel was seeking literary justification as a

modern epic, *Moll Flanders* recedes from epic breadth and homes in on individual consciousness. Moll is the sun, and the celestial bodies in her orbit are only illuminated from a great distance. We might recall here the implicit critique of the monocular picaresque narrative performed by Cervantes. There, the picaro is presented above all as a blowhard who delivers self-aggrandizing filibusters to only marginally interested listeners. The picaro's consciousness is limited by its refusal to take in exterior perspectives. In other words, the picaro is always an avid storyteller but seldom an interested listener, and this for Cervantes is the great weakness of monocular perspective of the picaresque. Moll, guilty of a similar offence, is inclined to great verbosity when matters concern her own "wickedness," but the rest of the figures that come and go in the novel are mere stage props rather than actors.

Defoe's most significant contribution to the picaresque enacts a kind of taming of two contrary principles—namely the intensely masculine tradition of the picaresque and the ideological construct of femininity in eighteenth-century England. The self-proclaimed tamer is none other than the presumably masculine narrator, who dresses himself up in a woman's clothing and tells Moll's story as if it were really her own. Defoe's construction of the rational male editor/narrator is not a radical innovation. Cervantes famously presents the *Quixote* as a Spanish translation of the Arabic manuscript of the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli. But, unlike Cervantes, Defoe does not allude to this mediation which is emphasized in the prologue, nor is *Don Quixote* "dressed up" as an autobiographical memoir.

But the notion of taming here is not merely that of lewd, "feminine" impulses. Whereas the tragic is here advertised only to be suffocated by pedestrian detail (or as

Price would say, parodied), comic topoi are introduced only to be suffocated by more serious matters (in a matter not wholly unlike the action/reaction model already observed in *Guzmán*). One prominent instance of a comic motif being introduced and effectively beaten back occurs midway through the novel, as Moll has learned the ropes of the criminal world. In a scheme to gain access to a greater variety of goods to steal, her governess disguises her as a man:

I was Tall and Personable, but a little too smooth Fac'd for a Man; however as I seldom went Abroad but in the Night, it did well enough; but it was a long time before I could behave in my new Cloths: I mean, as to my Craft; it was impossible to be so Nimble, so Ready, so Dexterous at these things, in a Dress so contrary to Nature; and as I did every thing Clumsily, so I had neither the success, or the easiness of Escape that I had before, and I resolv'd to leave it off; but that Resolution was confirm'd soon after by the following Accident. (167)

The mistaken identity/transvestite topos is a comic device used with great effect in the Renaissance and particularly prominent in Shakespeare (*As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* come to mind here) and in Grimmelshausen's *Courasche*. But the critical difference in Defoe is that what in almost any other author is an easy trick to lighten mood and generate chuckles and general confusion is here mishandled. And the result of this is a deflation of comic energy. Moll's clumsiness as a woman parallels the aforementioned clumsiness of the male narrator of the novel. Moll's inability to properly assume the qualities of manhood is therefore paralleled in the male narrator's own wearing of a "dress contrary to Nature" and his awkward handling of Moll's female interiority.¹⁷⁴ Further, the clumsiness theme applies equally to the mismanagement of the tragic and

comic elements that pepper the narrative. Indeed, the theme features already in the preface: “And as the best use is made even of the worst Story, the Moral `tis hop’d will keep the Reader serious even where the Story might incline him to be otherwise.” (3) Like *Guzmán de Alfarache*, *Moll* is defined through internal ideological division, but whereas these internal struggles arise organically in *Guzmán* (out of the struggle to reconcile a popular new narrative form with the ideological strictures of the Spanish Counter-Reformation), the contradictions in *Moll* are more attributable to clumsiness. The narrator acknowledges as much in constructing an opposition here between a moral (here associated with serious rational reflection and the “best use” of the novel) and a story (which is irredeemably lewd, predestined as it were to damnation). The narrator’s transvestism, the oscillation between tragic and comic modes, and the tension between the “best use” of the moral and the “worst Story” (defined as such because it is condemned by its own terms to lewdness) tear asunder the supposed moral thread running through the novel and make it one of the most fascinating cases of the neurotic element within the picaresque tradition.

Concluding Remarks

The three texts in this chapter demonstrate problems on three levels. The first of these problems is related to the peculiar case of the so-called female picaresque, and in particular the usurpation of the female voice by male authors. In *Courasche* and *Moll*, this usurpation is explicitly thematized within the text itself. The latter self-righteously asserts in its prologue that the wanton speech of its pícara has been toned down so as to better conform to eighteenth-century *bienséance*. The second major problem in these texts is on the level of intertextual relation. *Justina* and *Courasche* both situate

themselves in adversarial relation to earlier masculine picaresque texts, and both arrive at different approaches to the problem of picaresque than those earlier novels. *Justina* exhibits all of the rhetorical bombast of *Guzmán* but renders ridiculous the moralizing mission of literature. *Courasche* goes even further in stripping away the complexity of the pícara's psyche and giving voice to a lustful, wanton heroine devoid of the more serious spiritual backbone of *Simplicissimus*. The first two novels in this chapter explore new comic applications of the picaresque, but they lack a fundamental element of picaresque comedy (the potential for readerly identification with the picaro). They are, in other words, comic in the conventional rather than in the picaresque sense. Whereas *Justina* and *Courasche* share *Lazarillo's* jocularly, the pathos characteristic of picaresque comedy is largely lacking. *Moll* demonstrates ideological tension of a sort akin to that in *Guzmán*, whereas Alemán's great novel wrestles with its own comic impulse through profound metaphysical reflection, *Moll* is narrated as if by a child, unsure of which detail to include or which reflection to make. *Moll* inhabits a purgatory between comic levity and ideological sternness.

Chapter Six

Picaresque Comedy Tamed: The Cases of Smollett and Fielding

Earlier in the study we considered the problematic case of Cervantes and the picaresque. Cervantes' picaresque experiments, the novellas "Rinconete y Cortadillo" and the "Coloquio de los perros" draw on picaresque themes but ultimately critique the one-sidedness of picaresque point of view. Cervantine comedy, in contradistinction to picaresque comedy, privileges the distance established through the epic voice. Mediation, which for picaresque narrators is often a stumbling block, becomes for Cervantes an end in itself, a *mise en abîme* of literary artifice.¹⁷⁵ Mediation becomes itself the occasion for comic happenstance, the clear, calm voice diagnosing the chaos of the world and indeed judging the comic eccentricities of all.

This chapter will pick up in a sense where the Cervantes chapter left off, transposing the aesthetic debates of early seventeenth-century Spain to eighteenth-century Britain. In the earlier discussion of Cervantes, it was argued that Cervantes stands apart from quite a few of his Spanish compatriots in advocating a multi-dimensional approach to the comic. The violence and crudeness of earlier comic forms remains, but as Anthony Close quite astutely demonstrates, Cervantes signals a shift in comic sensibility in the Golden Age.¹⁷⁶ Fielding and Smollett stand alongside Swift and Sterne as the greatest comic writers of the eighteenth century, and yet their approaches to the novel (and to the picaresque in particular) represent an intriguing contrast. This chapter operates on a contrast between authors and representative early novels—Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Smollett's *Roderick Random*. I will argue that the basic contrast in

point of view between Cervantine “epic” comedy and the picaresque plays itself out once more in Fielding and Smollett.

Yet we should be careful to avoid too simple a contrast. As we saw in the case of Cervantes, the contrasts are not of the absolute sort. Cervantes does not reject the picaresque out of hand; he simply reworks picaresque content into a narrative framework that better suits his vision for comic prose fiction. Cervantes rejects basic assumptions of the picaresque but nonetheless contributes to the picaresque tradition, demonstrating that it is possible to explore the low comic realism of the picaresque through a different narrative framework. Fielding and Smollett, for their part, draw on aspects of the Spanish picaresque, and yet both extol Cervantes’s consummate comic artistry in the prefaces to their novels.¹⁷⁷ And despite the differences that I will spell out in this chapter, when *Roderick Random* appeared on the literary marketplace, a popular misconception emerged among the readership that it was actually the work of Fielding.¹⁷⁸ Neither *Joseph Andrews* nor *Roderick Random* is a truly homogeneous generic entity. *Joseph Andrews* is a self-professed comic epic (which draws directly on the Cervantine epic voice) that contains within it an important picaresque interlude. The picaresque interlude in *Joseph Andrews*, Wilson’s tale, has gone relatively unnoticed as a contribution to picaresque writing, let alone picaresque comedy, yet it contains an important innovation to the picaresque.¹⁷⁹ *Roderick* communicates through the same first-person voice of his picaresque predecessors, relishing in much of the same low comic realism, yet the novel he narrates seems to lose its picaresque energy and transmogrify into something other than picaresque (a curious amalgamation of a novel of adventure and a sentimental comedy).

Contrasting Modes in *Joseph Andrews*: A Picaresque Experiment within a Comic Epic

Fielding shares a great deal with Cervantes, and one further point of comparison is their mutual ambivalence towards the picaresque. Both indulge in occasional picaresque prose experiments. As we saw earlier, Cervantes flirts with the possibilities of the picaresque in two *novelas ejemplares* but ultimately rejects the limitations of picaresque point of view. Cervantes and Fielding share a clear preference third-person epic voice over the picaresque and indeed for the authority that such a voice confers.¹⁸⁰ The mediation established between comic narrator and reader frees the narrator from the confines of the first-person (picaro) and offers the occasion for the sorts of comic narrative digressions that enliven the *Quixote* as well as *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.¹⁸¹ Walter Reed's study on the competing novelistic modes of composition offers a useful framework from which to approach Fielding and Cervantes' relationship to the picaresque.¹⁸² Reed in fact uses the critical issue of novelistic point of view to construct a theory of the novel based on competing modes--the Cervantine and the picaresque.

As we have observed, a defining characteristic of the new picaresque comedy that emerges in 1554 with the *Lazarillo* is a confluence of comic traditions—on the one hand the physical comedy of the farcical tradition and on the other the sort of emotional relationship to the reader established by the heightened degree of verisimilitude (the picaresque signals the emergence of realism in European literature). The latter is rendered more complex by the seductive rhetoric of the picaro/narrator and the appeal to the

physical demands of the body (most often intense hunger). The laughter generated by picaresque comedy is fraught with moral ambivalence. It owes a debt to the tradition of comic misanthropy (catalogued by early comic theorists such as Castelvetro and Hobbes), but it likewise pulls in the opposite direction---namely towards a level of pathetic identification that is more in tune with *agape*. The misanthropic laughter, to be sure, remains in the picaresque, and to the degree that it is recounted from the point of view of the person who more often than not is the butt of the joke and the object of scorn and debasement, there is a peculiarly masochistic quality to picaresque comedy. Yet again ambivalence is created by the likable picaro whose consciousness becomes the filter through which this content is transmitted. Which is to say that this masochistic quality is offset by rhetorical seduction and by the picaro's winning over of his audience (usually by virtue of either his inherent likability or, as in the special circumstance of Alemán's Guzmán de Alfarache, his status as a "lighthouse of human life" or Everyman figure. Picaresque comedy appeals then in some instances to the "sudden glory" described by Hobbes, the sense of exaltation brought on by laughing at a social inferior, and yet in others, genuine commiseration with the strangely likeable picaro is invited by the master rhetorician, the narrator. We are invited to emphathize on one level with Quevedo's Pablos as the son of a witch and a criminal, but we are likewise inclined to mock him from afar as he is humiliated.

Cervantes and Fielding offer comedy of a more refined sort than Quevedo (eschewing his grotesque and scatological inclinations), but they too appeal in their broader comic epics to these same contradictory impulses. As Nabokov reminds us, *Don Quixote* for one is a strikingly violent novel, and much of the laughter it incites is directly

linked to this violence.¹⁸³ We laugh at Quixote's inability to conform to the norm, and at times even at the physical torment to which he is subjected. But Cervantes' errant knight is more than a mere object of scorn, but invites a good deal of the pathetic identification characteristic of picaresque comedy. And yet as we have argued earlier, there are critical distinctions to be made between Cervantine and picaresque comedy. The principal distinction here has to do with a fundamental contrast in narrative point of view. Essential to the picaresque experience is the narrator's masochistic pleasure in recalling his own past trauma, and indeed the delicious vexation of never knowing how much of this trauma is staged for rhetorical effect and how much of it is to be taken at face value. The basis of epic comedy, on the other hand, is the notion of *mediation* (which in *Don Quixote* and elsewhere in Cervantes involves various levels of mediation), the intrusion of a narrator who disrupts the reader's intimate engagement with the protagonist and often delights in digression for digression's sake.¹⁸⁴

The epic comedy espoused by Fielding is an extension and perfection of Cervantes' innovations in *Don Quixote*. But unlike Cervantes, who contributes relatively little formal theory in the way of criticism and a "poetics" of the novel, Fielding is both theorist and practitioner.¹⁸⁵ The preface to *Joseph Andrews* is a theory of comedy in miniature, and not surprisingly, it appears in the most prominent anthologies of comic theory. The Preface is known for its bold declaration that the work that follows, a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our language." (4)¹⁸⁶ As lofty as this project is advertised, it entails the introduction of characters with "inferior Manners." (4)

There is a conscious sense of contradiction in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, an intentional intermingling of the high and the low in the elaboration of theory. The notion of a “comic Epic-Poem in Prose” is itself comic in its embrace of oxymoron. Yet as absurd as the project might sound to those dearly attached to the purity of genres, Fielding endeavors to carve out a niche for the prose experiment to follow, and he makes clear from the outset that *Joseph Andrews* is not a mere burlesque of Richardson’s *Pamela*. Burlesque, he writes, is an “Exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural.” (4) To better bring into focus how burlesque and comedy differ, Fielding draws the analogy of the painter:

Now what Caricature is in Painting, Burlesque is in Writing; and in the same manner the Comic Writer and Painter correlate to each other. And here I shall observe, that as in the former, the Painter seems to have the Advantage; so it is in the latter infinitely on the side of the Writer: for the Monstrous is much easier to paint than describe, and the Ridiculous to describe than paint. (5)

The aim of the prose experiment to follow is therefore to depict the “ridiculous” rather than the “monstrous,” adhering as it were to an implicit comic *bienséance*. The opposition between ridiculous and monstrous is for Fielding a recasting of the terms natural and unnatural. True comic writing on Fielding’s view confines itself “strictly to Nature” and its goal is “just Imitation” that will ultimately bring pleasure to the “sensible Reader.” (4) The ridiculous lends itself much more easily than the monstrous to literary representation.

Fielding’s notion of the ridiculous lies in the notion of comic incongruity. We saw earlier how significant the comedy of incongruity is for Cervantes’ comic vision. Indeed,

the shift in comic theory from Castelvetro/Hobbes to the more humane comedy of Shaftesbury, Addison, and Fielding is in many ways already anticipated by Cervantes, who likewise privileges incongruity over “sudden glory.”¹⁸⁷ For Fielding, the principal source of laughter is what he terms “Affectation,” which describes the way individuals (either in conformity to some self-image or societal expectation) distort themselves so that they are “the reverse of what they would seem to be.” (7)

What Fielding offers for much of the remainder of the preface is a riposte to Hobbes’ theory of laughter.¹⁸⁸ As we may recall, laughter for Hobbes arises from an instinct to exert control over an inferior.¹⁸⁹ Yet Fielding’s definition of the comic is not so straightforward, nor is his notion of human motives so dark. For Fielding, the degradation of a social inferior is a source of pity rather than laughter:

Now from Affectation only, the Misfortunes and Calamities of Life, or the Imperfections of Nature, may become the Objects of Ridicule. Surely he hath a very ill-framed Mind, who can look on Ugliness, Infirmary, or Poverty, as ridiculous in themselves: nor do I believe any Man living who meets a dirty Fellow riding through the Streets in a Cart, is struck with an Idea of the Ridiculous from it; but if he should see the same Figure descend from his Coach and Six, or bolt from his Chair with his Hat under his Arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with justice. (7)

The comic is not a means of exerting imaginary control; it is a rational response to radical incongruity. Suffering for suffering’s sake is never funny for Fielding. Quevedo might lampoon the poor to generate laughs in the *Buscón*, but Fielding’s express intention in *Joseph Andrews* is the perpetuation of a more benevolent comedy, a shift away from the

“sudden glory” of Hobbes towards the “good-natured” satire advocated by Addison and Steele.¹⁹⁰ Steele describes the good-natured satire of Horace and Juvenal as follows:

That good Nature was an essential Quality in a Satyrist... Good Nature produces a Disdain of all Baseness, Vice, and Folly, which prompts them to express themselves with Smartness against the Errors of Men, without bitterness towards their persons.¹⁹¹

Another way of approaching the new notion of benevolent comedy is through the anti-aristocratic element that gains momentum in Fielding.¹⁹² *Joseph Andrews*' most prominent comic technique is its juxtaposition of the high and low, but the relationship between these categories is a complex one. The “high” aristocrats in *Joseph Andrews* are caricatures, not just of analogues in Richardson's *Pamela* but of bon vivants like Bellarmine (in the interpolated tale of Leonora) or of the decadent mistress Lady Booby. The novel's three protagonists, Parson Adams, Fanny, and Joseph are not members of the leisure class. Fielding's aristocrats are flat, one-dimensional types. Lady Booby is female lust personified. Bellarmine is incapable of producing an English sentence without staining it with French. Now one could object that this same one-dimensionality applies to the main characters of *Joseph Andrews*. Adams is one-dimensional in his bookishness (he seldom misses an occasion to demonstrate his superior Classical learning). Joseph is likewise initially defined as a comic incongruity personified—namely, the chaste young male who resists temptation from all directions. Yet these characters, to the extent that they are propelled into the vortex of the novel's action, reach a multi-dimensionality not imaginable in the aristocratic caricatures.

A similar tension exists in the level of prose style. To be sure, important precedents exist in the history of comic prose fiction which operate according to an incongruity between high and low. Apuleius, though by no means writing in the high literary style of Virgil, nonetheless delivers his at times basely scatological humor in polished Latin sentences. Rabelais is less concerned with dignified prose style. His “hurricane word formations” overwhelm with verbiage, some of it recondite in allusiveness, some of it unreadable because it knows no extra-verbal analogue.¹⁹³ Yet Fielding’s prose, self-consciously inflated so as to properly correspond to the occasion of a comic epic in prose, achieves a stylistic elegance rivaled perhaps only by Cervantes.¹⁹⁴ Yet before discussing Fielding’s mock-epic style in further detail, it is worth stepping into the picaresque experiment in Book Three of *Joseph Andrews*.

A Moment of Polite Picaresque Comedy in *Joseph Andrews*

In Book III of *Joseph Andrews*, a “gentleman” named Wilson appears on the scene. Joseph, Adams, and Fanny are staying at a country inn, and while the young lovers Joseph and Fanny are too taken with each other to pay much attention to the fellow, Parson Adams is enraptured by his conversation and urges him to sit down over a glass of ale and reveal his story. What follows is one of the novel’s most substantial chapter digressions, which shifts temporarily away from the narrative scope of the self-professed “comic epic in prose” to the more limited purview of the first-person, and indeed away from the epic comedy of the novel as a whole towards something much more reminiscent of the picaresque comedy of the Spanish tradition.

Moll Flanders may be the English novel most self-consciously written in the picaresque tradition, but Wilson's tale, one-twentieth the length of that work, celebrates the comic repertoire of the picaresque that Defoe largely eschews in *Moll*. Claudio Guillén offers an eightfold definition of the picaresque, and though genre is, in Guillén's own words, only an invitation to form, Wilson's tale fulfills Guillén's criteria quite admirably.¹⁹⁵ Yet there is one significant point about the picaresque that Guillén fails to make—namely that the picaro often indulges in self-pity that at once invites pathetic identification with his plight and laughter at his baseness. He invites at once emotional identification and a sense of commiseration, but he likewise tickles the misanthropic impulses of the reader through self-debasement.

Wilson's tale has not been given its due by critics. J. Paul Hunter, for one, regards this and other interludes in *Joseph Andrews* as counterexamples to the novel's overall narrative panache, as mere examples of alternative and indeed less satisfying models of prose fiction.¹⁹⁶ Battestin sees no comedy in Wilson's tale, but rather a serious reflection on the vanity that Joseph has managed to escape with the help of good Parson Adams.¹⁹⁷ Spanish picaresque novels are obliged to recount the low circumstances of their birth, usually providing some account of their dubious parentage and a string of traumatic childhood incidents. Lazarillo reflects on the loss of his father, his mother's consorting with a Moor, and the birth of a half-brother through this socially condemned pairing. Quevedo's Pablos reveals that his mother was a witch (who later is burned in the Inquisition) and that his criminal father died at the hand of his uncle, a professional executioner. Wilson, on the other hand, reveals in the first lines of his tale his respectable origins: "So, I am descended of a good Family, and was born a Gentleman." (157) In the

Spanish picaresque, an incongruity often exists between the peculiarly advanced language of the narrator and his low origins and presumed lack of education. No such problem presents itself in Wilson's tale, as he is well versed in Latin and competent in Greek.

Whereas the Spanish picaro lives on his wits and often attempts, like Guzmán de Alfarache, to fight his way up the social ladder (ultimately to fail in this regard), Wilson's story is one of descent rather than ascent. Yet one persistent characteristic of the picaresque is constant throughout Wilson's tale—the use of self-pity. Wilson, like all picaresque narrators, is eager to bask in self-pity and recount every misfortune with curious alacrity:

And to this early Introduction into Life, without a Guide, I impute all my future Misfortunes, for besides the obvious Mischiefs which attend this, there is one which hath not been so generally observed. The first Impression which Mankind receives of you, will be very difficult to eradicate. (158)

Like Guzmán, Wilson adopts a moralizing tone in his cautionary tale. Yet *Guzmán* is a neurotic novel which at once draws itself into picaresque mischief only to suffocate mirth under the anvil of moralizing and recrimination. By contrast, the comic is an irrepressible force in Fielding, and Wilson's tale, for all of its serious moral overtones, remains quite funny.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, the dynamic of Wilson's tale is inversely related to that of *Guzmán*. Whereas the latter establishes the comic only to suppress it, Wilson's serious moral purpose is undermined by comic thrusts.¹⁹⁹

As so often in Fielding, the narrative situation disrupts events in comic fashion. But disruption here is of a different sort than in the rest of *Joseph Andrews*. The

persistently intrusive narrator of *Joseph Andrews* recedes entirely for the duration of Wilson's tale, ceding temporary control of the novel to Wilson. The intrusions here are not by narrator but by audience, in this case a one-man audience of Parson Adams. One of the more humorous instances of narrative authority undermined by listener occurs when Wilson reveals the content of his journal.

Went to the Auction; told Lady-----she had a dirty Face; laughed heartily at something Captain-----said; I can't remember what, for I did not very well hear it; whispered Lord-----; bowed to the Duke of -----; and was going to bid for a Snuff-box; but did not, for fear I should have had it.

From 2 to 4, drest myself A Groan.

4 to 6, dined. A Groan

6 to 8, Coffee-house.

8 to 9, Drury-Lane Play-house.

9 to 10, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.

10 to 12, Drawing-Room. A great Groan. (159)

Remarkable here is the fact that this journal is not a direct excerpt but rather Wilson's own account of the original. Wilson prefaces this supposed journal entry with the words "I will endeavor to repeat it to you." (159) The form above is therefore an illusion of authenticity, a moment of narrative intrusion even during a brief instant in which the novel's pushy "epic" narrator has temporarily ceded control of the stage to Wilson. The ridiculous content of the journal undermines the supposed serious moralizing purpose of Wilson's tale. Wilson is guilty of affectation of the most blatant sort, which the preface to the novel declares the purest source of the ridiculous. Yet the comic presented in this

excerpt is of a multi-pronged variety. It encompasses in the first line the bluntness of the comic protagonist, who like the medieval fool flouts the conventions of politeness and respect. And yet the same individual capable of insulting a lady to her face in public laughs obsequiously at a joke that he did not even hear. Wilson is therefore defined by contradiction. He is at once an anti-social boor and an obsequious lackey, an aspiring aristocrat and a low-down picaro, a man who places tremendous emphasis on outward affectation and who inwardly is rotten. Of course, equally funny here is Adams' groaning to each hammer blow of detail. Wilson's vanity is a source of consternation for Adams; his interest in the theater, no doubt wholly superficial, evidently is not.

Picaresque detail infects Wilson's tale when he discusses his relations to the opposite sex. The picaresque, with few exceptions such as López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina* and Grimmelshausen's *Courasche*, largely marginalizes the female presence. Women are hardly present in two of the foundational picaresque novels, *Lazarillo* and the *Buscón*, and the other "canonical" picaresque novel, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, appears to associate the feminine with the comic principle that text systematically suppresses. In the case of Wilson's tale, the picaro's descent into moral turpitude is largely brought about by the very vices which are most often decried in Alemán's novel—excessive leisure and concupiscence. To those, Fielding would of course add affectation, and it is the conflict between Wilson's lascivious inclinations and his equally strong desire to enjoy the life of an aristocratic bon vivant that brings about his misery. Adams' reaction is harsh indeed, "Sir, this is below the Life of an Animal, hardly above Vegetation: and I am surprized what could lead a Man of your Sense into it." (160) Adams' intrusion into Wilson's would-be monologue represents a comic counterpart to the otherwise serious moral

overtones of the narrative and to Wilson's moral recriminations. On this count, it is interesting to recall once more the example of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. Whereas both the *Lazarillo* and *Buscón* reflect on the picaresque's past mischief with curious alacrity and a general lack of personal culpability (other figures in the picaresque's life get the lion's share of the blame), *Guzmán* is a thousand-page adventure in self-castigation. It is as if the narrator wanders back through his life's journey flagellating himself for every misdeed. In the case of Wilson's tale, much of the opprobrium comes not from the narrator, but from Adams, but Adams is not the frightening conscience of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, but an amiable, albeit pedantic fellow who makes his remarks to Wilson in a cozy setting.

Bawdiness is a continual source of comedy in Fielding—much more than in his picaresque predecessors. Indeed, the Spanish picaresque derives a great deal of its humor from physical comedy, but very seldom does this physical humor involve sexual detail. Whereas *Joseph Andrews* is rich in sexual innuendo, and *Tom Jones* even more so, Wilson's tale is unique in linking bawdiness to aesthetic dilettantism:

Here I met with smart Fellows who drank with Lords they did not know, and intrigued with Women they never saw. Covent-Garden was now the farthest Stretch of my Ambition, where I shone forth in the Balconies at the Play-houses, visited Whores, made Love to Orange-Wenches, and damned Plays. This Career was soon put a stop to by my Surgeon, who convinced me of the Necessity of confining myself to my Room for a Month. (160-1)

Fielding is of course using Wilson to parody the shallowness and critical ineptitude of many theatergoers and critics of the day. The corruption here is not simply moral.

Venereal diseases were often treated through a month's sequestration in one's room, and while naïve Adams fails to make an immediate connection between Wilson's solitary confinement and the sordid state of his reproductive apparatus, and Wilson smiles at Adams' "Simplicity" and steers the conversation away from the "odious Subject." (161) The reader is therefore privy to an understanding of Wilson's predicament that transcends the simple understanding of Adams, and in this regard, Iser is correct in asserting that such moments allow for a sense of superiority to emerge over Adams in the novel (despite his likability).²⁰⁰

Yet the woes don't stop there for Wilson. He becomes involved with the wrong sort of lady and, by his own account, is led further down the path to perdition. Things start off auspiciously between the two, but soon, she begins playing cards with other ladies to fill the empty hours, and before long, Wilson has a real problem on his hands:

She affected the Company of Rakes, gave herself all manner of airs, was never easy but abroad, or when she had a Party at my Chambers. She was rapacious of Money, extravagant to Excess, loose in her Conversation; and if ever I demurred to any of her Demands, Oaths, Tears, and Fits, were the immediate Consequences. (162)

Significant here is the shift in narrative style. The "comic epic" narrator would never indulge in such an extended condemnation of character. There is a perpetual charity in Fielding's voice that would scarcely permit such harshness. But Wilson, speaking now as a reformed picaro (like most of his Spanish counterparts), has not lost any of his bitterness. Yet the stylistic shift here is not merely one of tone. The parataxis of this passage can be set in opposition to the hypotaxis of much of the rest of the novel. Indeed,

this passage resembles, both in syntax and theme, several important moments in *Guzmán de Alfarache*. The influence of *Guzmán* is not merely a matter of prose style, however. As mentioned above, Alemán's novel goes beyond other Spanish picaresque texts in its portrayal of women, but this portrayal is highly critical. Women in Alemán's novel are condemned in the same way that Plato rejected poetry—namely for arousing the passions and distracting the male subject from serene contemplation of the good (which of course for Alemán is Christian spiritual *ataraxia*). Wilson was, by his own account and before his later marriage to the demure Saphira, as virulent a misogynist as any Spanish picaro:

I now forswore all future Dealings with the Sex, complained loudly that the Pleasure did not compensate the Pain, and railed at the beautiful Creatures in as gross Language as Juvenal himself formerly reviled them in. I looked on all the Town-Harlots with a Detestation not easy to be conceived, their Persons appeared to me as painted Palaces inhabited by Disease and Death: Nor could their Beauty make them more desirable Objects in my Eyes, than Gilding could make me covet a Pill, or golden Plates a Coffin. (163)

Wilson's eloquence here stands in stark contrast to his simple-minded repudiation of the feminine, but this eloquence is too stylized to be the oral account it purports to be. A persistent problem in Fielding, and perhaps of all pre-modern "homophonic" novels, is the failure to account for shift in stylistics between literary narration and dialogue.²⁰¹

Wilson may possess a sound Classical education, but he could not seriously be expected to attain the same degree of epic grandeur in his exposition as the novel's narrator. Yet the richness of this description, its carefully balanced syntax and its closing metaphors of the gilded pill or the golden coffin, never approach the spontaneous quality of spoken

language. The problem is not unique to Wilson's tale or to Fielding. There are other interpolated tales in *Joseph Andrews*, as well as in a host of other novelistic predecessors (*Guzmán* and *Quixote* prominent among them), and there too a similar disconnect is present.

The picaresque itinerary, if charted on a graph, would seldom represent smooth lines or continuity. A more appropriate graphic representation would be the pathological uneasiness of a financial market. Wilson's tale is no different in this regard. Having disavowed the company of women for the time being, he consorts with obstreperous fellows in taverns:

I fell into the Acquaintance of a Set of jolly Companions, who slept all Day and drank all Night: Fellows who might rather be said to consume Time than to live. Their best Conversation was nothing but Noise: Singing, Hollowing, Wrangling, Drinking, Toasting, Sp—wing, Smoking, were the chief Ingredients of our Entertainment. (165)

Wilson's male companions are great flouters of Weber's exalted Protestant work ethic, and like *Rinconete* and *Cortadillo* in Cervantes' eponymous novella, they establish a network that defines itself in opposition to accepted social norms, based not on the high aristocratic mannerisms lampooned throughout much of *Joseph Andrews*, but rather the pillars of picaro existence—free time and repudiation of genteel society.

Yet there is an important divergence that occurs in Wilson's picaresque itinerary. Whereas all picaros are *ipso facto* author figures, few (particularly in the Spanish tradition) define themselves primarily as such.²⁰² In other words, surprisingly little attention is drawn to their status as authors, and the bulk of their personal narrative is

devoted to descriptions of picaresque mischief rather than reflections on their literary ambitions. Wilson is different in this regard, for having drawn himself into the doldrums of despair, he sees hope in a literary career:

My Clothes grew shabby, my Credit bad, my Friends and Acquaintance of all kinds cold. In this Situation the strangest Thought imaginable came into my Head: and what was this, but to write a Play? For I had sufficient Leisure; Fear of Bailiffs confined me every day to my Room. (168)

Fielding is drawing here less on Spanish picaresque models than on the French innovation to the picaresque—namely the depiction of the *poète crotté*. The finest example of an intersection of picaresque poverty and self-pity and poetic ambition occurs in Furetière's poison-penned satire *Le Roman Bourgeois* (1666), which in its second part is a kind of literary assassination of Charles Sorel (presented as the picaro-poet Charroselles) Furetière even goes so far as to include in his anti-novel a bookseller's chart listing the prices for "*pauvres auteurs*," designating amounts of money awarded to each compliance with specific novelistic conventions such as a country house or haunted palace.²⁰³ Here as before, leisure is the impetus to picaresque mischief, but this mischief is of the literary rather than the conventional sort. Before, the social misfit was simply morally depraved; now he is an author, a street urchin on Grub Street.²⁰⁴ Before, Wilson had recounted his curious habit of blending sexual mischief and aesthetic experience, frequenting prostitutes and plays on the same night, but he was then a mere passive consumer of culture, not its producer. Very much like Furetière had done in his scathing satirical novel, Fielding draws the author figure into the sordid realm of the picaro. The picaro's livelihood is based on deception (*engaño*), which Fielding recasts as affectation,

and authorship, particularly when partaken by those rich in ambition but lacking in talent, is an egregious instance of such affectation. Yet the author's lowly status is rendered especially ridiculous in Fielding, for it is not merely a matter of a hardly heroic struggle to fill one's coffers, but a grave health concern. Wilson manages to obtain, like so many eighteenth-century authors, a subscription for his works, which pays according to output rather than quality. Having thrown himself entirely into the task, he reports the following:

I had no longer reason to lament the want of Business; for he furnished me with so much, that in half a Year I almost writ myself blind. I likewise contracted a Distemper by my sedentary Life, in which no part of my Body was exercised but my right Arm, which rendered me incapable of writing for a long time. (170)

Wilson becomes a servant of many masters. At the onset of his tale, he is the epitome of aristocratic decadence, at once lewd in his dealings with prostitutes and shallow in his attitude to society and high culture. His sexual mischief and the physical harm that arises from it demotes him on society's ladder, making a bitter misogynist of him and luring him into the lairs of carousing boors. Soon thereafter, Fortuna lifts Wilson up with the promise of a literary career, only to toss him back callously into picaresque self-pity: "I had now neither Health (for I was scarce recovered from my Indisposition) Liberty, Money, or Friends; and had abandoned all Hopes, and even the Desire of Life." (170)

The Spanish picaresque, for all of its comic shenanigans, is notoriously bleak in its outlook. True, the prototype for all later picaros, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, manages to rise from the ranks of the poor and enjoy some sense of social respectability at the end of his tale, but this respectability is largely tainted by his status as cuckold. Guzmán writes from the gallows and with a sour expression on his face concerning all matters worldly, and

Pablos in the *Buscón* ends up fleeing to the New World to escape rigidly hierarchical Spain, where climbing the social ladder is a Sisyphean task.²⁰⁵ Yet Fielding is not as dire a spirit, and just as *Joseph Andrews* as a whole concludes, in traditional comic fashion, in celebratory tone, so does Wilson's tale find comic resolution. The *deus ex machina* in this case is a lottery ticket that Wilson had infelicitously discarded before hearing that he had indeed possessed the winning numbers.

Fielding's Epic Comedy

Now that we have given due attention to Fielding's particular contribution to picaresque comedy in *Joseph Andrews*, we can now highlight the critical difference between this and the larger epic comedy practiced by Fielding in *Joseph Andrews* and indeed later in *Tom Jones*. If picaresque comedy is generated by the complicated relationship between picaresque narrator and reader, epic comedy's characteristic narrative feature is the persistent intrusion of the narrator and indeed the constant establishment of emotional distance between protagonist and audience. The practice of narratorial intrusion is not new.²⁰⁶ Fielding's intrusions, unlike Alemán's digressions in *Guzmán*, augment rather than suppress the comic dynamism of his novel. Remarkable in the case of Fielding is that such an overbearing narrative presence emerges from a writer who had earned his living in the theater, the one domain of literature where the author is most likely to recede from the work and cede control to characters (and eventually to actors and directors). Fielding's depiction of action, particularly his uproarious brawl scenes, owe a great deal to his experience in the theater, but his brilliance resides in his

ability to intrude as narrator into an otherwise seductive dramatic image and disrupt things even more.²⁰⁷

To appreciate the narrator's disruption of dramatic scene and injection of comical or ironic commentary (the hallmark of epic comedy), it is worth quoting at length one of the great comic passages in *Joseph Andrews* and indeed in all of Fielding.²⁰⁸ Here, a would-be catastrophe (the rape of Fanny at the hands of a bandit) is subverted both by the dual comic force of Adams (the quixotic would-be hero) and the intrusive omniscient narrator:

The Shrieks now encreasing, Adams made no Answer, but snapt his Fingers, and brandishing his Crabstick, made directly to the Place whence the Voice issued; and the Man of Courage made as much Expedition towards his own Home, whither he escaped in a very short time without once looking behind him: where we will leave him, to contemplate his own Bravery, and to censure the want of it in others; and return to the good Adams, who, on coming up to the Place whence the Noise proceeded, found a Woman struggling with a Man, who had thrown her on the Ground, and had almost overpowered her...He did not therefore want the Entreaties of the poor Wretch to assist her, but lifting up his Crabstick, he immediately levelled a Blow at that Part of the Ravisher's Head, where, according to the Opinion of the Ancients, the Brains of some Persons are deposited, and which he had undoubtedly let forth, had not Nature, (who, as wise Men have observed, equips all Creatures with what is most expedient for them;) taken a provident Care, (as she always doth with those she intends for Encounters) to make this part of the Head three times as thick as those of ordinary Men, who are

designed to exercise Talents which are vulgarly called rational, and for whom, as Brains are necessary, she is obliged to leave some room for them in the Cavity of the Skull: whereas, those Ingredients being entirely useless to Persons of the heroic Calling, she hath an Opportunity of thickening the Bone, so as to make it less subject to any Impression or liable to be cracked or broken; and indeed, in some who are predestined to the Command of Armies and Empires, she is supposed sometimes to make that Part perfectly solid. (107-08)

What makes this scene succeed is the effortless manner in which comic strands are woven together. The false affectation of the “man of courage” who flees the scene, the quixotic heroism of the painfully clumsy Adams, the transformation of potential dramatic tension into a ludicrous brawl that defuses emotional tension, the clever aside on the thickness of the ravisher’s skull, usurping of theatrical scene by the digressive narrator—all converge at this moment. The matter treated here is potentially of a dire sort—namely the rape of Fanny. And indeed, a modicum of dramatic tension is created by this context. And yet no effort is spent on describing the rape from Fanny’s point of view, her fear or physical pain are a non-issue, and hence no basis for emotional identification is set down.²⁰⁹ Instead, there are two moments of intervention: one by Adams and another by the narrator. The first is dramatic, the second anti-dramatic/digressive, and it is this second moment that gains the upper-hand. Often in Fielding’s epic comedy, prolixity is celebrated for its own sake, and the narrator flaunts his power over the scene.²¹⁰ Hunter captures quite well the effect of such intrusions on the solitary reader:

Fielding refuses to allow us solitude for our confrontation with fictional worlds, as if he did not trust us on our own, either to understand or to respond

appropriately. What Thackeray said of Sterne—‘He is always looking in my face, watching his effect’ applies equally well to Fielding, for he also goes out of his way to make us nervous, repeatedly characterizing us as ‘sagacious,’ ‘virtuous,’ ‘grave,’ or ‘curious,’ accusing us of particular responses and conclusions and helping us revise our reactions.²¹¹

To be sure, a great deal has been made of the supposed moral benefit of Fielding’s good-natured comedy (I have argued earlier the effort to redefine the comic against the misanthropic definition of Hobbes), but such asides, if anything, poke fun at overt moralizing in prose fiction and at the notion that readers allow themselves to be pushed about so easily by an author. In other words, the digression is a moment of self-debasement. Rather than prodding the reader to evaluate his role in society, they poke fun at his very emotional involvement in fiction. In the midst of the digression on the thickness of skulls here, we still smile at good-natured Adams and of course place emotional stakes in his brawl with the ravisher (which regrettably does not turn out altogether well for him).

One further point of contrast between epic and picaresque comedy still needs to be spelled out. The discussion up to this point has dwelt largely on mediation, or more specifically in the role of the narrator and the manner in which we are invited to experience distance from or propinquity to a character. The epic mode espoused by Cervantes and Fielding privileges the potentialities of the third-person observer of comic happenstance. But what is to be said of the digressive qualities of the first-person picaro? Although Lazarillo seldom digresses (indeed, he confounds less through digression than through his enigmatic elisions), Guzmán is a compulsive digresser, and his browbeating

of the reader is in many ways akin to the process described above by Hunter by which Fielding regulates (in excess perhaps) the reader's experience engagement with the text.²¹² In both Alemán and Fielding, the digression functions to transfer narrative energy from the present "theatrical" moment to a plane that often exists outside of the temporal framework of the novel (in the picaresque is only an illusion of theatrical "presence," the narrative action by definition being situated distantly in the past). But whereas Alemán's digressions disrupt the comic flow of his narrative (accounting for Guzmán's internal contradictions), Fielding's epic comedy, like that of Cervantes, engages in digression to augment the comic force of the narrative, to supplement theatrical slapstick with long-winded narratorial intrusions showcasing mock erudition and hyperactive reason. By considering Smollett's *Roderick Random*, a novel that follows *Joseph Andrews* by less than a decade, the critical differences between epic and picaresque comedy will become clearer still.

Smollett's *Roderick Random*

Smollett stands alongside Lesage as one of the great apostles of the Spanish picaresque outside of the Iberian Peninsula.²¹³ Smollett illustrates the contagious quality of picaresque writing, what Bauer describes in terms of a transition from an aesthetic of reception to one of production.²¹⁴ Like Lesage, who had translated Spanish classics into French and indeed provided his own creative reworking of that material in his own novels, Smollett translated *Gil Blas* and wrote three novels that firmly establish his reputation as the greatest British contributor to the picaresque tradition—*Roderick Random*, *Peregrine*

Pickle, and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*. The first of these three novels is of most interest to our purposes, for here the connections to picaresque comedy are by far the strongest.

Roderick emerges nearly two centuries after *Lazarillo* and a good 150 years after Mabbe's translation of *Guzmán de Alfarache*. The *Adventures of Roderick Random* draws on both Lesage and Cervantes, which is to say that it draws on the picaresque and the comic epic. In Fielding, we saw how the picaresque style is employed innovatively in an interlude within the larger framework of an epic comedy. Although Fielding plays in that substantial picaresque interlude with the techniques of picaresque comedy, he ultimately rejects, like Cervantes before him, the picaresque's limited perspective in order to adopt the multi-perspectival quality of the comic epic (or in the terms of Walter Reed, he favors the Quixotic mode over the picaresque mode).

Smollett composed novels in a variety of modes. After *Roderick Random*, he wrote two other novels with prominent picaresque features (*Peregrine Pickle* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*). Also noteworthy is the marvelous satirical tale *The Adventures of an Atom*, which traces the peregrinations of an atom across a variety of cultural landscapes. Of these works, *Roderick* is most inspired by the Spanish picaresque, and *Roderick* likewise serves as the best point of contrast to Fielding. A significant trait in Smollett separating him from Fielding (and indeed from the lion's share of both French and English eighteenth century authors) is his lack of genteel manners. There is a rough-hewn quality to Smollett's themes and characters, and as in the case of writers like Úbeda and Quevedo, a significant divide is present between the apparent elegance of expression and the crudeness of that being expressed. Robert Alter describes Smollett's penchant for depicting low happenings quite aptly:

And there is every indication that Smollett's portrayal—like Hogarth's—of physical as well as moral sordidness, was in large part the representation of a very real side of life in eighteenth-century England which was often neglected by the more genteel forms of literature. The poised rhythms of the heroic couplets—interrupted only occasionally by the rougher cadences of a Swift—may tend to make one forget the most unheroic belly noises of the lower orders of English society in the age of neoclassicism. But the picaroon's business in life is to wander up and down all the social strata, hearing all sounds, seeing all sights, smelling all odors.²¹⁵

The picaresque appeals to brute sensual realities. In *Lazarillo*, the tyranny of the belly drives the narrative forward. In *Guzmán*, although the world of sensory phenomena is ultimately denigrated as illusory, the novel recounts in striking detail the excesses and torments of the body, the violence of the digestive system and the demands of the loins. Quevedo's novel overwhelms with crudeness and scatological baseness, but it likewise dazzles with eloquence and punning. We have shown repeatedly in this study how the picaresque discards any notion of organic unity, celebrating instead the tyranny of happenstance. What we witness in *Roderick Random* is a gradual degeneration of comic energy and indeed of the picaresque form (or rather picaresque formlessness). We saw a similar decline after the first three *tractados* in the *Lazarillo*, but in that earlier case the text itself collapses into itself, only to resurrect itself in the final section. In Smollett, a perpetual redefinition occurs, a civilizing of its own base instincts. In order to understand better the contradictions running through Smollett's novel, it is first worth revisiting the polemics concerning the nature and effect of comedy in early eighteenth-century England.

The Problem of Comedy in Eighteenth-Century Britain

The comic resists easy categorization, and critics who aim to pin down its essence must first account for the overwhelming multiplicity of its forms. Studies have been done on entire national literatures, attempting to grasp the “comic spirit” of a particular culture. Murray Roston’s recent work on comedy in English literature is one such example.²¹⁶ Another is that of Anthony Close, who as we saw earlier attempts to pin down the comic sensibility of the Spanish Golden Age.²¹⁷ He makes a compelling case in his book on Cervantes’ comic artistry for an understanding of the evolution of comedy according to the same sort of sociogenetic processes that Norbert Elias attributes to table manners. Close’s analogy could be used to explain the stark difference in comic aesthetic separating say Renaissance France or Golden Age Spain from Eighteenth-century Britain. In the Renaissance, as Daniel Ménager quite convincingly argues in his book on the role of laughter in Renaissance France, the comic was above all seen in terms of its bodily effects.²¹⁸ Rabelais’s preface to the *Quart Livre* for example is fraught with medical terminology, and laughter is envisioned as a cure for bodily ills. Furthermore, a broader shift takes place in the theories of comedy from the hard-nosed notions of Castelvetro (who reminds us that comedy is a result of our fallen condition) and Hobbes (who advocates an understanding of the comic as an expression of superiority over the Other) to the more compassionate comic theories of Addison and Fielding. Addison embodies the Enlightenment’s appeal to a higher form of aesthetic laughter that reflects rational rather than animalistic impulses, and he opens the *Spectator* 35 (1711) with a quote from Catullus: “Risū inepto res ineptior nulla est,” [Nothing is as foolish as the laughter of a

fool.] He goes on to rail against those who venture into the domain of the comic without against “false humorists” and declares “one of my principal designs in this paper is to beat down that malignant spirit which discovers itself in the writings of the present age.” Ronald Paulson puts it quite well in saying that “through the eighteenth century the history of comic theory is the history of one attempt after another to refute Hobbes.”²¹⁹ Smollett’s novel finds itself in the trenches of this polemic, seemingly unsure of which cause to support.

Were it not for a writer as eclectic as Smollett, the neat paradigm sketched above could stand firmly. Smollett is above all a problem for theorists of the comic, the picaresque, or the novel. Smollett’s prose resists categorization, weaving between styles high and low and modes merry and solemn. At times, he maintains the ironic distance of the comic epic narrator (indeed, a few early critics were convinced that *Roderick Random* had been authored by Fielding). At other times, the comic self-pity of the picaresque narrator undermine the epic distance and establish an emotional intimacy between narrator and reader. We saw earlier in the chapter how in Fielding the epic narrator inserts important emotional distance between protagonist and reader. Fielding’s laughter may be compassionate laughter, but it does not partake of the dual-charged laughter of picaresque comedy.

The heterogeneous composition of *Roderick Random* is not altogether surprising when one considers the curious amalgamation of influences that informed Smollett’s novelistic style.²²⁰ Smollett was a translator of Cervantes and Lesage, and he seems to strike a balance between the epic distance of the former and the picaresque propinquity of the latter. Far from being an organic unity, *Roderick Random* is a hodgepodge of

novelistic modes. Its greatest picaresque energy runs through the initial two hundred pages, and these will be our main focus here.

On Smollett's Picaresque Instincts

Smollett's novel opens in tribute to the picaresque. Birth is never a straightforward undertaking in picaresque, fraught with ignominy or obscure circumstances. From the outset, the first-person narrator takes great pains to delineate a childhood fraught with hardship. There is considerable narrative energy here, and past trauma and distress are conjured with a curiously masochistic gusto. As elsewhere in the tradition, these initial chapters function on comic and rhetorical levels, and hence draw the audience in two different emotional directions at once. The comic element is most notable in the stylized self-pity and the depiction of base circumstances. The laughter induced by this process establishes a divide between the laughing subject (the reader) and the plaything of fortune (the picaro) who is the butt of the hard-edged humor. But what separates picaresque comedy from its cousins is the participation in the narrator in his comic self-immolation. And yet the self-immolation, the picaro's basking in self-pity and his masochistic description of failure and degradation, serves a separate rhetorical purpose, namely to establish a rational basis for a failed life trajectory and to elicit a measure of pity.

The prologue to *Roderick* demonstrates a great sensitivity to the gray area which picaresque comedy occupies:

The same method has been practiced by other Spanish and French authors, and by none more successfully than by Monsieur Le Sage, who in his adventures of Gil

Blas, has described the knavery and foibles of life, with infinite humor and sagacity...The disgraces of Gil Blas, are for the most part, such as rather excite mirth than compassion; he himself laughs at them; and his transitions from distress to happiness, or at least ease, are so sudden, that neither the reader has time to pity him, nor himself to be acquainted with affliction. (xlv)²²¹

Picaresque comedy skirts the boundary between dire reflection on human poverty, failure, and humiliation and the elation that occurs through temporary transcendence of these “foibles of life.” Curious here is Smollett’s emphasis on disgraces arousing mirth (and by extension, emotional distance) rather than compassion (emotional propinquity). Gil’s own sense of self-irony becomes an invitation for the reader to laugh along in serene emotional distance.

The important thing to emphasize here, at least with regard to the theory of picaresque laughter proposed in the Preface, is that it reflects the polite, genteel laughter of Addison and Fielding far more than the misanthropic laughter of Quevedo, Hobbes, and Castelvetro. We already discussed in the Fielding section above the shift in theoretical orientation from the caustic, misanthropic notions of laughter before towards laughter as an agent of social cohesion and self-betterment is part of a larger civilizing process with regard to comic norms that occurred in the Enlightenment, involving the appeal to human compassion rather than Schadenfreude and a deliberate effort to purge comedy of its preoccupation with bodily functions and malfunctions. Rather than being governed by the caprices of the digestive system, comedy was now (in theory at least) a matter pertaining to higher rational functions and in particular an awareness of the

incongruity of our personal vanity and actual place in society. The comic muse was no longer the mischievous street urchin of Seville or Toledo but Little Lord Fauntleroy.

But things are never so simple in picaresque, and as we have seen throughout the study, prologues are more often than not invitations to break prescription. Theory and practice are reluctant company, particularly in a writer as eclectic as Smollett. Indeed, the prologue's maxims are flouted throughout the novel, and even in the early chapters of *Roderick Random*, the genteel humor advocated just pages before is tossed aside.

As in the case of *Lazarillo* and *Courasche* a consistent comic and rhetorical strategy of the pizaro is an effusive self-pity. Yet among the texts considered in this study, the degree to which this picaresque self-pity is comically or rhetorically slanted is highly variable. On the other end of the spectrum from those pizaros are Guzmán and Moll Flanders, both of whom indulge in healthy measures of self-pity, but without any expressly comic or satirical intent. What makes *Lazarillo* and *Grimmelshausen's* pizaros fascinating is the degree to which they strike a balance between indulging in physical humor and at the same time evoking scenes of genuine social and historical pathos (in *Lazarillo's* case the intense description of hunger and deprivation, in *Grimmelshausen* the ravages of the Thirty Years' War). The heightened degree of novelistic verisimilitude separating *Lazarillo* and *Grimmelshausen* from the likes of Rabelais and Apuleius makes the self-representation of suffering more powerful on an emotional level and the form of comedy in those works a more complex affair. That is to say, the sixteenth-century Spanish reader of *Lazarillo* paying witness to rampant poverty and hunger on the streets of cities like Toledo or Salamanca, or the veteran of the Thirty Years' War in Germany connects to the depictions of trauma in those picaresque novels in a fundamentally

different way than the reader of Apuleius or Rabelais. There is, in other words, a heightened degree of emotional/pathetic investment in the characters, and this investment implies the establishment of a constant tug of war between two contrary emotional impulses.

A signal feature of picaresque writing is a preoccupation with establishing a link between childhood trauma and humiliation and a later life gone awry. *Roderick Random* begins in precisely this fashion, but the novel ends on a much brighter note than any of its Spanish predecessors (more on this end in a moment). Whereas the novel of chivalry begins with an elaborate genealogy to establish the credibility of its hero, the picaresque novel typically opens with a problematic genealogy. In Smollett's case, we have a comical metaphor that encapsulates the curious life trajectory of Roderick. The anecdote that opens *Roderick Random* is that of his mother, a housekeeper in the service of Roderick's wealthy grandfather, who had been so distraught from pregnancy that she had consulted a fortune teller.

She dreamed, she was delivered of a tennis-ball, which the devil (who to her great surprise, acted the part of a midwife) struck so forcibly with a racket, that it disappeared in an instant; and she was for some time inconsolable for the loss of her off-spring; when all of a sudden, she beheld it return with equal violence, and earth itself beneath her feet, whence immediately sprung up a goodly tree covered with blossoms, the scent of which operated so strongly upon her nerves that she awoke. (1)

The whimsical trajectory of Roderick's great picaresque adventure is here encapsulated. Nevertheless, the providence associated with Fielding's comic epics is no real concern

for the picaresque apostle Smollett. James Beattie, a fellow Scotsman, criticized Smollett on the grounds that “it does not appear that he knew how to contrive a regular fable, by making his events mutually dependent and all co-operating to one and the same final purpose.”²²² *Roderick Random* is a string of unconnected episodes tied together through the device of a main character (Shklovsky, we may recall, made this same argument about *Don Quixote*).²²³ The novel’s main claim to anything like unity is the fact that the episodes are linked together by the constant presence of the narrating picaro. There is greater diversity in thematic content and novelistic composition in *Roderick* than in any text discussed in this study. If the opening half is rightly picaresque, then substantial parts of the novel’s second half can be described in terms of novels of adventure and sentimentality.

Critics of Smollett and of the picaresque more broadly emphasize the heightened degree of verisimilitude achieved. Indeed, it is this heightened degree of verisimilitude that makes possible the ambivalence of picaresque comedy, the emotional tug-of-war between pathetic identification with a real and likeable protagonist (not Aristophanes’ stage hooligan, Apuleius’ donkey or Rabelais’ impossibly verbose Panurge). When compared to pastoral romances or novels of chivalry, the picaresque certainly approaches what we may cautiously term “realism.” The fascinating aspect of picaresque comedy is the way this new realism converges with the comic archetypes of older, more fantastical forms of comedy. One of the problems in Smollett and in picaresque comedy more broadly is that the heightened degree of verisimilitude and logical consistency of the narrated material adds an emotional heft to the childhood trauma depicted, and that this

emotional heft runs counter to the distance established through laughter at the slapstick scenes. The chapter heading for chapter two is a fine example of this inflated rhetoric:

I grow up—am hated by my relations—sent to school—neglected by my grandfather—maltreated by my master—seasoned to adversity—form cabals against the pedant—debarred access to my grandfather—hunted by his heir—demolish the teeth of his tutor. (4)

There is naturally nothing comical about these statements until the end, where the notion of “demolishing” teeth of a tutor provides a punch line. But the comic inclinations of this early part of the novel eschew in large measure the polite laughter of Addison and Fielding. Smollett reverses the power dynamic between pedantic tutor and recalcitrant pupil in most extravagant fashion. But more still, a connection to the brute physical comedy of the Spanish picaresque is here forged in the very first pages of the novel. Consider for instance a grim detail recounted on the novel’s second page:

On pretence that I had wrote impertinent letters to my grandfather, he caused a board to be made with five holes in it, through which he thrust the fingers and thumb of my right hand, and fastened it by whip-cord to my wrist, in such a manner, that I was effectually debarr’d the use of my pen. (5)

Bauer’s idea of picaresque authorship as stigma management of past trauma seems particularly relevant here, but just as germane is the idea of revenge through writing (which plays a significant role in Lazarillo’s literary vendetta of sorts against his masters). The impertinent scribbling of Roderick the boy here gives way to a full-scale indictment of his world.

And yet there is another way of understanding the picaresque preoccupation with early trauma. It can be argued that the infusion of comic detail into these early instances of partake more of masochism than catharsis. And *Roderick Random* is rich in such scenes. When Roderick and his Sancho Panza-like companion Strap venture into London, we get the following exclamation from a man in their company:

God send us well out of this place [London], we have not been in London eight and forty hours, and I believe we have met with eight and forty thousand misfortunes. –We have been jeered, reproached, buffeted, pissed upon, and at last stript of our money; and I suppose by and by we shall be stript of our skins. (72)

Such is the paradigmatic picaresque situation—the naïve youth set free from an unhappy situation at home and wandering into an unfamiliar and hostile urban landscape where he is exploited by new masters. But what makes this depiction of misfortune comical rather than pathetic is the use of picaresque comic hyperbole, indeed the narrator’s curiously masochistic delight in recounting this supposed humiliation. A bit further on in the novel, another similar effusion is injected:

Thus I found myself, by the iniquity of mankind, in a much more deplorable condition than ever...at present my good name was lost, my money gone, my friends were alienated, my body infected by a distemper contracted in the course of an amour. (114)

In *Joseph Andrews*, Wilson indulges in a similar bewailing of his fate (in his case, he contracts the “French sickness” [syphilis] and is sequestered in his room for a month), but Wilson’s tale is a mere picaresque interlude within the larger framework of a comic epic. Roderick repeatedly takes great pains to remind his reading audience of how the “iniquity

of mankind” has wrought damage to his body and mind. Like Wilson, Roderick sheds light on the fact that he had at one point contracted a venereal disease, and as Boucé points out, Roderick is perhaps the only protagonist in English literature with such an ailment.²²⁴

As in Fielding, Smollett derives a great deal of his humor from the incongruity of melodrama and mischief. A common target for Smollett and Fielding are the maudlin elements of Richardson and other sentimental novelists. Yet the examples above illustrate that it would be a mistake to describe Smollett’s comic artistry solely in terms of the benevolent humor advocated by Addison and others. *Roderick Random* quite often crosses the boundary from merry recollection of a life of mischief to a genuinely acerbic satire of certain character types. Indeed, caricatures are a prominent feature in Smollett’s comic scenes, and one early example of this is the depiction of the surgeon Lancelot Crab:

This member of the faculty was aged fifty, about five foot high, and ten round the belly; his face was capacious as a full moon, and much of the complexion of a mulberry: his nose resembling a powder-horn, was swelled to an enormous size, and studded all over with carbuncles; and his little grey eyes reflected the rays in such an oblique manner, that while he looked a person full in the face, one would have imagined he was admiring the buckle of his shoe. (26)

Such a description could just have easily come from Dickens, and clearly Dickens drew great inspiration from Smollett in his extravagant caricatures (indeed, David Copperfield refers explicitly to Smollett’s novels, and Smollett coins in Chapter 50 of *Roderick* the phrase “Great Expectations”). In the context of a first-person picaresque narrative, such descriptions tell us as much about the character of the narrator as they do about the

deformed object of narration. Roderick demonstrates in the novel a naïve streak analogous to that of *Joseph Andrews*, but in this description, he assumes a caustic quality not present in Fielding's protagonist. We later learn that Roderick's resentment of Crab can be traced to a personal slight: "One day, when he honored me with the names of ignorant whelp and lazy ragamuffin—I boldly replied, I was neither ignorant nor lazy, since I both understood, and performed my business as well as he could do for his soul: neither was it just to call me ragamuffin, for I had a whole coat on my back, and was descended from a better family than any he could boast an alliance with." (28) The scruffy self-righteousness here is very much characteristic of Roderick's tone throughout the novel. Earlier in the novel, he relates that he responds to another boy's insult to his poverty in the most extreme of ways, using the same device that his tutor had attached to his hand to prevent him from writing as a weapon: "I was so incensed at this ungenerous reproach, that with one stroke of my machine, I cut him to the skull, to the great terror of myself and school-fellows, who left him bleeding on the ground." (6) Like other picaresque narrators before him, Roderick writes with a chip on his shoulder. The aim of the text is to convince readers of his bourgeois respectability and his status as a victim of society's depravity. Some picaros (most notably Pablos) make laughter out of their own iniquity and unabashedly align themselves with the dregs of society; others, like Lazarillo and Roderick, self-righteously (and violently) assert their status as freely operating moral agents who have been victims of circumstance.

Although same motive is present in the *Lazarillo*, Lazarillo inhabits a very different society than Roderick. Class allegiance in eighteenth-century British society was far less rigidly defined than in the Spain of Philip III, and furthermore, Roderick

separates himself from his picaresque predecessors by maintaining a degree of pride and even haughtiness with respect to society's less fortunate. Again, Roderick's lack of empathy with the poor represents another divergence from the prologue's high-minded genteel laughter.

To appreciate this point more fully, it is worth considering a substantial passage at an inn. In both the *Quixote* and the Spanish picaresque, the inn is a magnet for unsavory characters, a kind of cauldron of picaresque activity. Fielding's Wilson narrates his picaresque interlude in an inn. And in the case of *Roderick*, we have a marvelously constructed picaresque episode at an inn is set in motion with the entrance of a wretched fellow:

After her, came limping an old man with a worsted night-cap, buttoned under his chin and a broad-brimmed hat slouched over it, an old rusty blue cloak tied about his neck, under which appeared a brown surtout, that covered a threadbare coat and waist-coat, and, as we afterwards discerned, a dirty flannel jacket. –His eyes were hollow, bleared and gummy; his face was shriveled into a thousand wrinkles, his gums were destitute of teeth, his nose sharp and drooping, his chin peeked and prominent, so that when he mumped or spoke, they approached one another like a pair of nut-crackers; he supported himself on an ivory-headed cane, and his whole figure was a just emblem of winter, famine, and avarice. (50)

And were this not yet enough, the wife of this miserable fellow is described in this way:

But how was I surprised when I beheld the formidable captain leading in his wife; in the shape of a little, thin creature, about the age of forty, with a long, withered

visage, very much resembling that of a baboon, through the upper part of which, two little grey eyes peeped. (50)

What such descriptions entail is a reversal of power structures, or rather the usurpation of power by the lowly picaro who has been for the greater part of his life circumstance's favorite victim. The benevolent, charitable humor espoused by Shaftesbury, Addison and Fielding is here altogether renounced. What we have instead is a wickedly humorous description of a decrepit pauper and his frail baboon-faced wife, reaffirming Hobbesian "sudden glory" in an age when it had seemingly lost currency and more importantly still, revisiting the picaresque comedy of the Spanish novels. Roderick here surpasses Lazarillo's scorn of his parsimonious second master (the bread-hoarding priest), and no picaresque author other than Quevedo matches this degree of grotesque caricature (we may recall on this count the merciless humor in the portrait of Cabra so marvelously dissected by Leo Spitzer).²²⁵ Fielding's preface to *Joseph Andrews* just a few years before the publication of *Roderick* had explicitly rejected this sort of mean-spirited humor: "In the same manner, were we to enter a poor House, and behold a wretched Family shivering with Cold and languishing with Hunger, it would not incline us to Laughter, (at least we must have very diabolical Natures, if it would."²²⁶ For Fielding, poverty and infirmity are not funny unto themselves, but only when wed to rational incongruity.²²⁷ For Smollett, that same comic bienséance does not apply, for as we shall see, there is a cruel aspect to the comedy in *Roderick* that harks back to the Spanish picaresque.

Satire and Picaresque Comedy

Another way of conceiving the opposition described above between the mean-spirited humor of Hobbes (and by extension Quevedo) and the genteel laughter advocated in early eighteenth-century Britain is by considering Ronald Paulson's fine work on satire and the eighteenth-century English novel. For Paulson, Juvenalian satire is an underappreciated influence on the Spanish picaresque and indeed a primary influence on Smollett (greater even than that of the Spanish picaresque). What interests Paulson most in this connection is the relationship between what he terms an "innocent" and a "knave."²²⁸ In Paulson's model, a picaro like Lazarillo or Guzmanillo would represent the innocent being exploited by a knavish master, and the picaresque is more akin to Roman satire than to what we might term the "realistic" novel, insofar as "the realistic factionalist takes joy in contemporary reality, while the satirist sees it as an ugly, repugnant alternative."²²⁹ Hence, Roderick's constant struggles with authority figures would seem to conform quite nicely to the archetype of the unruly servant in Juvenalian satire. The novel indicts society but spares its protagonist from critique. Roderick emerges on this account as an agent of normalcy amidst chaos and moral turpitude, a kind of beacon of righteous behavior. Paulson is right to spell out the connections to Juvenalian satire, but he goes too far in discounting the picaresque's influence on Smollett. Smollett was an enthusiastic advocate of continental literature, a translator of Cervantes and Lesage, and it is quite reasonable to assume that he read the Spanish picaresque texts in the original. More importantly still, Paulson neglects the critical comic perspective of the picaresque narrator, which as we have seen, is the critical ingredient of picaresque comedy. The heightened degree of verisimilitude in the picaresque and the

dual charge of the picaresque narrator (comic masochist and wily rhetorician) separate him from Juvenal.

To better understand Smollett's use of satire and comedy, it is worth revisiting a basic distinction. In his book on *Tristram Shandy*, Stedmond provides a useful distinction between the two: "Comedy tends to present a glass in which we glimpse ourselves (albeit distorted for humorous effect), whereas satire, as Swift wryly put it, presents a glass in which we tend to see others' failings, but seldom, willingly, our own."²³⁰ The notion of comedy as a mirror refers back to Donatus' description of comedy as a *speculum consuetudinis* or mirror of custom, more than the mere confluence of the base and wondrous that we have in Vincenzo Maggi.²³¹ Comedy in Stedmond's view appeals to the instinct towards self-betterment, satire to our Hobbesian desire to exult in feeling superior through laughter. The problem in declaring *Roderick Random* an outright satire is that such a statement ignores the heterogeneous character of the novel, and indeed one of the basic components of picaresque comedy—the capacity to transcend the distance normally created by laughter and experience empathy with the picaro.

The brand of picaresque comedy described thus far in the study skirts the boundary between this dichotomy. The picaresque undoubtedly has a strong satirical sting, but it is more than mere satire. Juvenalian satire is a celebration of the ugly for laughter's sake, but the most successful picaresque comedy arouses more than scorn. Whereas satire is wholly one-sided and parasitic, picaresque comedy revels in ambivalence, a willingness to mock and empathize at once.

A Tale of Two (or More) Novels

The great contrast between Smollett and Fielding can be approached on two fronts. On the one hand, we have established a basic difference with regard to the orientation of their novelistic modes. Smollett shows himself in *Roderick* (and in *Peregrine Pickle* and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*) partial to the picaresque mode (and indeed to the comic possibilities that emerge from its framework). Fielding, as we have seen, more closely models his epic comedy on Cervantes than the picaresque, but within *Joseph Andrews* he includes a brief but important contribution to the picaresque tradition (if perhaps only to illustrate by way of contrast the superiority of his own multi-faceted epic comedy).²³²

What is fascinating about *Roderick Random* is the way the novel's loose picaresque framework gives way to other internal digressions and dissolutions. The substantial portion of the novel in which Roderick is aboard the warship reads more like a novel of adventure than anything in the Spanish picaresque. More striking still is the shift in tone in the final chapters of the novel. Alter is quite right when he remarks that "walking into the last section of *Roderick Random* is like stepping from a sea beach into a hothouse. We leave the harsh but bracing salt air of the picaresque world to enter the rhetoric-perfumed, tear-watered sphere of the novel of sentiment."²³³ *Roderick Random* demonstrates once more a problem discussed earlier in the Cervantes chapter, namely the problem of narrative continuity and indeed the need in the picaresque for a *deus ex machina*. The seemingly ceaseless narrative digressions and the ever-shifting gallery of characters has to evolve into something (at least in an era increasingly preoccupied with rationality in all of its forms), and for Smollett and Fielding, that something is the comic convention of love and marriage. But as we shall see in the case of *Augie March*, who

appears on stage some two centuries later, the bleakness of the Spanish picaro is more in tune with modern sensibility than with the sentimentality found in the final chapters of *Roderick*.

Chapter Seven

Picaresque Comedy in America: The Case of *Augie March*

Until the twentieth century, the history of the picaresque is that of a wild animal domesticated. Which is to say that the early manifestations of the genre in Spain evince a feral quality, evident in their crude subject matter, desultory narrative organization and in their intense internal energy. Yet the inner energy contrasts markedly in the earliest Spanish texts. In the *Lazarillo*, it is characterized by the confluence of comic elements, the physical and the intellectual, the comedy of effusive self-pity and that of misanthropy. In *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the comic energy of the *Lazarillo* is introduced only to be subsumed by the larger ideological forces of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. Later Spanish texts such as Quevedo's *Buscón* and Úbeda's *Pícara Justina* parody the self-righteousness of *Guzmán* and celebrate the grotesque and the carnivalesque, and they add linguistic disorder to the mix. But the domestication of the picaresque occurs principally in France and England. Lesage, the apostle of the picaresque in France, translates *Guzmán* (excising its tedious moral commentaries and weightier metaphysical lucubration) to produce a free-flowing and delectable prose narrative.

In England, *Moll Flanders* follows *Guzmán de Alfarache* in its tendency towards self-repression (most notably of potentially comic circumstances) and self-castigation. In *Moll*, the external world of comic incongruity is rejected so that the inner world of Puritan introspection can be brought more sharply into focus, but Defoe's novel never fully aligns itself along the axis of picaresque comedy, remaining instead in its own limbo. In both Cervantes and Fielding, the picaresque is subsumed in the larger

dialectical processes of his epic comedy, and though neither author offers anything more than brief picaresque experiments. For Cervantes, two marvelously innovative novellas highlight the limitations of the standard picaresque perspective, whereas Wilson's tale in *Joseph Andrews* offers a new possibility of picaresque expression—the author figure as picaro. Of the eighteenth-century English writers, only Smollett truly embraces the comic turbulence of the Spanish models in *Roderick Random*. He responds to the epic comedy of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* with a fine example of picaresque comedy in *Roderick*, but *Roderick*'s picaresque energy transmogrifies into a curious blend of other novelistic forms halfway through that work.

We conclude our journey through the strange career of picaresque comedy with a twentieth-century American novel—Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*. Bellow's novel is in fact truer to the Spanish picaresque than any other English-language text in this study. Bellow's protagonist maintains the ambivalent relationship to his readers as earlier picaros, but the real contribution of this great novel is the introduction of a new picaresque cynicism which draws on aspects of both *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*.

Augie March and the Picaro as Cynic

Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March* stands out as the greatest twentieth-century American contribution to the picaresque tradition.²³⁴ It is in some respects a remarkably conservative work, considering that it shares more with Spanish novels of the late Renaissance than with many of the novelistic experiments of the early twentieth century. Its timeline is neatly linear, its characterization intentionally limited and the psychological depth of the novel's principal figures (and indeed of its

narrator/protagonist) rather shallow. In roughly six hundred pages, Augie reveals relatively little of his own inner psychological workings (in marked contrast to Bellow's other great novel *Herzog*, where a neurotic patient chastises himself in sublimely comical fashion). The ancillary characters make hurried appearances on stage and unceremoniously scamper off when they no longer directly impinge on Augie's life. As in those early Spanish novels, Bellow's picaro is born into difficult circumstances, raised in poverty without a father. Augie, at a young age, is driven to a peripatetic existence and forced to fend for himself in a hostile world where no one seems trustworthy. Like his predecessors, the young Augie makes his way through a rogue's gallery of masters who diagnose the various ills of social segments. And like the early novels, *Augie March* celebrates the petty criminal's life with a slightly perverse pleasure. Augie is never able to establish himself or plant roots, nor does he really seem to want to. In lieu of bourgeois normalcy, he pursues picaresque aimlessness. In the process, he takes on a wide array of makeshift identities and occupations, ranging from petty thief to valet to intellectual to iguana chaser in Mexico. He prefers to keep company with the corrupt or the eccentric rather than the straight-laced and God-fearing. In the age of the picture perfect television sitcom, of *The Donna Reed Show* and *Leave it to Beaver*, Augie celebrates the dark side of America, indulging in a life that skirts the boundary between infamy and bourgeois respectability. At times, Augie appears poised for social advancement and respectability, but time and again he eschews this in order to consort with deadbeats like the thief Padilla, who himself seems cast directly from an early Spanish novel:

Well, Padilla in his thieving wasn't of this earthly-power class, and had no ideas such as involved the whole world. It wasn't his real calling. But he enjoyed being

good at it and liked the whole subject. He had all kinds of information about crooks, about dips, wires, and their various tricks; about Spanish pickpockets who were so clever they got to the priest's money through the soutane, or about the crook's school in Rome of such high tuition that students signed a contract to pay half their take for five years after graduation. (207)²³⁵

The school for thieves in Rome might well be a direct reference to a similar establishment mentioned in *Guzmán de Alfarache*, and Cervantes likewise plays in *Rinconete y Cortadillo* with the comic incongruity of a thieving underworld assuming the trappings of organized civil institutions. In Bellow, we transfer the seething picaresque underworld of places like Seville to Chicago's mean streets, the manufacturing belt of the Midwest, and later in the novel to Mexico, where Augie sojourns with his capricious iguana chaser of a lover Thea. A good number of the novel's descriptions could just as easily have been taken from a Spanish novel. Take for instance a passage later in the novel: "The beggars and loafers were already collecting in their Middle Ages style, the touts and schnorrers and the others uncovering their damages and stock-in-trade woes from bandages and rags." (407) Augie's world is chock-full of such characters. No one is to be trusted, least of all Augie. The picaresque narrator is *ipso facto* an unreliable one, a victim of fraud and petty criminality and yet a practitioner as well. And though we are keenly aware of this deception, Augie charms with language, and he does so perhaps more skillfully than any of his predecessors.²³⁶

But Augie is his own man, and the real distinction between Augie and the earlier picares has to do with his new sensibility. In *Lazarillo*, we noted the emergence of a new comic sensibility, picaresque comedy. Augie continues the tradition begun with *Lazarillo*,

but he achieves a gritty realism and a hard-eyed cynical embrace of existence that knows no analogue in the four hundred years of prior picaresque writing. To speak of the evolution of the picaresque in teleological terms is obviously a fallacy. The dividing line in the Spanish picaresque aligns *Lazarillo*, the *Buscón*, and *La pícara Justina* along an axis that is resistant to stable ideology and consistent with the wiliness of the picaro to accept the world according to fixed terms. On the other side of this axis are the graver works of the picaresque tradition—the *Guzmán de Alfarache* and later novels such as *Moll Flanders* and the *Confidence Man*. *Augie March* combines the recalcitrant resistance to ideological weightiness of the comic Spanish texts with the densely wrought and realistic prose of the graver texts. Augie negotiates the tension between picaresque comedy and morose reflection on the state of mankind more deftly than Alemán or Defoe. What is interesting in the case of Bellow's novel is that Bellow's dark humor reflects the higher spiritual revolt against normalcy that André Breton characterizes as *l'humour noir*.²³⁷ For Breton, black humor is characterized by its subversive nature, and it is above all a satirical weapon. But Bellow's novel is less a satire of a particular society than it is an indictment of the human race. The most salient feature of Bellow's new sensibility is what I label cynical realism. The tradition of cynicism in literature goes back at least to Lucian, whose prose satires stand out for their caustic lampooning of prominent figures and in philosophy to Diogenes, celebrated by Rabelais and others for his untoward public behavior (which included public masturbation in his bathtub of a domicile). In the picaresque tradition, the most noteworthy exponents of the cynical are in dialogues—Cervantes' Cipión in his *Coloquio de los perros* and Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau* (a starving artist and modern Diogenes). Augie takes this cynical strain to new levels and

produces a narrative that runs sour through and through. But Augie's world, unlike those envisioned by Alemán or Defoe, is anything but deterministic. It admits neither the dire moral confinement of *Guzmán* (condemned as he is to sin and to Sisyphean repetition) nor the subjugation to a master's will. Rather, there is a celebration of the shifting boundaries of society, the instability of institutions.²³⁸ Consider a prominent passage in the novel in which the picaresque narrator reflects on his first days at the city college and the tumbling masses of humanity filling its corridors:

And the students were children of immigrants from all parts, coming up from Hell's Kitchen, Little Sicily, the Black Belt, the mass of Polonia, the Jewish streets of Humboldt Park, put through the coarse sifters of curriculum and also bringing wisdom of their own. They filled the factory-length corridors and giant classrooms with every human character and germ, to undergo consolidation and become, the idea was, American. In the mixture there was beauty—a good proportion—and pimple-insolence, and parricide faces, gum-chew innocence, labor fodder and secretarial forces, Danish stability, Dago inspiration, catarrh-hampered mathematical genius; there were waxed-eared shovelers' children, sex-promising businessmen's daughters, an immense sampling of a tremendous host, the multitudes of holy writ, begotten by West-moving, factor-shoved parents. Or me, the by-blow of a traveling man. (135-36)

One of the great qualities of the picaresque narrator, clearly on display here, is the ability to embrace a hard-eyed view of mankind. The haphazard ordering of enumeration here blends gritty realism and black humor (consider especially on this count the juxtaposition of “parricide faces” and “gum-chew innocence.”) And yet this is not the delirious list-

making of Rabelais or the verbal fireworks of Úbeda, but a celebration of American heterogeneity. Augie does not allow himself to be engulfed into groups, nor does he bow easily to the will of masters. Even in the service of the cutthroat businessman Einhorn, Augie remains largely a free agent, unaffected by moral recrimination, unfettered in movement, and ideologically indifferent.

The novel's peculiar mood is created through a curious admixture of this dark wit, cynicism and a sense of melancholy. This mixture is achieved through a number of prose poems injected into the picaresque's living account. Bellow is a great virtuoso of English prose style and his richly evocative style partakes of the Baroque qualities of Alemán.²³⁹ The description below is a fine example of this consummate craftsmanship:

We hitched rides toward Chicago and spent a night on the beach at Harbert, a little way out of St. Joe, Nails wrapped in his robe and Dingbat and I sharing a slicker. We went through Gary and Hammond that day, on a trailer from Flint, by docks and dumps of sulphur and coal, and flames seen by their heat, not light, in the space of noon air among the black, huge, Pasiphae cows and other columnar animals, headless, rolling a rust of smoke and connected in an enormous statuary of hearths and mills—here and there an old boiler or a hill of cinders in the bulrush spawning-holes of frogs. If you've seen a winter London open thundering mouth in its awful last minutes of river light or have come with cold clanks from the Alps into Torino in December white steam then you've known like greatness of place. Thirty crowded miles on oil-spotted road, where the furnace, gas, and machine volcanoes cooked the Empedocles fundamentals into pig iron, girders, and rails. (97)

There seems to be a conscious attempt in the novel to endow language with grit and earthiness. Indeed, the passage resonates with the earthiness of Anglo-Saxon epic.²⁴⁰ A number of these prose poems enrich the novel, and they add a dimension generally lacking in the picaresque tradition—a poeticizing of the prosaic world.²⁴¹ Rust belt towns like Gary and Flint are not the sorts of places that invite comparisons to London or Torino (even before they were consigned to the rust belt), but Augie evinces here a curious capacity to transcend through language. Elsewhere in the picaresque tradition, we have digressions, temporary departures from the picaresque's self-centered effusions (be they of the unbridled comic sort of *Justina* or the internal recriminations of *Moll Flanders*). But Augie's account stands apart for its conjuring of scene, its release from subjectivity and its ceaseless nagging, the pollution of our minds with petty thoughts and desires. True, consciousness converges on this description (allusion to prior European travels), and mention is made of concrete circumstance, the hitching of a ride through the industrial belt with fellows named Nails and Dingbat, but there is also a moment of transcendence here, even in this most morose of settings. While the Spanish picaresque quite rightly can be celebrated as a great step away from pastoral and chivalric romances towards what we might call "realism," their take on "reality" is quite different from what we have here. In this moment, the sordid state of reality is celebrated rather than decried.

What Bellow achieves in elevating uninspiring places he willfully sacrifices in terms of character depth. Yet the self-conscious rejection of depth in character delineation and in design in plot architecture in *Augie March* has more to do with Bellow imitating his Spanish models than with flawed design.²⁴² *Augie March* propels itself about like a slowly churning locomotive rails running in irregular loops. Subject and

object are in constant tension and undergo constant revision in their mutual engagement. A dialectic is set in motion between an objectification of the world (what Schopenhauer termed renunciation of the Will) in which the narrating subject appears subsumed by the objectified world, and a reassertion of the subject's will (evident in the injection of cynicism into his narrative). In *Guzmán de Alfarache* and *Moll Flanders*, inner tension is created between comic impulses and weightier ideological forces that suffocated such impulses. The tension in Bellow is not of the ideological sort. Augie subscribes to no larger belief system, owes no allegiance to a celestial master, let alone an earthly one. Indeed, his novel, given its origins in the highly "ideological" America of the 1950s, asserts an independence from all larger systems of belief (religious or political) and the novel is ideologically more akin to the recalcitrant individuality and self-reliance of *Lazarillo* than to the ideologically fraught *Guzmán* (despite being far more similar in breadth and depth to the latter). The flow of Bellow's comedy is not so much interrupted and disarmed by the passages that objectify the world and detach it from the picaresque's consciousness. Rather, subject and object, consciousness and the world engage each other. The novel is a discordant convergence of elements in the narrator's mind. An example of such discord occurs quite early in the novel:

The rest of us had to go to the dispensary—which was like the dream of a multitude of dentists' chairs, hundreds of them in a space as enormous as an armory, and green bowls with designs of glass grapes, drills lifted zigzag as insects' legs, and gas flames on the porcelain swivel trays—thunderly gloom in Harrison Street of limestone county buildings and cumbersome red streetcars with metal grillwork on their windows and monarchial iron whiskers of cowcatchers

front and rear. They lumbered and clanged, and their brake tanks panted in the slushy brown of a winter afternoon or the bare stone brown of a summer's, salted with ash, smoke, and prairie dust, with long stops at the clinics to let off clumbers, cripples, hunchbacks, brace-legs, crutch-wielders, tooth and eye-sufferers, and all the rest. (6)

This is a passage fraught with internal contradictions. These images are drawn from a child's imagination, but they arise in the rich and fully-formed prose of a consummate verbal craftsman. To be sure, the discrepancy between a child's perception and a mature writer's verbal adornment is a problem in any autobiography. The eerie dentist chairs, insect-leg drills, and ominous gas flames here, unlike **Stephen Dedalus'** moo-cow in *Portrait of the Artist*, are not reproduced with the illusion of mirroring a child's consciousness but filtered through the mind of an embittered adult in the process of reconstructing his existence in words. As in the earlier passage quoted above, there is here a celebration of the prosaic. The picaresque narrator has always demonstrated a penchant for recalling the unpleasant eccentricities of childhood and describing more broadly what Aristotle saw as the basis of the comic, the *aischros* or the ugly. Sometimes, this entails indulgence in comical self-pity (a picaresque specialty); at other times, such recollection serves as a justification for a later criminal life. If all narrators, even the detached surgeon dissecting human consciousness in Flaubert, can rightly be said to have an agenda, the picaresque narrator's agenda often looms larger than the content of his narration. But Augie seems an exception to this rule. Augie's agenda does not broadcast itself as loudly as some of his predecessors. His recollection of "thunderly gloom" and other random images from the past is not about making a case for himself and protecting

him from the judgments of society and the reader (as is the case in *Lazarillo* and *Roderick Random*). Rather, such reflections give Augie occasion to let his caustic cynicism erode the recalcitrant reality of the world.

This raises a critical question with regard to *Augie March*—namely, what place does the picaresque inhabit on the continuum between ironic observer of mankind’s folly and irredeemable cynic? Couched in terms of picaresque analogues, is Augie more akin to *Lazarillo* and *Roderick Random*, or is he closer in spirit to Guzmán or the bleak narrator of *The Confidence Man*?

Augie March and the Problem of Picaresque Comedy

I have put forth the argument that the dominant tone in *Augie March* is a somber cynicism that is largely absent from earlier picaresque texts. I have discussed how certain passages in the novel imply a departure from the subjective consciousness of the picaresque towards an objectification of reality and that the dialectical tension generated from the juxtaposition of these prose poems and the overwrought subjectivity characteristic of the picaresque account for a significant innovation in the genre. What remains to be seen is how Bellow’s novel can be related to the larger questions in this study, namely the picaresque genre’s constant grappling with its own definition and the alignment of texts in the tradition into contrary camps.

As we pointed out in the introduction to this study, critical literature on the picaresque has eschewed the question of comedy. Yet in the case of *Augie March*, it is Bellow’s comedy which seems overestimated. Notable on this count is Sarah Blancher Cohen, who devotes a book-length study to Bellow’s comedy, and the recent essay by

James Wood in his recent book on laughter and literature.²⁴³ Blancher Cohen establishes a contrast between the comic in *Augie March* and the more acerbic humor of Bellow's two earlier novels *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. She celebrates the comic impulses of *Augie March* as an expression of the "tolerant laughter" of the "genial" romantics of the early nineteenth century.²⁴⁴ Blancher Cohen's approach to the novel and its comic texture differs substantially from my own, for she sees Augie as "the picaresque apostle who, meeting up with errant humanity, eagerly listens to their confessions and generously pardons their sins, even blessing them for their antic trespasses."²⁴⁵ What makes Blancher Cohen's statement problematic is not just the morose character of much of the novel, but the hard-edged quality to so many of Augie's descriptions of people.²⁴⁶ Like Pablos before him, Augie judges frequently and *sans merci*, and one example is that of an elderly lady whose husband was evicted from one of Einhorn's units: "Sablonka, an old Polish woman who disliked us, a slow-climbing, muttering, mob-faced, fat, mean, pious widow who was a bad cook besides." (139) What is more, the novel's first page sets the mean-spirited tone with a description of Augie's mentally-handicapped brother and worn-down mother:

My own parents were not much to me, though I cared for my mother. She was simple-minded, and what I learned from her was not what she taught, but on the order of object lessons. She didn't have much to teach, poor woman. My brothers and I loved her. I speak for them both; for the elder it is safe enough; for the younger one, Georgie, I have to answer—he was born an idiot—but I'm in no need to guess, for he had a song he sang as he ran dragfooted with his stiff idiot's trot, up and down along the curl-wired fence in the backyard. (1)

In Quevedo or Smollett, comic delight is taken in depicting physical infirmity or aberrance. But there is nothing comical in this early description, even by the standards of Hobbes or Malebranche. Yet while Augie may not achieve Hobbesian sudden glory, there is a different sort of assertion of superiority in the narrative. Augie's cynical realism involves an assertion of superiority over the world, and even in his earliest childhood experiences, there is a sense of detachment from humanity and from the *hoi polloi*. The picaresque experiences alienation on two levels: detachment from the world of human affairs (through his status as outsider) and from his former self (the gulf between his writing self and lived self). Whereas the latter is manifest in the great eloquence in describing the hazy recollections of childhood, the former presents itself throughout the narrative in Augie's perpetual distance. Never does Augie reveal anything more than perfunctory emotional attachment to others. Even in his love affairs, he is astoundingly callous. The closest Augie gets to genuine empathy with other humans are in his relations with Mimi Villars and Thea Finkel, but even when Augie shows a modicum of compassion by helping Mimi abort her child, he ultimately acts out of self-interest.

We have observed throughout the study the signal feature of picaresque comedy to be ambivalence—which is to say that the peculiar laughter that emerges with Lazarillo and his descendants pulls the laughing subject in two opposing directions. Picaresque comedy is, on the one hand, intensely physical (insofar as it involves in many instances bodily harm, the reduction of the organic to the level of the mechanic in Bergsonian terms). The physical aspect of picaresque comedy both creates and erodes emotional distance between the laughing person and the object of ridicule. The heightened verisimilitude of the picaresque relative to comic prose fiction before the Lazarillo and

indeed the historical relevance and sociological urgency of the early Spanish narratives likewise account for this newfound comic sensibility.

Yet picaresque comedy is ambivalent on other levels. Most notably, it involves a narrating subject engaging in what Matthias Bauer has called stigma management.²⁴⁷ Stigma management for Bauer involves a patient narrating past trauma in order to overcome its aftereffects, and this process resembles in a number of ways a session of psychoanalysis. But picaresque comedy is more complicated than a therapy session. Picaresque novels rarely go too deeply into the psychic makeup of characters, but one of the great riddles of picaresque texts is why narrators consistently take pleasure in delving into past trauma. The most common response we have seen time and again in this study is the inflation of self-pity for rhetorical effect. The comic effect that arises from this is two-pronged, for appeals both to Hobbesian Schadenfreude and because such inflated rhetoric is funny for its own sake. It is a hallmark of the genre and is present early in *Augie March*:

So I had the ignominy of being canned and was read the riot act in the kitchen.

Seemingly the old lady had been waiting for just this to happen and had it ready to tell me that there were faults I couldn't afford to have, situated where I was in life, a child of an abandoned family with no father to keep me out of trouble, nobody but two women, feeble-handed, who couldn't forever hold a cover over us from hunger, misery, crime, and the wrath of the world. Maybe if we had been sent to an orphanage, as Mama at one time thought of doing, it would have been better.

(38)

From *Lazarillo* onward, the picaresque presents a particular problem of ambiguous comic derision. It appeals to the misanthropic impulses of the laughing subject and at the same

time invites genuine empathy with the plight of the protagonist. In *Lazarillo*, the element of pathetic identification with a social inferior is a great innovation over precedents like Apuleius and Petronius. This is not quite the case in Bellow, who was writing for a mid-twentieth century readership who had already had plenty of experience reading Dickens, Zola, and other champions of the lower-class. Indeed, for Bellow, precisely the opposite dilemma presents itself. That is, Augie performs a very different rhetorical operation on his reader than his picaresque predecessors. In the grim moral environment following the Holocaust and the Second World War, he conjures a sober mood that admits in some instances wit and comic charm but that generally appeals to a latent misanthropy. In lieu of pathetic identification with the plight of the poor and underprivileged, Augie inspires in his reader a callousness and indifference, and in some moments an outright cynical scorn. We are hurtled onwards in Augie's peripatetic adventures without developing an emotional attachment to any of the figures that pepper the narrative, and in this way, one is invited to adopt the same pessimistic embrace of humanity as the picaro. Neither time nor occasion is offered to dwell on characters or develop emotional interest or attachment. All moves forward coldly and relentlessly. A corollary to this callousness is the treatment of women in the novel. The picaresque's record on women is by no means sterling. Augie is, to be sure, more involved with romantic liaisons than some of his Spanish forebears (most of whom eschew amorous play). But just as Augie quietly undermines the authority of his masters and mentors, so does he only half-heartedly commit himself to matters of the heart. As one critic aptly puts it, Bellow's women are an "assortment of absent or vaguely present wives and the indistinguishable bevy of alluring though ephemeral

mistresses.”²⁴⁸ Thea Fenchel, the most intricately sketched woman in *Augie March*, loses her contours as a character and collapses into caricature while chasing iguanas in Mexico.

How then, in such a morose novelistic landscape, can we dare call *Augie* a comic novel? Popkin for one maintains that the novel “traces a richly comic pattern of aspiration and disaster. It is a comic pattern because the height of Augie’s aspirations and the speed of his recoveries keep us from taking his catastrophes seriously.”²⁴⁹ And yet if we consider the peculiar comedy of *Augie March* within the context of the picaresque, it does not entirely fit the mold of what we have labeled “picaresque comedy.” In the case of the Spanish picaros, there is a keen sense of self-justification that necessitates the writing process. The same can be said of later English and German picaros. Courasche writes out of an intense desire to one-up her male counterpart Simplicissimus in the arena of literary combat. Wilson in *Joseph Andrews* likewise unwittingly satirizes the author figure and, in the case of Fielding’s grander epic scheme, exposes the limitations of picaresque comedy. Augie scarcely seems self-righteous, neither in the comic sense of *Lazarillo* nor in the moralizing sense of *Guzmán*. Much of the energy in picaresque comedy derives either from the picaro’s overindulgence in self-pity and false humility for rhetorical and comic purposes, but Augie rarely resorts to this technique, and when he does so, his motivations are different. There is no consistent rhetorical effort underway in *Augie* to win us over to his cause, and in fact it is not clear that Augie has a “cause” at all. Augie narrates not to win over an audience but to achieve a sense of interiority—an interiority that has been denied to him after a life spent being tossed about on the fringes of society. He is the victim of his own superficial exteriority, his own picaresque existence, and the “stigma management” of authorship is his redemption.

The picaresque text is devoid of a center; it evinces what Lukács ascribes to the novelistic genre as a whole-- a transcendental homelessness.²⁵⁰ In the case of *Augie March*, this transcendental homelessness is particularly acute. The novel achieves no climax, no build or release of emotional investment, very little sense of moral pay-off. Perhaps the closest the novel comes to *desengaño* is a passage later in the novel, after Augie has experienced disillusionment in romantic love. After his estrangement from Thea in Mexico, Augie reflects:

Me love's servant? I wasn't at all! And suddenly my heart felt ugly, I was sick of myself. I thought that my aim of being simple was just a fraud, that I wasn't a bit goodhearted or affectionate, and I began to wish that Mexico from beyond the walls would come in and kill me and that I would be thrown in the bone dust and twisted, spiky crosses of the cemetery, for the insects and lizards. (436)

The rhetoric here is inflated and self-pity is in no short supply. Indeed, Augie's death wish here echoes Lazarillo's own sense of despair when he lies hungry in the house of his third master (the impoverished squire) and pleads for God to take his life.²⁵¹ But this self-pity reflects a new sensibility from that of *Lazarillo*, for it is not the comic self-pity that we often encounter in picaresque comedy. Rather, self-pity here serves as the occasion to reflect on the dire state of the species and indeed on the project of representing the wretched:

Because nobody anyhow can show what he is without a sense of exposure and shame, and can't care while preoccupied with this but must appear better and stronger than anyone else, mad! And meantime feels no real strength in himself, cheats and gets cheated, relies on cheating but believes abnormally in the strength

of the strong. All this time nothing genuine is allowed to appear and nobody knows what's real. And that's disfigured, degenerate, dark mankind—mere humanity. (437)

The classic picaresque theme of *engaño/desengaño* is here given a new treatment. It is at this point, so far into the novel's journey, that we at last arrive at a declaration of Augie's personal philosophy. If *Augie March* is in fact a comic novel, as several critics have claimed, it is also a very serious one. This grim-eyed indictment of mankind (again, the point of reference here is *Guzmán de Alfarache*) makes explicit the guiding principle of the narrative—namely the disfiguring of mankind. The disfiguring of mankind is indeed Augie's own accomplishment, performed by the scalpel of consciousness. Augie's narrative is far more "realistic" than say the grotesque *Buscón*, but his dictum here about the real never being allowed to appear can be read as the obvious starting point of fiction and especially of picaresque fiction, where the forthright manner of the first-person narrator is only a smokescreen clouding "reality." As Augie remarks a bit later, "that's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your version of what's real. Then even the flowers and the moss on the stones become the moss and the flowers of a version." (437)

It is a fitting point of arrival after Augie's meanderings across the Midwest and the Mexican desert, and indeed after five hundred years of picaresque writing, all the way from the slippery rhetoric of *Lazarillo's* prologue.

¹ Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

² C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

³ Quoted from Otto Rommel, "Die Wissenschaftliche Bemühungen um die Analyse des Komischen." In *Wesen und Formen des Komischen im Drama* Ed. Reinhold Grimm and Klaus Berghahn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975). P. 16. Translation mine.

⁴ George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956). P. 4.

⁵ Alexander Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe, 1599-1753* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967). Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), and Walter Reed, *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁶ José Antonio Maravall, *La picaresca desde la historia social* (Madrid: Taurus, 1986), Francisco Rico, *La novela picaresca y el punto de vista* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1970), Peter Dunn *Spanish Picaresque Fiction: A New Literary History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁷ Cristóbal Serra, *Antología del humor negro español* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1976).

⁸ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* Trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). P. 188-9. For an estimation of Apuleius' influence on the emergence of the picaresque, see Joseph Ricapito, "The Golden Ass of Apuleius and the Spanish Picaresque Novel." *Revista hispánica moderna* 40 (1978-79):77-85. Erich Auerbach offers a fine close reading of Apuleius with particular attention to the question of elevation of prose style in *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1959).

⁹ All parenthetical page citations of *Lazarillo* refer to the following edition: *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987).

¹⁰ Translations from *Lazarillo* and from subsequent foreign language texts are mine.

¹¹ Of course *Lazarillo's* Spanish is only "honest" to the degree that it reflects the naiveté of the narrator. As most critics of *Lazarillo* are quick to observe, this supposed naiveté is another instance of ironical narratorial posturing in the text. See on this count Francisco Rico (cited above). On the rhetorical posturing intrinsic to literary composition, see Wayne Booth's classic study *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). On the complexity of the novella's language and the rhetorical traditions that inform it, see Gustav Siebenmann, *Über Sprache und Stil im Lazarillo de Tormes* (Bern: Francke, 1953). See also José Verdú Rico, *La retórica española de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: CSIC, 1973).

¹² Thomas Hobbes. "On Laughter" From *On Human Nature*, quoted from the Norton Critical Edition of *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy* (New York: Norton, 1998). P. 457. It should be mentioned that Hobbes was not the first to associate laughter with an expression of superiority. Castelvetro argues in a similar vein in his Commentary on Aristotle's "Poetics." See *Theories of Comedy* Ed. Paul Lauter (New York: Doubleday, 1964). Pp. 94-95.

¹³ Indeed, later picaresque novels such as Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* and the Quevedo's *Buscón* depart from this comic-rhetorical strategy. Guzmán treats his former, sinful self Guzmanillo with relative disdain and the image of Pablos in Quevedo is humiliated throughout the text (less out of contrition for sinfulness than outright misanthropy).

¹⁴ Henri Bergson. *Œuvres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1991).

¹⁵ M.M. Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World* Trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ For a comprehensive survey of the interrelationship between poverty and literatura in early modern Spain and in relation to the emergence of the picaresque, see José Antonio Maravall's massive study (cited above) See also Javier Herrero, "Renaissance Poverty and *Lazarillo's* Family: The Birth of the Picaresque Genre." *PMLA* 94 (1979): 876-86. Linda Martz offers a compelling historical account of the problem in her *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain: The Example of Toledo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For an approach to the problem of poverty that considers more recent questions of gender and alterity, see Anne Cruz, *Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). For an exploration of the problem in more direct relation to

the *Lazarillo*, see Giancarlo Maiorino, *At the Margins of the Renaissance: Lazarillo de Tormes and the Picaresque Art of Survival* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ See Ronald Paulson, "The Fool-Knave Relation in Picaresque Satire." *Rice University Studies* 51, no.1. (1975):59-81. On the archetypal implications of the unruly servant motif, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) as well as Elisabeth Frenzel's fine compendium of literary archetypes in *Motive der Weltliteratur* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1976).

¹⁸ See Harry Sieber, *Language and Society in La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Sieber's study represents one of the most intellectually ambitious confrontations with *Lazarillo*, though his argument betrays perhaps too great a concern for organic unity in the text, as well as a teleological focus seemingly out of place in a narrative which renders problematic the notion of social ascension. Sieber's thesis is that the text represents the evolution of *Lazarillo* as a master of language and hence as author. For a somewhat related (though far shorter and less intricate) discussion of *Lazarillo* as a "self-made man," see R.W. Truman, "Lázaro de Tormes and the *Homo Novus* Tradition." *Modern Language Review* 64 (1969): 62-67.

¹⁹ *Lazarillo* himself characterizes the situation in this way: "Así, como he contado, me dejó mi pobre tercero amo, do acabé de conocer mi ruin dicha, pues, señalándose todo lo que podría contra mí, hacía mis negocios tan al revés, que los amos, que suelen ser dejados de los mozos, en mí no fuese así, mas que mi amo me dejase y huyese de mí" (110). And yet this may be another prominent instance of *Lazarillo*'s clever recasting of reality. He is perhaps exulting in some sense of power attained over a social superior, but in truth the squire runs away more from his debtors than his servant.

²⁰ See Neil Schaeffer, *The Art of Laughter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). Schaeffer explores in his book the importance of context in any kind of comic circumstance. Laughter is only generated under proper circumstance, and nothing is *ipso facto* humorous.

²¹ Richard Hitchcock, "Lazarillo and 'Vuestra Merced.'" *MLN* 86 (1971): 264-66. Francisco Rico (cited above) offers a similar discussion of "el caso" in his study of the picaresque novel.

²² Remarkable here is the parallel to another work of prose fiction that, though *sui generis*, has nonetheless been brought into connection with the picaresque—*Tristram Shandy*: "I affirm it over again to be one of the vilest worlds that ever was made; ----for I can truly say, that from the first hour I drew my breath in it, to this, that I can now scarce draw it at all, for an asthma I got in scating against the wind in Flanders;----I have been the continual sport of what the world calls Fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil;----yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, That in every state of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small Hero sustained." Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: Norton, 1980). P. 6

²³ Jauss has argued for an understanding of *Lazarillo* and its picaresque offspring as a burlesque of Augustine's Confessions. See Hans Robert Jauss, "Ursprung und Bedeutung der Ich-Form im Lazarillo de Tormes," *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 8 (1957): 290-311. Jauss' argument is refuted rather persuasively by Baumans. See P. Baumans, "Der Lazarillo de Tormes eine Travestie der Augustinischen Confessiones?" *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 10 (1959): 285-91.

²⁴ On the significance of the bread, see Anson Piper's brief essay, "The 'Breadly Paradise' of Lazarillo de Tormes." *Hispania* 44 (1961): 269-71. It goes without saying that the entire scene with the priest's communion renders profane the sacred, a demotion from Christ's body to *Lazarillo*'s fodder. There is a curious tendency to yoke the sacred with the physical (with the latter of course holding sway) in *Lazarillo*'s thought. In an exclamation of self-pity that I cite, *Lazarillo* invokes "Dios" to put an end to his physical torment with a quick death. Yet the text, as I see it, quite unlike the neurotically spiritual *Guzmán*, keeps transcendent spiritual concerns out of its purview.

²⁵ On *Lazarillo*'s peculiar proclivity to engaño in narration, see George Shipley, "The Critic as Witness for the Prosecution: Making the Case against Lázaro de Tormes." *PMLA* 97 (1982):179-94. On the poetics of engaño in the picaresque novel (with particular emphasis on the *Guzmán de Alfarache*), see Donald Gilbert-Santamaria, *Writers on the Market: Consuming Literature in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

²⁶ On the subject of laughter and irrationality, two theorists of the comic with curiously similar names offer important insights: See Morton Gurewitsch, *Comedy: The Irrational Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) and Marcel Gutwirth, *Laughing Matter: An Essay on the Comic* (Ithaca: Cornell University

Press, 1993). Both are right to describe laughter in terms of a temporary paralysis of other bodily and mental activities, but one should exercise caution in wholly discarding the rational aspects both of the comic incongruity that so often leads to laughter (in Kant's view an expectation unfulfilled in the rational mind) and of the peculiar aftertaste which laughter often leaves, a heightened state of awareness of matters social, political, and existential.

²⁷ See Claudio Guillén, "La disposición temporal del *Lazarillo de Tormes*," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1957):264-79. Guillén argues for the unity of the text on the basis of its status as a "relación" told by an individual. For Guillén, *Lazarillo's* recession from the text after the third *tractado* is in fact the narrator's natural response to having satisfied his purpose in narration, and the final *tractados* constitute a gradual exit from the self-created literary realm. Bruce Wardropper likewise argues for a kind of natural symmetrical inversion (and hence a justification of its unity). See his "El trastorno de la moral en el *Lazarillo*," *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* 15 (1961): 441-47.

²⁸ An alternative explanation for *Lazarillo's* reticence here is the encroachment of the "malas lenguas" referred to later in the text and the pernicious influence of gossip on the narrator's social status.

²⁹ Sieber, (cited above).

³⁰ For a dissenting opinion that considers the fifth *tractado* a necessary part of an organic whole, see Raymond Willis, "Lazarillo and the Pardoner: The Artistic Necessity of the Fifth *Tractado*." *Hispanic Review* 27 (1959): 267-79.

³¹ Stephen Gilman, "The Death of *Lazarillo de Tormes*" *PMLA* LXXXI (1966): 149-166.

³² Lukács associates the novel with the state of "transcendental homelessness," which is essentially a theory of alienation on three counts (man from nature, man from man, and man from himself). The novel is symptomatic with this fallen condition, whereas the epic is a lost state of totality that can only be nostalgically appreciated in our postlapsarian condition. See his *Theorie des Romans* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963).

³³ For an insightful discussion of irony in *Lazarillo*, see R.W. Truman, "Parody and Irony in the Self-Portrayal of Lázaro de Tormes." *Modern Language Review* 63 (1968): 600-65. Truman's contention is that *Lazarillo* renders himself increasingly ridiculous in the text, if only to better manage his lowly predicament through humor and irony.

³⁴ The first important study of the ideological undercurrents of the novel is that of Enrique Moreno Báez, who asserts the importance of the Counter-Reformation in shaping the moralizing forces in Alemán's text. See Enrique Moreno Báez, *Lección y sentido del Guzmán de Alfarache* (Madrid: Revista de Filología Española, 1948). In addition to Maravall's study on poverty and the picaresque (cited above), see his equally impressive study on the Baroque, *La cultura del barroco: análisis de una estructura histórica* (Esplugues de Llobregat: Ariel, 1975). Alexander Parker (cited above) concurs with the basic assumptions of this study in arguing against the likes of Castro and Van Praag, who had asserted Alemán's curious status as a Jewish *converso* in a rigidly Catholic milieu. For an examination of the issue of ideology from a Marxist perspective, see Michel Cavillac, *Gueux et marchands dans le Guzmán de Alfarache (1599-1604): Roman picaresque et mentalité bourgeoise dans l'Espagne du Siècle d'Or* (Bordeaux: Institut d'Etudes Ibériques, 1983). See also the classic account of the imbrication ideology and literature, Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978).

³⁵ Strangely, some critics have attempted to characterize Alemán's work as merely a continuation of the free-spirited comedy of *Lazarillo*. See especially Nina Cox Davis, *Autobiography as Burla in the Guzmán de Alfarache* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991). See also Carlos Rodríguez, "Guzmán de Alfarache, narrador: La poética del gracioso" *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 31 (1984):403-12.

³⁶ Maxime Chevalier considers the *Lazarillo* as a string of beads in which one traditional anecdote after another is artificially assembled, unified only by the inclusion of a single protagonist. See his *Lecturas y Lectores en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Turner, 1976). Shklovsky makes a similar argument about the arbitrary organization of *Don Quijote* in his *Theory of Prose* trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood park: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990).

³⁷ For a fine recent study of the nexus between cultural production and an ideal to complement Burckhardt's nineteenth-century masterpiece, see Peter Burke *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

³⁸ Consider for instance the rather mechanistic definition of laughter offered by Vincenzo Maggi: "In summary it is clear that laughter comes from a baseness or ugliness that is without pain. This baseness, as we have said, is either of the body, or of the mind, or of things happening extrinsically; also the baseness of

these things is either true, or pretended or accidental. If a laugh is going to be raised from this baseness, wonder must necessarily be the companion to this baseness. And wonder necessarily stems from novelty.” In Lauter (cited above) P. 73. For an important study of shifting attitudes towards comedy in the sixteenth-century in the wake of the Italian humanists, see Marvin Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964). Herrick’s study is a highly impressive survey of the debates on comedy in the time, but its focus is on drama rather than prose.

³⁹ Lodovico Castelvetro, Commentary on Aristotle’s “Poetics.” In Lauter (cited above) Pp. 94-5 The most important engagement with Castelvetro and other Italian commentators of Aristotle remains Bernard Weinberg’s mammoth study. Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁴⁰ On the peculiarity of the picaresque narrator, see Alfonso Rey, “La novela picaresca y el narrador fidedigno.” *Hispanic Review* 47 (1979):55-75. See also the provocative work of Maurice Mohlo, *Introducción al pensamiento picaresco* Trans. Augusto Gálvez-Cañero y Pidal (Salamanca: Anaya, 1972).

⁴¹ Bakhtin (cited above) P. 73. For a broad overview of laughter in the Middle Ages and the transition to modernity, see *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, Ed. Albrecht Claussen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010). The thirty or so essays in this volume illustrate in fact the diversity of comic forms in the period and indeed demonstrate the problems with Bakhtin’s broad account of the matter.

⁴² See Close (cited above). Victoriana Roncero López argues in a similar vein by assigning *Guzmán, Lazarillo* and *La pícara Justina* to a tradition of buffoon literature. That the protagonist is at once *burlador* and *burlado* is clear enough from the narrative. Yet conflating the kind of *burla* (and hence the brand of humor) present in *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, as López does, is at once an over-simplification of the matter and an over-estimation of the comic content of Alemán’s novel. On the internal dialogue in Alemán between opposing ideological forces, see Tatiana Bubnova, “Diálogo interno como fuente de ambivalencia en Mateo Alemán.” *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* 42.2 (1994): 489-506.

⁴³ See on this count Auerbach and Rikapito (cited above).

⁴⁴ Bergson (cited above).

⁴⁵ For a reading of *Guzmán* as an ironic novel through and through, see John Arias, *Guzmán de Alfarache: The Unrepentant Narrator* (London: Tamesis, 1977). Arias’ reading rightly points to the fundamental disconnect between picaresque narrator and his former, sinful self, but ultimately fails to account for the novel’s own heavy-handed moralizing tendencies. For a provocative reading on the protean nature of Alemán’s narrator (and protagonist), see Edmond Cros, *Protée et le gueux: Recherches sur les origines et la nature du récit picaresque dans Guzmán de Alfarache*. (Paris : Didier, 1967).

⁴⁶ Barry Ife offers a very valuable consideration of the way reading was connected with vice in Golden Age Spain. See his *Reading and Fiction in Golden Age Spain: A Platonist Critique and Some Picaresque Replies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴⁷ Van der Weyden’s work can be seen in the Hôtel Dieu in Beaune France. At the center of the triptych is an image of the archangel Gabriel holding a scale tipping ominously downward, implying that the number of the damned vastly outnumbers that of the saved. This same pessimistic embrace of humanity as fallen informs the ideology of Alemán.

⁴⁸ On the peculiar rhetorical play of the prologue to Alemán’s novel, see Madison J. Woods, “The Teasing Opening of the *Guzmán de Alfarache*.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 57 (1980):213-18. For a comparison to *Lazarillo* see Siebenmann (cited above).

⁴⁹ E.C. Riley offers a highly insightful explanation of Cervantes and the *vulgo*: “For Cervantes, the *vulgo* is the conventional anonymous enemy, to which he rarely refers without dislike and contempt. It is the power behind the scurrilous hordes of poetasters in the *Parnaso*, and encourages bad plays and novels. It is a collective monster not as a rule individualized...” Riley *Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). P 108-9. See also Otis Green, “On the Attitude Toward the *vulgo* in the Spanish Siglo de Oro.” *Studies in the Renaissance* 4 (1957):190-200.

Gilbert-Santamaría draws an intriguing contrast to the notion of the *vulgo* in Lope de Vega’s *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* and Alemán’s prologue. See Gilbert-Santamaria (cited above).

⁵⁰ On the subject of early-seventeenth century Spanish readership, see the aforementioned study of Chevalier. Chevalier offers data on the actual number of readers in Alemán’s Spain.

⁵¹ Indeed, a defining attribute of picaresque comedy is that it pulls the laughing subject in two directions—appealing at once to agape and pathetic identification as well as to the sense of superiority over the Other that Castelvetro and Hobbes propose in their definitions of the comic. Added to this is the intimate

relationship established in the picaresque between narrator and reader—an intimacy at odds with the distance established through the profuse comedy of self-pity that comes through in the narrative as well as the unreliability of the narrator.

⁵² On the way ideology impinges on Golden Age literature more broadly, see Anthony Cascardi, *Ideologies of History in the Spanish Golden Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). See also Virgilio Pinto Crespo, *Inquisición y control ideológico en la España del siglo XVI* (Madrid: CSIC, 1957).

⁵³ Indeed, as McGrady points out, Juan Martí's spurious sequel to *Guzmán* offers another curious parallel in the biographies of Alemán and Cervantes. Both were born within two weeks of each other in 1547. Both were imprisoned for debt, and both of their novels were continued by imitators. And in both authentic sequels, a literary castigation of the usurper is performed. See Donald McGrady, *Mateo Alemán* (Boston: Twayne, 1968). On literary imitation in Cervantes, see Stephen Gilman, *Cervantes y Avellaneda: Estudio de una Imitación* (Nápoles: Colegio de México, 1951).

⁵⁴ See Sherman Eoff, "The Picaresque Psychology of Guzmán de Alfarache." *Hispanic Review* 21 (1953):107-19. Carroll Johnson, "Defining the Picaresque: Authority and the Subject in Guzmán de Alfarache," in *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*, ed. Giancarlo Maiorino. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See also Laurie Kaples-Hohwald, "the Sermon as Literature in Guzmán de Alfarache," *Romance Quarterly* 48.1 (2001): 47-53
Gilbert-Santamaría and Nina Cox Davis (cited above).

⁵⁵ Plato, *Philebus* in *Dialogues* trans. Benjamin Jowett. (Boston: Scribner, 1871)

⁵⁶ Ife offers an intriguing contradistinction between the well-rehearsed Platonist critique of literature as a mere representation of a representation and the picaresque's justification of literary engaño.

⁵⁷ See again the passage cited from Castelvetro above.

⁵⁸ See Gutwirth (cited above).

⁵⁹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in Drei Bänden*. V. 2. (Munich: Hanser, 1954).

⁶⁰ See J.A. Jones, "The Duality and Complexity of *Guzmán de Alfarache*: Some Thoughts on the Structure and Interpretation of Alemán's novel. In *Knaves and Swindlers: Essays on the Picaresque Novel in Europe* Ed. Christine J. Whitbourn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). 25-48.

⁶¹ See Benito Brancaforte, *Guzmán de Alfarache: ¿Conversión o proceso de degradación?* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1980). Particularly interesting in Brancaforte's reading of the novel is the way he sees the possibility of continual degradation through writing—a degradation that I connect to the particularly ambivalent comedy that emerges with the picaresque.

⁶² See Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁶³ Peter Dunn argues that the relationship between Cervantes and the picaresque is slightly antagonistic. See Peter Dunn. "Cervantes De/re-Constructs the Picaresque." *Cervantes. Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* II.2 (1984): 109-131. Gustavo García López. "Rinconete y Cortadillo y la novela picaresca." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 19.2 (1999): 113-24.

⁶⁴ See Reed (cited above). Reed's study is an important inspiration behind this one, for it offers readings of an important array of novels from the picaresque to the works to contemporary American fiction. Reed is quite right to distinguish the narrative sensibility of Cervantes from that of the picaresque. On Cervantes' contributions to the budding notion of the novel in Europe, see Stephen Gilman, *The Novel According to Cervantes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) and Félix Martínez Bonati, *El Quijote y la poética de la novela* (Alcala de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 1995).

⁶⁵ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote de La Mancha*. (Madrid: Castalia, 1997). P. 296.

⁶⁶ Ibid, P. 297.

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 297.

⁶⁸ Peter Dunn (cited above) points this fact out in his book on the Spanish picaresque. On the literary marketplace in Golden Age Spain, see Chevalier and Gilbert-Santamaría (both cited above). See also Keith Whinnom, "The Problem of the Best-Seller in Spanish Golden-Age Literature." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 57 (1980):189-98.

⁶⁹ Dunn, *Spanish Picaresque Fiction* (cited above), p. 217.

⁷⁰ There are other *Novelas* in the collection that have been brought into discussion with the picaresque, most notably *La ilustre fregona*. But *La ilustre fregona* makes only a passing reference to the picaresque

lifestyle, and my discussion is therefore limited to the two novellas which most fully confront the picaresque problem.

⁷¹ All subsequent parenthetical page references to *Rinconete y Cortadillo* refer to the volume *Novelas ejemplares* (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1982).

⁷² Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Cervantes y la picaresca: notas sobre dos tipos de realismo." *Nueva revista de filología hispánica* 11 (1957): 313-42. Blanco Aguinaga argues for a basic distinction between Cervantes' narrative sensibility and that of the picaresque. Yet he does not explore in this contrast the special implications this broad distinction has for the comedy of the two modes. Blanco Aguinaga's argument is in fact an important precursor to Reed's sweeping study of the novel along the lines of picaresque and what Reed calls the "Quixotic," the latter being informed by a detached, epic vision. Blanco Aguinaga later contributed to a differential understanding of picaresque themes in Spain and England with "Picaresca española, picaresca inglesa: Sobre las determinaciones del género." *Edad de Oro* 2 (1983): 49-65.

⁷³ It is interesting to consider on this count the fine article on master/knave relations in Roman satire and the picaresque by Paulson (cited above).

⁷⁴ Ruth Pike, *Aristocrats and Traders: Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973). Pike's study provides indeed an arresting view into the social turmoil in Seville during the time in which the first picaresque texts emerged. We may also recall a passage in *Guzmán* where the evils of Seville are denounced: "Sevilla era... madre de huérfanos y capa de pecadores, donde todo es necesidad y ninguno la tiene." (*Guzmán* 161) [Seville was mother of orphans and cape of sinners, where everything is a necessity and no one has need]

⁷⁵ For a dissenting view of the *Novelas ejemplares* as carefully constructed artistic unities within a larger united framework, see Joaquin Casaldueiro. *Sentido y Forma de las Novelas ejemplares* (Madrid: Gredors, 1962). A more modern approach to the form/content issue is Aylward, E.T. *The Crucible Concept: Thematic and Narrative Patterns in Cervantes's Novelas ejemplares* (Madison: Associated University Presses, 1999).

⁷⁶ See Close (cited above). Close offers a valuable overview of the attitudes towards comedy in Golden Age Spain, as well as fine contexts for both novellas discussed here. He discusses how Cervantes' embrace of the comic involves an evolution beyond the lowbrow features of farce towards a more enlightened sense of aesthetic propriety. Close's ultimate argument is that comedy follows the same sociogenetic process that Elias ascribes to the civilizing process, and that the divergent comic forms of the Golden Age can in fact be lumped together as expressions of a common comic spirit. The idea of a uniform Golden Age comic spirit is a problematic one, as this study is among other things an endeavor to isolate points of divergence among Spanish picaresque authors and those they influenced. Rather than constituting a cultural monolith, the Golden Age (and indeed its picaresque subset) are fraught with internal contradictions and struggles for self-definition (indeed in the arena of the comic as well).

⁷⁷ The history of comic theory since the Renaissance can be read largely in terms of two competing comic traditions: the misanthropic comedy best expressed in Hobbes, whereby laughter is above all assertion of superiority over a social inferior, and the more "humane" incongruity theory later espoused by the likes of Addison and Fielding, as well as by German theorists such as Kant and August Wilhelm Schlegel. See on this count the recent book by Dickie (cited above). Cervantes appears to oscillate between a slightly misanthropic comic ethos and a more genteel humor that anticipates those eighteenth-century English writers. Picaresque comedy, I argue, represents a kind of third term, a dialectical solution to this binary opposition. See Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). P. 65.

⁷⁸ The connection here is obviously between the picaresque autobiography and the spiritual autobiography of St. Augustine, St. Teresa of Avila and others. On the picaresque as travesty of this genre, see Jauss (cited above).

⁷⁹ On the novela's picaresque connection, again see Blanco Aguinaga and Dunn (cited above). Both endeavor to establish that Cervantes flirts with aspects of the genre without adopting its core sensibility. For an emphasis on points of connection rather than difference, see Gonzalo Sobejano, "El coloquio de los perros y la novela picaresca." *Hispanic Review* 45 (1975): 33-41.

⁸⁰ García López, P. 118.

⁸¹ As in most works in this study, the comic is a highly underappreciated aspect of the *Coloquio* in the critical literature. Critics focus primarily on its form rather than its comic artistry. One significant and recent exception to this tendency is Jannine Montauban, "El chiste y su relación con El Coloquio de los

perros.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 86.3 (2009): 387-400. Montauban argues for a Freudian understanding of the novel’s comic impulse, particularly in Berganza’s use of comic vitriol as an unconscious response to torment.

⁸² On Cervantes’ eclectic incorporation of animal themes from Apuleius, Lucian, and Aesop, see Paul Carranza, Cipión, Berganza, and the Aesopic Tradition. *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 23.1 (2003): 141-163. See also Ricipito’s fine work on the connection between Apuleius and the Spanish picaresque, “The Golden Ass of Apuleius and the Spanish Picaresque Novel.” *Revista hispánica moderna* 40, 3-4 (1978): 77-85.

⁸³ Page citations for the *Coloquio* refer to *Novelas Ejemplares* v. III. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1982.

⁸⁴ In his *Lectures on the Comic Writers of Great Britain*, Hazlitt observes that “there is nothing more powerfully humorous than what is called keeping in comic character, as we see it very finely exemplified in Sancho Panza and Don Quixote. The proverbial phlegm and the romantic gravity of these two celebrated persons may be regarded as the height of this kind of excellence. The deep feeling of character strengthens the sense of the ludicrous. Keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity; a determined and laudable attachment to the incongruous and singular. The regularity completes the contradiction.” Quoted in Lauter (cited above), p. 270.

⁸⁵ Alban Forcione, *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). P 22. Forcione’s study is marvelously learned and demonstrates great mastery over the text. For Forcione, as for a good number of critics, including Ricipito and El Saffar, the central episode of the novella is the discovery of witchcraft. See Ruth El Saffar, *Novel to Romance: A Study of Cervantes’s Novelas ejemplares* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). See also Joseph Ricipito, *Formalistic Aspects of Cervantes’s Novelas ejemplares*. Volume 16 (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

⁸⁶ Lazarillo’s narrative is from the outset a power struggle, and it is shaped not by individual consciousness but through the social space of the narrative—a space both private and public. His narrative must be rhetorically refined according to the “private” relationship between author and *Vuestra Merced* and the more public one involving the extended readership.

⁸⁷ Walter J. Ong, “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction,” *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9-21. For more on the significance of the dialogue form, see Thomas Hart, *Cervantes’ Exemplary Fictions* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993). Hart’s argument that the dialogue format and the character of Berganza as representative of a broader Renaissance ideal of the flexible self exemplified in the writings of Pico della Mirandola and other humanists is compelling. On this same topic, see Thomas Greene, “The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature.” In *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*. Ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). Murillo also highlights the importance of the dialogue form in the novella. L.A. Murillo, “Cervantes’ Coloquio de los perros,” a Novel-Dialogue.” *Modern Philology* 58 (1960): 174-85. For Murillo, despite the intimations of witchcraft and chaos, and indeed despite the sheer absurdity of dogs speaking, there remains a rational order to the novella. On the influence of Erasmus’ *Colloquies* on Cervantes, see the fine study of Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963). Kaiser spends far more time on Erasmus than Cervantes but his closing chapter does a nice job of linking the two. For more emphasis on Cervantes in the connection, see Antonio Vilanova, *Erasmus y Cervantes* (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1989). Vilanova does not write with the erudition of Kaiser but he does emphasize how Cervantes, here in the *Coloquio* and elsewhere in his artistic vision, gave voice to Erasmus’ humanism. The classic study on Cervantes’ aesthetic and philosophical influences remains Américo Castro, *El pensamiento de Cervantes* (Madrid: Casa Editorial Hernando, 1925).

⁸⁸ For a valuable discussion of Cervantes’ sense of comic and aesthetic moderation in relation to some of his peers, see Close (cited above) and E.C. Riley’s classic *Cervantes’s Theory of the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). Riley points out that Cervantes, despite being one of the greatest contributors to the evolution of comic literature, has surprisingly little to offer in the area of comic theory. Riley discusses for instance how Cervantes’ responds to El Pinciano’s theory of comedy as a confluence of the incredible and the extraordinary (indeed, such a confluence occurs in the *Coloquio* and in the mind of Cervantes’ greatest knight errant. Murillo (cited above) likewise is concerned with emphasizing the victory of rational control over comic excess in the *Coloquio* and elsewhere in the *Novelas*.

⁸⁹ The element of restraint in laughter does not begin or end with Cervantes. In the *Philebus*, Plato describes laughter in terms of an absence of self-knowledge. Swift, in his “Essay on Polite Conversation,” uses the absurd Simon Wagstaff to oppose natural and learned laughter. Whereas the former represents

“involuntary Distortion of the Muscles,” learned laughter is a mark of good taste and polite behavior. Swift of course introduces this dichotomy only to expose it as false and absurd, but as Simon demonstrates, Fielding later takes it up again in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* and appears to make Wagstaff’s argument earnest. Simon goes on to oppose the misanthropic/brutish laughter of Hobbes (who couched laughter in terms of a “sudden glory” won over a social inferior) and the polite laughter advocated by Addison and Fielding. See Richard Simon, *The Labyrinth of the Comic: Theory and Practice from Fielding to Freud* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1985). For a twentieth-century attempt to construct an opposition between base and aesthetic laughter, see Etienne Souriau. “Le risible et le comique.” *Journal de Psychologie* 41 (1949): 145-83. The postmodern deconstruction of high and low might just as well rebut Souriau’s binary opposition of the “risible” (that is the instinctual, animalistic impulse to laugh) and the “comique” (which induces laughter of the refined, aesthetic sort).

⁹⁰ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Don Quixote* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), P. 52. On Cervantes’ struggle to reconcile the internal contradictions in his comic aesthetic, see John Weiger, “*Don Quixote*: The Comedy in Spite of Itself.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 60 (1983): 283-92.

⁹¹ Gilbert-Santamaría (cited above) argues quite convincingly with regard to the *Guzmán* that the prurient picaresque detail, though ostensibly the object of condemnation in the novel, is in fact a necessary element to appeal to the tastes of the *vulgo*. In other words, the novel’s inclusion of such detail is driven as much by the demands of the literary market as by a genuine concern with imparting moral edification.

⁹² See Forcione and El Saffar (cited above). See also Francisco Sánchez. *Lectura y representación: análisis cultural de las Novelas ejemplares de Cervantes* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). Sánchez is most interested here in the ways the larger cultural theme of witchcraft plays into the social fabric of the novel. See also Pamela Waley, “The Unity of the Casamiento engañoso and the Coloquio de los perros.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 34 (1957): 201-12, who argues for a tighter thematic connection between the two novellas that goes beyond the copresence of Campuzano and Peralta.

⁹³ Quixote of course draws its energy from a similar idea, but there at least the dissonance created between the mock-heroic and the recalcitrance of reality provides a deep well of comic happenstance and incongruity. Alonso Quijano assumes by his life’s end, ironically enough, the status of a hero, and the final pages of Cervantes’ great novel monumentalize the same madman who for significant portions of the first part of the novel had been a constant source of scorn and venomous laughter.

⁹⁴ For readings which emphasize the novel’s linguistic play over its plot and characters, see above all Leo Spitzer. “Zur Kunst Quevedos in seinem *Buscón*” In *Wege der Forschung* CLXIII *Pikarische Welt*. Ed. Helmut Heidenreich. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969). Pp. 40-60. Fernando Lázaro Carreter. “Originalidad del *Buscón*,” In *Estilo barroco y personalidad creadora*. Salamanca: Anaya, 1966; Raimundo Lida. “Sobre el arte verbal del *Buscón*.” In *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972). Lida stresses here that the novel is inherently hostile to realism and that is primarily an exhibition of stylistic élan. Rico (cited above) highlights that this lack of realism and verisimilitude undermines its own literary aspirations. I argue quite the contrary, namely that Quevedo self-consciously undermines realism in order to thwart any greater moralizing project. In this regard, Quevedo’s novel is not altogether unlike that of Cervantes in the two picaresque novellas discussed in the previous chapter.

⁹⁵ Rico (cited above) For an argument against Rico which attempts to qualify Quevedo’s novel as serious moral literature, see Joseph Ricapito. “Quevedo’s *Buscón*—‘Libro de entretenimiento’ or ‘Libro de desengaño’: An Overview.” In *Romance Quarterly* 32 (1985) PP. 153-164 See also the moralizing argument put forth by Terrence May “Good and Evil in the *Buscón*: A Survey.” *MLR* 45 (1950): 319-35.

⁹⁶ Lázaro Carreter writes: “Domina en el *Buscón*, sobre todo, una burla de Segundo grado, una burla por la burla misma, reflexivamente lograda, que no se dirige al objeto—con todas sus consecuencias sentimentales—sino que parte de él en busca del concepto. El perfil novelesco del libro es sólo el marco, dentro del cual el ingenio de Quevedo—“las fuerzas de mi ingenio”—alumbraba una densa red de conceptos.” Cited above P. 140.

⁹⁷ See Parker (cited above).

⁹⁸ Richard Bjornson, “Moral Blindness in Quevedo’s *Buscón*,” *Romantic Review* 67 (1976): 50-59.

⁹⁹ See Edmond Cros. *L’aristocrate et le carnaval des gueux: Étude sur le Buscón de Quevedo*. Montpellier: CERS, 1975. Cros’ reading of the novel is one of the few book-length studies to focus on Quevedo’s novel. His essentially Marxist reading offers insight into the complex array of social and ideological forces that run through the text. Malcolm Read, *Visions in Exile: The Body in Spanish Literature and Linguistics, 1500-1800*, Purdue University Monographs in Romance Languages (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990).

Read does a nice job of highlighting the intensely physical nature of the novel, but the emphasis here is not that the physical degradation in the novel exists on comic terms, but that it offers insight into the status of marginalized subjects in Golden Age Spain. Anne Cruz, (cited above) makes a similar emphasis on social marginality, arguing how the novel's scatological motifs complement the theme rather than undermine its seriousness.

¹⁰⁰ *Lazarillo* is only forthright here in a relative sense. Its prologue emphasizes its status as self-consciously literary, and the many wiles and contradictions in its narration are at odds with the invitations to intimate and straightforward dialogue between the narrator and *Vuestra Merced*. The *Buscón* self-consciously employs a much less direct form of "communication" to the reader, highlighting through this obfuscation the layers of mediation inherent in any literary speech act.

¹⁰¹ Claudio Guillén, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," in *Literature as System*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). On the difficulty of finding a place for Quevedo's novel within the picaresque tradition, see Peter Dunn, "Problems for a Model of the Picaresque and the Case of Quevedo's *Buscón*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 59 (1982): 95-105. Dunn's line of argumentation shares important similarities to my own—namely that the picaresque as a generic construct, even at its early stages, is a problem. But Dunn says little of how the comic figures into that problem.

¹⁰² Meredith defines the hypergelasts in strict opposition to the agelasts (the sworn enemies of the comic). For Meredith, the hypergelasts are "the excessive laughers, ever-laughing, who are as clappers of a bell, that may be rung by a breeze, a grimace; who are so loosely put together that a wink will shake them," (4) and he goes on to declare that "to laugh at everything is to have no appreciation of the comic of comedy." (4) See Meredith (cited above).

¹⁰³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* V. 2 (Berlin: Koenemann) P 216. (translation mine) I should mention in passing that despite Schopenhauer's scorn for low humor, he is an avid endorser of Spanish Golden Age writing.

¹⁰⁴ Souriau (cited above).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ All parenthetical text citations refer to Francisco de Quevedo, *El Buscón*. Madrid: Castalia, 1990.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Giddings, *The Tradition of Smollett* (London: Methuen, 1967) P. 31. Giddings' study is eloquent and incisive, and it properly assesses the influence of the Spanish picaresque on Smollett.

¹⁰⁸ See Maxime Chevalier and Gilbert-Santamaria (cited above).

¹⁰⁹ See Vincenzo Maggi, *On the Ridiculous* Trans. George Miltz. In Lauter (cited above), Pp. 64-73. It is interesting to contrast Maggi and Castelvetro's reading of Aristotle. As we observed in our discussion of Alemán, the emphasis on Castelvetro is on the comic as a means to an end, namely the uncovering of our fundamentally sinful state.

¹¹⁰ For more on *agudeza* and the movement of *conceptismo* (with which Quevedo is often associated), see Mercedes Blanco., "La agudeza en el *Buscón*." In *Estudios sobre el Buscón* Ed. Alfonso Rey (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2003). Pp. 133-172.

¹¹¹ See Sigmund Freud. *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* In *Gesammelte Werke* Volume 6. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1999). Freud's description of condensation in humor is especially applicable to the *Buscón*'s intense punning and *conceptos*.

¹¹² Spitzer, (cited above).

¹¹³ On the rich signification of the body in Quevedo, see Read (cited above).

¹¹⁴ I owe this explanation of an otherwise highly obscure reference to Domingo Ynduráin's footnote in his edition of the novel (cited above) P. 100. For an excellent discussion of the grotesque element in Quevedo's comedy, see James Iffland, *Quevedo and the Grotesque* (London: Tamesis, 1978). Iffland's focus, to be sure, is on Quevedo's poetry, but the equally themes are equally present in the *Buscón*.

¹¹⁵ See on this count my earlier chapter on the *Lazarillo*, where I argue that *Lazarillo* transcends the grotesque humor of Apuleius and Rabelais by offering a character who is more than a mere whipping boy present to incite us with Hobbesian laughter.

¹¹⁶ For a deeper understanding of the richness of Quevedo's literary idiom within the larger linguistic context of Golden Age Spain, see Maxime Chevalier, *Quevedo y su tiempo: La agudeza verbal* (Barcelona: Critica, 1992). I make a similar argument regarding the picaro's stylized language and the problem of verisimilitude in a later chapter on *La pícaro Justina*.

¹¹⁷ Francisco Rico's reading of the *Buscón* as a bad picaresque novel highlights the implausibility of this disconnect. See Rico (cited above). Yet whereas Rico sees logical incongruity and sloppy composition, I

see one of the fascinating problems of picaresque—namely the narrator’s masochistic delight in recounting past torment. In a culture obsessed with honor and social respectability, picaros pillory themselves with such descriptions.

¹¹⁸ This is an important early example of what becomes a dominant theme in satirical French writing of the 17th and 18th centuries—namely the poète crotté. In a later chapter, I will argue the connection between this brand of writing and the picaresque tradition.

¹¹⁹ Julia Epstein, “Fiction Making in Quevedo’s *Buscón*.” *Romance Quarterly* 30 (1983): 277-292. See also Anthony Zahareas, “The Historical Fiction of Art and Morality in Quevedo’s *Buscón*.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 61 (1984): 432-43. Whereas Epstein sees in the novel’s rejection of realism a celebration of the literary for its own sake, Zahareas focuses on the ways in which this rejection exposes ideological contradictions in society.

¹²⁰ Bergson P. 396.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* P. 396.

¹²² On the social dynamic at work, see Cros (cited above), and also Paul Julian Smith’s intriguing reading of the novel’s cruel aristocratic scorn in *Writing in the Margin: Spanish Literature of the Golden Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). Smith’s focus is to apply deconstructive practices to Spanish Golden Age literature in the way Terence Cave had for French literature. See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Yet what makes Smith’s reading of the *Buscón* problematic on this count is that his intense concern with the social “reality” outside of the text is at odds with his ostensible deconstructive practices.

¹²³ See Matthias Bauer, *Der Schelmenroman* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994).

The notion of stigma management in Bauer might easily find an earlier analogue in Freud, who hypothesizes in his study that wit is a response to unconscious forces, often early childhood trauma or feelings of inferiority. Iffland, Parker, and Cruz (all cited above) draw on Freudian ideas of early trauma (particularly in the *rey de gallos* episode in which Pablos is covered in the town’s excrement and forced to endure extreme humiliation that would, presumably, inspire the later bitterness we encounter in his narrative towards mankind).

¹²⁴ We may recall once more that Ginés de Pasamonte in the Quixote speaks of his efforts to outdo in his own picaresque narrative all other antecedents, and he makes explicit reference to a genre.

¹²⁵ On Quevedo’s problematic relationship to the feminine, see Amédée Mas *La caricature de la femme, du mariage et de l’amour dans l’œuvre de Quevedo* (Paris: Ediciones Hispanoamericanas, 1957).

¹²⁶ Scholars have embraced with great excitement the idea of the pícaro as iconoclastic. See Edward Friedman, *The Antiheroine’s Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987). Friedman does a nice job applying theory of narrative discourse to the problem of the female picaresque, particularly in highlighting the rupture between narrating subject and narrated protagonist. See also Anne Kaler, *The Pícaro: From Hera to Fantasy Heroine* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State Press, 1991). See also Julio Rodríguez-Luis, “Pícaras: The Modal Approach to the Picaresque.” *Comparative Literature* 31 (1979): 32-46, and Marcia Welles “The Pícaro: Towards Female Autonomy, or the Vanity of Virtue.” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 33 (1986): 63-70. On broader questions regarding the nexus between the feminine presence and the comic, see Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998). Among those studies cited above, only Bilger successfully manages to assess how the problem of comedy impinges on gender trouble. She celebrates the autonomy of the pícaro and indeed connects this autonomy to the motif of defiance through laughter. The male audience of these texts is therefore mocked by the proud pícaro.

¹²⁷ Francisco Delicado’s *La Lozana andaluza* (1527) is dated a generation before the first publication of Lazarillo, so its classification as properly picaresque is a dubious one. It lacks for one the peculiarly picaresque first person perspective and its theme of sly subversion of masters. For this reason, scholars such as Hanrahan, Sieber, and Blanco Aguinaga classify *La pícaro Justina* as the female picaresque narrative. See Thomas Hanrahan. *La mujer en la novela picaresca española*. 2 vols. (Madrid: Ediciones Porrúa Turanzas, 1967), and Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, “Picaresca española, picaresca inglesa: Sobre las determinaciones del género.” *Edad de Oro* 2 (1983) 49-65.

¹²⁸ Parenthetical citation of Úbeda’s novel refers to the two volume edition of *La Pícaro Justina*, (Madrid: Editoria Nacional, 1977).

¹²⁹ For a good discussion on the nature of *engaño* in Golden Age literature, see Américo Castro, *El pensamiento de Cervantes*. (Barcelona: Noguer, 1972). See also Mohlo (cited above) and especially Ife

(cited above). For Ife, the picaresque represents an assertion of the value of reading against a critical backdrop that had denigrated the idea of prose fiction. See also E. C. Riley (cited above) and Paul Julian Smith, (cited above).

¹³⁰ See on this count Nina Cox Davis, "Breaking the Barriers: The Birth of López de Úbeda's *Pícara Justina*." In Giancarlo Maiorino, ed. *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). 137-58.

¹³¹ Showalter's essay on male pretensions to feminist causes nicely illuminates the problematic nature of female picaresque writing of this sort. See Elaine Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year." *Raritan* 3.2 (1983): 130-49.

¹³² Jonas Andries Van Praag, "Die Schelmin in der spanischen Literatur." In *Pikarische Welt: Schriften zum europäischen Schelmenroman*. Ed. Helmut Heidenreich. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969). 147-64.

¹³³ See Cruz (cited above).

¹³⁴ On the destabilizing effects of comedy on hierarchies, see Wolfgang Preisendenz and Rainer Warning, eds. *Das Komische* (Munich: W. Fink, 1976). See also Harvey Mindess, *Laughter and Liberation* (Los Angeles: Nash, 1971). For an appreciation of laughter's subversive role in various cultures from Bali to Japan to Lithuania, see Ron Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

¹³⁵ For a discussion of Quevedo's misogyny, see Amédée Mas (cited above). On the distinction between high and low in comedy see Souriau (cited above), Gutwirth (cited above), and Maurice Charney, *Comedy High and Low* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1978.

¹³⁶ Bruno Damiani, *Francisco López de Úbeda* (Boston: Twayne, 1977). P. 133.

¹³⁷ René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). P. 211.

¹³⁸ See especially on this count Terence Cave (cited above). For a more focused approach to Rabelais that marvelously situates him within the larger framework of Renaissance comedy, see Thomas Greene, *Rabelais: A Study in Comic Courage*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970). See also Ménager (cited above).

¹³⁹ For a fine overview of laughter as a response to logical incongruity, see Otto Rommel, (cited above) Pp. 1-38. See also Marie Collins Swaybey, *Comic Laughter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

¹⁴⁰ On Grimmelshausen's own intertextual agon, see Hans Wagener, "Simplicissimo zu Trutz! Zur Struktur von Grimmelshausens "Courasche" *The German Quarterly* 43 (1970): 177-187.

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of the literary landscape of Germany in the seventeenth century and the infiltration of the Spanish picaresque, see Jürgen Jacobs, *Der deutsche Schelmenroman* (Munich: Artemis, 1983). See also Volker Meid, "Von der *Pícara Justina* zu Grimmelshausens *Courasche*." In *Simpliciana* 24 (2002): 15-26. See also Gerhart Hoffmeister, *Spanien und Deutschland: Geschichte und Dokumentation der literarischen Beziehungen*, (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1976). Although Hoffmeister's focus is on the fascination of German Romantics with Cervantes and other Golden Age Spanish authors, he still offers a valuable historical discussion of earlier Spanish influences on Grimmelshausen and his contemporaries.

¹⁴² On the relationship between Grimmelshausen and Alemán in particular, see Christoph Schweitzer, "Grimmelshausen and the Picaresque Novel," In *A Companion to the Works of Grimmelshausen*. Ed. Karl F. Otto. (Rochester: Camden House, 2003). Schweitzer does a nice job of identifying the Spanish inspiration of Grimmelshausen and highlights the availability of German translations of Alemán. For a discussion of how Grimmelshausen drew specifically on *La pícaro Justina*, see Ulrich Stadler, "Parodistisches in der *Justina Pícaro*: Über die Entstehungsbedingungen und zur Wirkungsgeschichte von Úbedas Schelmenroman in Deutschland," *Arcadia* 7 (1972):158-70. Karl Zaenker emphasizes how Grimmelshausen draws on the basic idea of Úbeda's novel while pursuing a different literary agenda. See his "Grimmelshausen und die *Pícara Justina*" *Daphnis* 27 (1998): 631-53.

¹⁴³ We should recall on this count the waning of comic/narrative energy in the final three tractados of *Lazarillo*.

¹⁴⁴ Citations of *Courasche* refer to Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Lebensbeschreibung der Erzbetrügerin und Landstörzerin Courage*. (Munich: Goldmann, 1969).

¹⁴⁵ Truly, in the picaresque tradition, only *Lazarillo* expresses himself in a plain language befitting a fellow of lowly upbringing, and for that reason the first picaresque narrative is, on a linguistic level at least, the most plausible.

¹⁴⁶ One critic goes so far as to maintain that Grimmelshausen's contribution to the feminine picaresque entails a richer dialogue with theology and aesthetics. See Jean-Marie Valentin, "Théologie et esthétique: Sur le chapitre premier de la *Courasche* de Grimmelshausen." *Etudes Germaniques* 42 (1987): 278-290. Valentin argues that the novel presents itself as mere entertainment but in fact offers profound insight into some of the larger theological debates of the age.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Parker's discussion of Grimmelshausen dwells a great deal on the Thirty Years' War, but Parker says very little about the playfulness in these novels. Lacking from his otherwise insightful discussion is proper appreciation of the conflict between the ludic energy of Grimmelshausen's picaresque comedy and the historical urgency of the era.

¹⁴⁸ For an intriguing discussion of the connection between late Renaissance visual art and prose, see Ryan Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Giles' coverage of the picaresque is disappointingly brief but he nevertheless draws interesting connections between figures in picaresque writing and the parodies of saints in late medieval Spain. Similar suggestions have been made by both Jauss and Baumann (cited above), and Giles' study could have benefitted from a deeper engagement with those German studies. For a brief but useful introduction of Bosch's own struggles with ecclesiastical order, see Heinrich Goertz, *Hieronymus Bosch* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977).

¹⁴⁹ For a fine discussion of how narrative content was received and recycled in Baroque literature, see Günther Weydt, *Nachahmung und Schöpfung im Barock Studien um Grimmelshausen* (Bern: Lang, 1968). Weydt's study does not dwell too much on the Spanish picaresque, but it is intriguing to apply the Renaissance and Baroque notion of *imitatio* to the picaresque, which demonstrates a resistance to imitation and a dogged insistence on peculiarity. On the larger issues of imitation in the Renaissance and later, see the classic study of Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁰ Cervantes, we should recall, plays with mediation not only in the *Quixote* but in his two picaresque novellas discussed earlier. In all instances, such mediation is to be contrasted with the illusion of direct presence presented by the narrating picaro.

¹⁵¹ Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (New York: Norton, 2004). P. 3

¹⁵² For a new account of how Grimmelshausen's novels represent the grim reality of war-torn Germany, see Italo Michele Battafarano, *Simpliciana Bellica: Grimmelshausens Kriegsdarstellung und ihre Rezeption* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

¹⁵³ See Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁴ Some critics have attempted to identify the seeds of feminism in Grimmelshausen's iconoclasm. See on this count Rainer Hillenbrand, "Courasche als emanzipierte Frau. Einige erstaunliche Modernitäten bei Grimmelshausen." *Daphnis* 27 (1998): 185-199. For a good discussion of the imbrications of literature and gender dynamics, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1991). For a feminist reading of Grimmelshausen's novel that considers the way new economic sensibility expresses itself, see Thomas Mast, "The Allure of the World: Capitalism and Gender in Grimmelshausen's *Courasche*." *Seminar* 34 (1998): 95-109.

¹⁵⁵ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). For a perspective on the birth of the novel less centered on individual authors, see Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Davis sees the development of the novel in relation to changing uses of print and narrative. See also the fine work of John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), which views Defoe's narratives in the context of popular fiction, both the criminal biography and more serious Puritan writings.

¹⁵⁶ Reed (cited above) P. 99.

¹⁵⁷ Watt's account of the origins of the novel attribute Defoe's narrative innovations (and indeed the emergence of the novel in England more broadly) to a peculiarly Protestant spiritual interiority and the work-ethic of a merchant class largely absent in Spain or elsewhere. Such an account naturally implies that the Spanish picaresque and Cervantes fail to achieve the "formal realism" of modern novels, and this bias against Spanish literature has prompted Parker and Reed (cited above) to argue forcefully against Watt. Both maintain namely that realism in European fiction is born with the Spanish. Perhaps trumping both schools is the marvelously clever definition of "realism" offered by Terry Eagleton: "To call something

'realist' is to confess that it is not the real thing. False teeth can be realistic, but not the Foreign Office...[Realism] is the form which seeks to merge itself thoroughly with the world that its status as art is suppressed. It is as though its representations have become so transparent that we stare straight through them to reality itself. The ultimate representation, so it seems, would be one which was identical with what it represented. But then, ironically, it would no longer be a representation at all. A poet whose words somehow "become" apples and plums would not be a poet but a greengrocer." See Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2004). P. 10.

¹⁵⁸ See on this count G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Starr speaks of a contrast between the haphazard organization of the narrative and the far more systematic development of Moll's spiritual condition. See also Rudolf Stamm, "Daniel Defoe: An Artist in the Puritan Tradition," *Philological Quarterly* XV (1936): 225-246.

¹⁵⁹ The actual title of Grimmelshausen's novel reads: "Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch/Das ist: Die Beschreibung des Lebens eines seltsamen Vaganten, genannt Melchior Sternfels von Fuchshaim, wo und welchergestalt er nämlich in diese Welt kommen, was er darin gesehen, gelernet, erfahren und ausgestanden, auch warum er solche wieder freiwillig quittiert./Überaus lustig, und männiglich nützlich zu lesen..."

¹⁶⁰ See J. Paul Hunter, *Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966). Hunter does a fine job of demonstrating the inner tensions in Defoe's worldview and the way these tensions come to the fore in his writing. The focus of course is on *Robinson Crusoe* but many of the same arguments can be extended to *Moll*.

¹⁶¹ For a fine discussion of Defoe and the historical factors informing them, see John Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Richetti picks up where he left off in his fine earlier study on the origins of the English novel and considers how cultural contradictions in English society play out within Defoe's novels. See also the relatively recent comparative study of Janet Bertsch, *Storytelling in the Works of Bunyan, Grimmelshausen, Defoe and Schnabel* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2004). Bertsch explores the relationship of fiction and Scripture in the religious fiction of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but particularly useful is her emphasis of how deeply Defoe's narratives were informed by religious debates of the day. Her comparative approach is appreciated, although the transition from Grimmelshausen to Defoe is not as smooth as one would hope. For a dissenting view emphasizing the secular rather than the religious aspect of Defoe, see Ian Bell, *Defoe's Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

¹⁶² On the struggles for women in Defoe's day to attain social respectability and a measure of independence, see Bridgit Hill, *Women, Work, & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1994). Hill catalogues the systematic discrimination against women leading up to the century and hence provides a useful context for understanding Moll's struggles (the novel is of course set in the seventeenth century). For a view of Defoe's attitude towards women as expressed in the novel, see Tommy Watson, "Defoe's Attitude Toward Marriage and the Position of Women as Revealed in *Moll Flanders*," *Southern Quarterly* III (1964): 1-8.

¹⁶³ The full quote reads: "Ultimately, one might call Defoe a comic artist. The structure of *Moll Flanders* itself defies resolution. In giving us the life-span, with its eager thrust from one experience to the next, Defoe robs life of its climactic structure." Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964). P. 266. What Price wishes to argue by stating this is not so much that Defoe is intentionally comic in the way that say Úbeda or Grimmelshausen, are, but rather that his novelistic construction is sufficiently loose in *Moll* so as to subvert any high moralizing ideals.

¹⁶⁴ Price, P. 233.

¹⁶⁵ On the relationship between the idleness motif and the Spanish picaresque, see Ife (quoted above). On the way *Moll Flanders* negotiates between criminality and bourgeois decency, see Gary Hentzi, "Holes in the Heart: *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and 'Agreeable Crime,'" *Boundary 2* 19 (1991): 174-200. For a larger discussion of how *Moll* operates within the larger cultural logic of eighteenth-century society (and its views of punishment and repression), see John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Drawing on Foucault's imbrications of power structures and culture, Bender sees Defoe's novel in the context of a larger eighteenth-century system of punishment. To better appreciate Bender's work, it is worth viewing it

in the context of Foucault's original argument. See on this count Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

¹⁶⁶ On the peculiarities of Moll as narrator, see Maximillian Novak. "Defoe's 'Indifferent Monitor': The Complexity of *Moll Flanders*." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 3 (1970): 353-7. See also George Butte, *I Know that You Know that I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004). Butte describes the "deep intersubjectivity" that is in fact a historical shift in the way consciousness comes to the fore in narrative. In his later analysis of film, Butte considers how such moments of intersubjectivity can in fact disrupt the comic experience. I argue that precisely such a disruption occurs in *Moll*.

¹⁶⁷ Watt, P. 134.

¹⁶⁸ The Swift quote appears in the Norton critical edition of *Moll Flanders* (cited above) P. 256.

¹⁶⁹ Indeed, as Reed points out in the citation above, such an appeal to the reader's comic inclinations would have dovetailed nicely with their overall association with the Spanish picaresque as a shallow, merry genre of writing.

¹⁷⁰ On the artificiality of Moll's autobiographical tale, see Ralph Rader, "Defoe, Richardson, Joyce, and the Concept of Form in the Novel." In *Autobiography, Biography, and the Novel: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Rader uses *Moll Flanders* to point out how Defoe's novels are "simulated naïve" autobiographies. On the male/female divide in Moll and how it "outs" the narrative as artificial, see Helene Moglen, "(Un)Gendering the Subject: Towards a Feminist Theory of the Novel." *Genre* 25 (1992): 65-89.

¹⁷¹ See M.G. McClung, "A Source for Moll Flander's Husband." *Notes and Queries* XVIII (1971): 329-330.

¹⁷² A recent article argues against the longstanding notion of Defoe's heightened degree of realism, most famously advocated by Watt. See Daniel Spielman, "The Value of Money in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*." *Modern Language Review* 107 (2012): 65-87. Spielman points out how the quantities of money exchanged in these novels is not at all in line with realistic expectations of the day, hence undermining their verisimilitude. For an earlier essay on the question of economics in *Moll*, see Samuel Rogal, "the Profit and Loss of *Moll Flanders*." *SNNTS* 5 (1973): 98-103, and for a fine book-length study of all matters economic pertaining to Defoe, see Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth-Century: Accounting for Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁷³ See Lukács (cited above).

¹⁷⁴ For an intriguing account of how women are both perpetrators and victims in *Moll* and *Roxana*, see Paula Backscheider, "Defoe's Women: Snares and Prey." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 5 (1976): 103-20

¹⁷⁵ Francisco Rico (cited above) has pointed out how the gap between narrating self and narrated self is always a problem in picaresque fiction.

¹⁷⁶ Close (cited above).

¹⁷⁷ See Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Paulson, whose fine book on satire has informed this chapter, has also traced in a more recent book Cervantes' profound influence on the aesthetic and comic theory of eighteenth-century England Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁷ See Guillén, (cited above).

¹⁷⁸ Lewis Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

¹⁷⁹ On the heterogeneity of Fielding's novel, see Leonard Lutwack, "Mixed and Uniform Prose Styles in the Novel." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 18 (1960): 350-57. Lutwack considers how the mixed and uniform style influence plot structure in the novel, which negotiates between the looseness of the traveler's tale (or indeed the picaresque) and the providence typical of Fielding.

¹⁷⁹ See Guillén, (cited above).

¹⁸⁰ Charles Knight argues that there is in fact a breakdown of narrative authority in *Joseph Andrews*. See "Joseph Andrews and the Failure of Authority." *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 4 (1992): 109-24.

¹⁸¹ For a good recent article emphasizing the ironic distance of Fielding's narrator, see Jill Campbell, "Fielding's Style." *ELH* 72.2 (2005): 407-28.

¹⁸² Reed (cited above).

¹⁸³ Nabokov (cited above).

¹⁸⁴ Wayne C. Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*." *PMLA* 67 (1952): 163-85.

¹⁸⁵ Impressive studies on Cervantes' theory of the novel have been undertaken. The most famous remains that of E.C. Riley, who sets out to reconstruct on the basis of Cervantes' literary works the basis for a theory of the novel (in an age when no one really wrote novel theory).. In more recent times, similarly impressive work has been done by Félix Martínez-Bonati (cited above).

¹⁸⁶ All parenthetical page citations from *Joseph Andrews* refer to Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews with Shamela and Related Writings* (New York: Norton, 1987).

¹⁸⁷ Cervantes represents a problem in the history of comic theory. On the one hand, he anticipates the critical shift from Hobbes to Addison, from laughter as "sudden glory" to laughter as appreciation of rational incongruity. Yet Cervantes includes in *Don Quixote* and elsewhere more than a few moments of brutal physical comedy that hark back to "less civilized" comic traditions. On the "civilizing" influences of Cervantine comedy, see Close (cited above), on the primitive elements, see Nabokov (cited above).

¹⁸⁸ On Fielding's place in the context of a larger "laughter debate" in eighteenth-century Britain, see Simon Dickie, "Joseph Andrews and the Great Laughter Debate." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2005): 271-32.

¹⁸⁹ For a discussion of the benevolent humor in Fielding, see A.E. Dyson, "Satiric and Comic Theory in Relation to Fielding." *Modern Language Quarterly* 18 (1957): 225-37. Dyson distinguishes in this essay between satire's harsh judgment of man in relation to an ideal and comedy's more relaxed approach that considers an ethical norm, associating the latter with Fielding. Paulson's important book on satire takes a different approach to the problem. Paulson approaches *Joseph Andrews* in relation to Lucianic satire. See also Paulson, *Satire* (cited above) For Simon, the dichotomy between satire and comedy is a false one, and Fielding's aim in *Joseph Andrews* remains a benevolent one, namely to "reform the reader's laughter in this manner and thus to reconcile comedy with Christian morality." See Simon, (cited above)

¹⁹⁰ For an assessment of how *Joseph Andrews* confronts the issue of poverty in eighteenth-century Britain, see Christopher Parkes, "Joseph Andrews and the Control of the Poor." *Studies in the Novel*, 39:1 (2007): 17-30.

¹⁹¹ Tatler No 242 (October 26, 1710). Quoted in Paulson *Satire*, P. 60.

¹⁹² See C.J. Rawson, *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress* (London: Routledge, 1972). Rawson considers how Fielding deals with the fragility of systems of order. For more explicit treatment of Fielding's politics, see Brian McCrea, *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

¹⁹³ I borrow the term from Frederic Amory. See his essay "Rabelais' Hurricane Word-Formations." *Études Rabelaisiennes* 17 (1983): 61-74.

¹⁹⁴ For an excellent summary not only of Cervantes' influence on Fielding but also that of French imitators of Cervantes such as Scarron, Marivaux, and Lesage, see Homer Goldberg, *The Art of Joseph Andrews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). One of the best studies of Fielding's style is that of Leo Braudy. See his *Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding, and Gibbon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Braudy's book manages quite successfully to consider Fielding's concern for epic design in the context of other non-fictional works. For insight into the notion of providence in Fielding's narrative style, which I associate with the epic comedy in Fielding, see also Aubrey J. Williams, "Interpositions of Providence and Design of Fielding's Novels," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 70 (1971): 265-86.

¹⁹⁵ See Guillén, (cited above).

¹⁹⁶ J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

¹⁹⁷ Martin Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

¹⁹⁸ Critics have largely failed to identify the humorous mood of Wilson's tale, let alone the picaresque connection. Sheldon Sacks characterizes the interaction between Adams and Wilson in the following way: "In Mr. Wilson's tale, value judgments are again the result of the interaction of an important ethical agent with the narrator of the digressive tale...Mr. Wilson, the strayed lamb, has found his way back to the path of virtue and is trustworthy both in the narration and in the interpretation of the events of his life." Sacks reduces this critical interlude of picaresque comedy within the epic framework of the novel to the status of

a moralizing digression. See his *Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding, with Glances at Swift, Johnson, and Richardson* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1964). P. 214.

¹⁹⁹ In this regard, my argument runs directly counter to that of both Goldberg and Battestin (cited above).

²⁰⁰ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

²⁰¹ I am referring here to Bakhtin's distinction between the polyphony and heteroglossia of Dostoyevsky. See his *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* Ed. and trans Carl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Fielding, despite his eagerness to wed high and low, is no master of polyphonic composition, and even when characters like Wilson appear to take over the reins, they still speak with Fielding's voice.

²⁰² One significant exception to this rule in the Spanish tradition is Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina*, which strays from the norm not only in its depiction of a female protagonist but in Justina's intense concern early in the novel with her own status as an author figure. And yet for all Justina's reflections on her status as an author, the larger stakes of the literary marketplace fail to enter into the equation.

²⁰³ See Antoine Furetière, *Le Roman bourgeois* (Paris: Tallandier, 1970) P. 272. Here is an excerpt from the chart: "Estat et roole des sommes : Ausquelles ont esté moderement taxées, dans le Conseil poétique, les place d'illustre et demy-illustres, dont la vente a esté ordonnée pour faire un fonds pour la subsistances des pauvres autheurs. Pour un principal heros d'un roman de deux volumes...000.LIV.PARISIS

Pour la description d'une maison de campagne qu'on deguise en palais enchanté, pour la façon seulement sera payé Pour l'anagramme du nom du personnage dépeint, quarante sous." On the struggles of French authors to "live by the pen" in the Enlightenment, see Geoffrey Turnovsky, *The Literary Market: Authorship and Modernity in the Old Regime* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

²⁰⁴ For a good overview of the toil of Grub Street authors and the literary subculture in which they struggled, see Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972).

²⁰⁵ On the picaro's connection to Sisyphus, see Brancaforte (cited above).

²⁰⁶ See on this count Booth's important article (cited above).

²⁰⁷ On Fielding's contributions to comedy in drama and how his later prose work partakes of this dramatic force, see John Loftis *Comedy and Satire from Congreve to Fielding* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1950). Loftis rightly distinguishes between Fielding's unique comic contributions and the prevailing Augustan satire of the day.

²⁰⁸ Indeed, were space not a consideration here, one could find several other similar quotes in both *Don Quixote* and *Tom Jones*, but the focus here is Joseph Andrews and its own juxtaposition of epic and picaresque comedy.

²⁰⁹ On the critical problems associated with Fielding's rape scenes, see Susan Staves, "Fielding and the Comedy of Attempted Rape," In *History, Gender & Eighteenth-Century Literature* Ed. Beth Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

²¹⁰ See Mark Spilka, "Fielding and the Epic Impulse." *Criticism* 11 (1969):68-77.

²¹¹ J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form* (cited above) P. 7 See also I.B. Cauthen, "Fielding's Digressions in Joseph Andrews." *College English* 17 (1956): 379-82.

²¹² Indeed, Bauer (cited above) goes so far as to draw a connection between Alemán's narrative digressions and the unbridled digressions of *Tristram Shandy*.

²¹³ Probably the best study on Smollett's influences is that of Giddings (cited above).

²¹⁴ Bauer (cited above).

²¹⁵ Alter (cited above) P. 62. Alter's is in truth a nice complement to Parker's. Whereas Parker's attention is focused primarily on the Spanish text, Alter demonstrates how the picaresque emerges in the English-speaking realm. The classic study of the English picaresque remains that of F.W. Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1907). See also Ian Bell, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England* (London: Routledge, 1991).

²¹⁶ See Murray Roston, *The Comic Mode in English Literature: From the Middle Ages to Today* (New York: Continuum, 2011). Roston's study is certainly admirable for its ambition, and it likewise does a nice job of touching on important comic movements across the ages, but such a broad approach blurs critical distinctions between authors. See also the recent anthology of essays entitled *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* (cited above).

²¹⁷ See Close (cited above).

²¹⁸ See Ménager (cited above). Ménager's study does a fine job of highlighting the physical comedy in Rabelais, but he likewise points out the connection between comedy and medicine in Laurent Joubert's sixteenth-century treatise on laughter.

²¹⁹ See Paulson, (cited above) P. 18. On the broader trajectory of the eighteenth-century English comic novel, see Susan Auty, *The Comic Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Novels* (London: Kennikat, 1975). Auty's study is admirable in the attention it gives to the question of comedy, but it ultimately does not succeed in adequately defining what separates the comic forms of eighteenth-century England from other periods or national literatures.

²²⁰ For an appreciation of Smollett's eclectic influences, see the fine book of Giddings (cited above) as well as Damian Grant, *Tobias Smollett: A Study in Style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). Grant does a nice job of demonstrating Smollett's exploration of various novelistic forms, tracing a trajectory from *Roderick* to *Humphry Clinker*. Spector argues in his introductory study that all of Smollett's novels fall under the rubric of picaresque, but Spector's definition of picaresque as "a series of apparently unrelated incidents, loosely linked through interlocking characters and some vaguely satirical aims" is far too nebulous for our purposes. See Robert Spector, *Tobias Smollett* (Boston: Twayne, 1989) P. 106. Including a novel like *Humphry Clinker* as picaresque diminishes the importance of the first-person picaresque narrator, which as I have argued throughout is essential to picaresque comedy.

²²¹ All subsequent parenthetical page references refer to Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²²² Quoted in Jerry C. Beasley, *Tobias Smollett: Novelist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Beasley's argument is based primarily on the haphazard organization of Smollett's novel and he declares that it evinces a thematic unity of purpose that belies its formal disarray. This unity of purpose has to do with the moral message of the book—an argument not altogether convincing given the scathing comedy of much of the novel.

²²³ See Shklovsky (cited above).

²²⁴ Paul-Gabriel Boucé, *The Novels of Tobias Smollett* (London: Longman, 1976).

²²⁵ See Spitzer (cited above).

²²⁶ Fielding, P. 5.

²²⁷ See on this count Schaeffer's assertion of the primacy of context in humor (cited above).

²²⁸ Paulson, *Satire* P. 25. See also Paulson's earlier work on the subject in "The Fool-Knave Relation in Picaresque Satire," (cited above) Robert Alter argues against Paulson's reading of *Roderick* as primarily satirical on the grounds that Smollett's novel's violence is "too harsh for any imaginable satiric purpose." See Alter, P. 64. Alter goes on to declare that Smollett's novel is "shot through with lurid tinges of real sadism," (64) and

²²⁹ Paulson, *Satire* P. 26.

²³⁰ John M. Stedmond, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) P. 89.

²³¹ Maggi, it might be recalled, expanded upon Aristotle's idea in the *Poetics* that comedy merely represent the ugly. For Maggi, the ugly and base unto themselves do not inspire laughter. Only when wed to an element of surprise, what he terms the "wondrous" does the ugly become funny. For a good discussion of Maggi and other Italian commentators on Aristotle, see also Weinberg (cited above).

²³² In this regard, the conclusion I draw concerning the Wilson episode is not wholly opposed to that of Hunter, who sees in the interpolated stories examples of inferior narrative forms. Yet I would argue that the Wilson episode is less a showcase of the inferior quality of picaresque than a brief experiment in picaresque point of view, akin to those of Cervantes discussed in Chapter Three.

²³³ Alter, P. 78.

²³⁴ On the picaresque influence on Bellow, see Philip Gericke, "Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* and Its Picaresque Antecedents." *Pacific Coast Philology* 25. 1-2 (1990): 77-83. See also Meade Harwell. "Picaro from Chicago." *Southwest Review* 39 (1954): 273-276. Patrick W. Shaw. "History and the Picaresque Tradition in Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*." *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 16:3 (1987): 203-219. See also Barbara Probst Solomon. "The Spanish Journey of Saul Bellow's Fiction." *Salmagundi* 106 (1995): 94-99.

²³⁵ Parenthetical citation of the text refers to Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*. (New York: Viking, 2003).

²³⁶ The issue here of course is essentially one of anachronism. It goes without saying that a contemporary American reader of Augie's tale would connect to him on a linguistic level in ways not possible with the older texts, let alone those in Spanish, French, or German.

²³⁷ André Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1940). Breton sees the origin of black humor in Swift, and it is regrettable that he neglects the picaresque. See also Gerd Henninger, *Brevier des schwarzen Humors* (Munich: dtv, 1966). Henninger defines black humor as "ein Lachen, das keines ist" [a laughter that is no laughter], and this concept in particular can be related to the dual charge of picaresque comedy. See also the fine work on Spanish black humor by Serra (cited above).

²³⁸ Again, this celebration of instability dovetails nicely with Breton's definition of black humor.

²³⁹ James Wood celebrates Bellow's stylistic force as well: "A dozen very good writers—the Updikes, the DeLillos—can render you the window of a fish shop, and do it very well, but it is Bellow's genius to see the lobsters "crowded to the glass" and their "feelers bent" by that glass—to see the riot of life in the dead peace of things...Bellow is Flaubertian in this sense: either, by force of metaphorical wit, he makes us seize new connections and linkages." See Wood's essay "Saul Bellow's Comic Style" in *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

²⁴⁰ Terry Eagleton, with his characteristic blend of eloquence and humor, writes the following in reference to Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, which just as easily could describe the kind of language we have in Bellow: "Roughly speaking, the nearer you approach the Arctic Circle, the more authentic your language grows. Northern poems—from *Beowulf* and Ted Hughes' *The Hawk in the Rain* to Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist*—are craggy and brawny, whereas southern ones are more devious and deliquescent. The Northern Irish poet Tom Paulin, with his penchant for words which sound like the squelching of a leaky boot, raises this doctrine to the point of self-parody. In poetry like Heaney's, you can hear the pluck and slop of brackish water as the signs button down snugly on their referent." See Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2003). P. 233.

²⁴¹ We saw earlier in the Alter quote how Smollett, and other picaresque authors before him, make a clear appeal to often unpleasant sensual detail. But in those authors, such appeals are not celebrations, endowed with metaphorical force, but rather forays into a new realistic sensibility in fiction. Bellow, by contrast, seems to invoke such descriptions as a means of transcending reality through language.

²⁴² Shaw (cited above) does a nice job in his article of articulating this lack of inwardness and its connection to earlier picares.

²⁴³ See Sarah Blancher Cohen, *Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974). Cohen's book is an ambitious survey of the comic element in Bellow's oeuvre. Yet her portrait of *Augie March* as an essentially comic novel reveals an over-enthusiastic effort to group it under her book's rubric. Nevertheless, Blancher Cohen makes a number of fascinating points about the levity of *Augie*. See Wood (cited above). Wood's case is more convincing than Blancher Cohen's insofar as he distinguishes the dark comic sensibility in Bellow from what he quite aptly labels the "hysterical realism" of DeLillo, Pynchon, and David Foster Wallace.

²⁴⁴ The notion of tolerant laughter has its roots in Addison and Fielding, who as mentioned earlier in the study sought to replace the Hobbesian theory of laughter as an expression of Schadenfreude with an appeal to the rational and civilized element of humanity. See again on this count Paulson and Dickie (cited above).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* P. 89.

²⁴⁶ On Bellow's knack for highlighting grotesque physical traits, see again Wood (cited above).

²⁴⁷ See Bauer (cited above).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P. 71

²⁴⁹ Henry Popkin. "American Comedy." *Kenyon Review* 16 (1954): 329-334. P. 329. Popkin does not adequately distinguish in this brief article this new American comic sensibility from that of other cultures. For insight into the humor of Jews in the United States, see Arthur Asa Berger, *Jewish Jesters: A Study in American Popular Comedy* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2001).

²⁵⁰ Lukács, (cited above). In truth Lukács could hardly find a more worthy representative of his idea of the novel as fallen epic than *Augie March*. As compellingly as *Don Quixote*, *Augie March* dramatizes the fall from utopian grandeur into the prosaic world, yet as in *Quixote*, precisely the pedestrian is given a grand stage on which to present itself in a new light.

²⁵¹ See again the quote from *Lazarillo* (83): Maldíjeme mil veces (Dios me lo perdone), y a mi ruin fortuna, allí lo más de la noche, y lo peor, no osándome revolver por no despertalle, pedí a Dios muchas veces la

muerte. [I cursed myself a thousand times (may God forgive me of it), and my ruinous fortune, throughout the night, and the worst of it is that I didn't dare wake him, I asked God many times for death.]

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