


5-2015

# Cervantes and the Picaresque: A Question of Compatibility.

Chad M. Gasta

*Iowa State University*, [gasta@iastate.edu](mailto:gasta@iastate.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language\\_pubs](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs)

 Part of the [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Spanish Literature Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language\\_pubs/156](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/language_pubs/156). For information on how to cite this item, please visit <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html>.

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the World Languages and Cultures at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in World Languages and Cultures Publications by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

---

# Cervantes and the Picaresque: A Question of Compatibility.

## **Abstract**

In Part 2 of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), the knight and his squire happen across a prisoner chain gang headed to the royal galleys to serve out their sentences. In a rather famous exchange, Gines de Pasamonte, one of the condemned, informs Don Quixote that he is writing his own autobiography titled *La vida de Gines de Pasamonte* (The life of Gines de Pasamonte) that, when finished, will be so good and entertaining that it will overshadow *Lazarillo de Tormes* and all other works of that sort: *Es tan bueno {...} que mal ano para Lazarillo de Tormes y para todos cuantos de aquel genero se han escrito o escribieren'* (It's so good [...] that it's going to be bad news for *Lazarillo de Tormes* and for all the others of that genre that have been, or will be, written).

## **Disciplines**

Classical Literature and Philology | Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures | Spanish Literature | Theatre and Performance Studies

## **Comments**

This book chapter is published as "Cervantes and the Picaresque: A Question of Compatibility." *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*. Ed. J. A. G. Ardila. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. Chapter 6; 96-112. Posted with permission.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Cervantes and the picaresque* *A question of compatibility*

Chad M. Gasta

In Part I of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), the knight and his squire happen across a prisoner chain gang headed to the royal galleys to serve out their sentences. In a rather famous exchange, Ginés de Pasamonte, one of the condemned, informs Don Quixote that he is writing his own autobiography titled *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte* (The Life of Ginés de Pasamonte) that, when finished, will be so good and entertaining that it will overshadow *Lazarillo de Tormes* and all other works of that sort: 'Es tan bueno [...] que mal año para *Lazarillo de Tormes* y para todos cuantos de aquel género se han escrito o escribieren' (It's so good [...] that it's going to be bad news for *Lazarillo de Tormes* and for all the others of that genre that have been, or will be, written).<sup>1</sup> The episode has been cited as explicit proof that Cervantes knew *Lazarillo de Tormes*, perhaps even the uncensored versions that continued to circulate secretly in Spain. It also reveals that the writer was familiar with other works – an interconnected body of fictional works sharing similar structure, themes and characters which today we might call *the picaresque*. The episode is brief and ambiguous but nonetheless stands as the most complete and explicit commentary Cervantes offers on the picaresque, although we can assemble his opinion of the genre through study of his other works, particularly the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613). Indeed, it is hard to dismiss the fact that numerous picaresque characters and characteristics appear in the *Novelas ejemplares*, particularly in *La ilustre fregona* (The Illustrious Kitchen Maid), the framed stories *El casamiento engañoso* (The Deceitful Marriage) and *El coloquio de los perros* (The Dialogue of the Dogs), and *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, although these *novellas* are not considered stringently picaresque in the same way that scholars group together the genre's foundational work, *Lazarillo*, or its prototype, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599, 1604). Cervantes sometimes singles out the picaresque for absolute disparagement while other times he shows great admiration, suggesting that the writer believed the genre held great promise for the future of narrative, even as he simultaneously abhorred

many of its more infamous qualities. This essay explores Cervantes's shifting and elusive interplay with the picaresque by examining specific examples from *Don Quixote* and the *Novelas ejemplares*.<sup>2</sup>

Cervantes wrote both *Don Quixote* and his *Novelas ejemplares* on the heels of a monumental shift in narrative marked by Mateo Alemán's successful *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599). The *Guzmán* was the best-seller of the day that single-handedly revived the latent picaresque, and subsequently prompted numerous imitations and continuations. One of the imitators was Mateo Luján de Sayavedra who wrote a spurious second part to *Guzmán* that appeared in 1602 and sold more copies than Alemán's own 1604 sequel. Other writers similarly capitalised on Alemán's immense popularity and success: Francisco de Quevedo's *Historia de la vida de buscón, llamado Pablos* (History of the Swindler Named Pablos) circulated in manuscript form after 1604 (published in 1626), Francisco López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina* (Justina the Pícaro) in 1605, and Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo's *La hija de la Celestina* (Daughter of Celestina) in 1612. But, it was Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* that cast a very long shadow over them all including Cervantes. As Francisco Márquez Villanueva reminds us, there was at the time a small community of writers and an even smaller number of fictional works being published such that it would be unthinkable to suppose that Cervantes and Alemán were not fully aware of each other's efforts.<sup>3</sup> This defined publishing context also leads us to imagine that Cervantes must have taken note of a great number of picaresque features worth exploring and incorporating into his own fiction, even if he did so in ways quite different from Alemán and company.

Some of these can be seen in the galley slaves episode where we find not a praise of the picaresque but rather a tongue-in-cheek disapproval. In particular, through Ginés, Cervantes remarks that the picaro's story is never totally honest or complete but instead beautiful and entertaining: 'Lo que le sé decir a voacé es que trata verdades y que son verdades tan lindas y tan donosas que no pueden haber mentiras que se le igualen' (p. 209) (All I can say is that it deals with truths, and they are truths so appealing and entertaining that no lies could equal them). Cervantes judges that picaresque narrator-protagonists seek to amass favour and endearment from their readers by carefully selecting what might be amusing or relevant to defend their personal circumstances, but they do so at the expense of truth and verisimilitude, which makes the picaresque both inadequate and disingenuous. Thematically and stylistically, he seems to object to the picaresque's persistent determinism, its latent

deceptiveness, its questionable realism, and its unsubstantiated search for truth and openness. Moreover, Cervantes exploits the episode to provide a wonderfully playful commentary on the problematics of autobiography and narrative. When Don Quixote asks if his story is finished, Ginés's witty reply – '¿Cómo puede estar acabado [...] si aún no está acabada mi vida?' (p. 209) (How can it be finished [...] when my life isn't over yet?) – exposes the picaresque's hypothetical inadequacies: its perpetually incomplete state, its faulty pseudo-autobiographical nature, and limited first-person point of view.

In light of the surging popularity of Mateo Alemán, it would seem that Cervantes had *Guzmán* in mind when Ginés de Pasamonte informs Don Quixote that he will complete his novel once he is back in the galleys because 'me quedan muchas cosas que decir y en las galeras de España hay más sosiego de aquel que sería menester, aunque no es menester mucho más para lo que yo tengo de escribir, porque me lo sé de coro' (p. 209) (I still have lots of things to say, and on the galleys of Spain there's more leisure than I'll need, though I don't need that much for what I have to write because I know it by heart). It is difficult to believe that Ginés's statement does not refer to Guzmán given that both he and Ginés are sentenced to the galleys where they supposedly write their autobiographies. Why then does Ginés explicitly cite *Lazarillo de Tormes*, who was not condemned nor even as popular as *Guzmán*? Moreover, how can we believe that there is so much uninhibited free time in the galleys that one can write one's life story practically uninterrupted? And are we to suppose that Ginés has such a meticulous memory as to be able to accurately compose an autobiography that is so detailed ('me lo sé de coro') that the story includes the time 'desde mi nacimiento hasta el punto que esta última vez me han echado en galeras' (p. 209) (from my birth up to the last time I was thrown into the galleys)? Such questions and inconsistencies have led many to question (1) whether Cervantes is mocking or parodying the picaresque and (2) if he indeed is referring to *Lazarillo de Tormes* even though it was Alemán that loomed over Cervantes's own writing and probably was a literary rival. As E. C. Riley states, the literary scene was so impassioned by *Guzmán* that the presence of Alemán's protagonist could not have been ignored by any writer like Cervantes who was anxious to attract 'both a large readership and the respect of serious critics'.<sup>4</sup> After all, Cervantes knew well that the picaresque attracted readers in spite of – or perhaps because of – the deficiencies he believed existed. The Ginés episode reveals Cervantes's contention that the picaresque offered previously unknown advances

in narrative, irrespective of whether or not *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte* was a nod to *Guzmán* or *Lazarillo*. And it therefore presents Cervantes with a unique situation: he can transform the picaresque by drawing inspiration from it.

If Cervantes was hiding an allusion to *Guzmán*, what is it about Alemán's novel that he either appreciated or abhorred? The ambivalence that Cervantes often shows the picaresque has led many to believe that Cervantes was not a picaresque writer and that he and the genre are totally incompatible. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo first advanced this opinion, but such a view has softened considerably since then.<sup>5</sup> For example, Américo Castro called *Guzmán* the work that profoundly affected Cervantes's writing.<sup>6</sup> For Castro, the antisocial and critical *Guzmán* was much too bitter for Cervantes, who instead esteemed a sense of optimism as opposed to Alemán's gloomy acrimony. The most influential study was Carlos Blanco Aguinaga's who, it seems to me, is as rigid as Menéndez y Pelayo.<sup>7</sup> Blanco claims that Cervantes and the picaresque are completely irreconcilable because each employs a conflicting mode of realism: Alemán's 'realismo dogmático' and Cervantes's 'realismo objetivo'.<sup>8</sup> According to Blanco, Alemán celebrates the use of first-person autobiography, a tendency to moralise and emphasise deterministic factors such as the protagonist's inability to escape his lineage and social class. On the other hand, Cervantes's fiction highlights an idealistic, open and harmonious realism in which characters are free to overcome social limitations. As Peter Dunn points out, Blanco's article successfully convinced many that Cervantes and the picaresque were absolutely opposed.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Dunn believes that Cervantes does not challenge Alemán at all, but rather integrates those picaresque features that were most relevant and useful to his own writing. Dunn asserts that Cervantes creatively and intuitively 'deconstructs' the picaresque for integration into his own work in surprisingly original and fresh ways. Hence, scholars lately agree that Cervantes sought to appropriate what was already established and convert it into something advantageous to his writing. For Claudio Guillén, Cervantes and the picaresque share countless commonalities, and he claims that Ginés's declaration about 'todos cuantos de aquel género se han escrito o escribieren' (all those books of that genre ever written or to be written) is the acknowledgement of a picaresque genre that also simultaneously and consciously creates a counter-genre.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Gonzalo Sobejano explicitly affirms Cervantes's debt to Alemán: 'es más probable que Cervantes haya seguido a Mateo Alemán que no que se haya opuesto a él' (it's more likely that Cervantes followed Mateo Alemán than opposed him).<sup>11</sup> And Riley writes that *Don Quixote* is clearly a

targeted response to *Guzmán* just as both works were reactions to romance, the prevailing fiction of the time.<sup>12</sup>

Cervantes valued several distinguishing features that Alemán engaged: narrative richness and point of view, elaborate plot and sub-plot structures, character complexity, socio-political and religious criticisms, biting satire and realism. Indeed, Cervantes's theory of narrative owes much to *Guzmán*; without Alemán's novel, in many ways Cervantes would not have achieved similar advances in *Don Quixote*: the self-conscious and unreliable narrator, psychological complexity, episodic plot structure, interpolated stories, literary verisimilitude, character types, and realism. But, while Cervantes's work owed a debt of gratitude to Alemán, the galley slaves episode and the general absence of any tribute to *Guzmán* suggests that Alemán's picaresque was inadequate in terms of the narrative complexity towards which Cervantes was moving.

The only overt reference Cervantes makes to Alemán appears in *La ilustre fregona*. But, we cannot say it is praise. *La ilustre fregona* tells the story of Diego de Carriazo and Tomás de Avendaño, two noble-born boys from Burgos who forgo their wealthy lifestyle and study in Salamanca to seek out adventures dressed as picaros. On their way to the south of Spain, they stop at an inn in Toledo where Avendaño catches a glimpse of Costanza, the beautiful kitchen maid and title character. He falls madly in love with her and, consequently, the two would-be picaros remain at the inn working odd jobs as Avendaño attempts to win her over. Eventually, the reader learns that Costanza is not a maid but rather the daughter of a mysterious aristocratic lady who had asked the innkeeper and his wife to look after the girl. Thus, the kitchen maid who 'no *friega* ni entiende en otra cosa que en su labor' (neither cleans nor understands anything about that sort of work)<sup>13</sup> is therefore of noble lineage and lives happily ever after married to Avendaño.

Readers knowledgeable about either *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán* would obviously realise that little in the tale corresponds to what commonly had become known as the picaresque in Cervantes's time. In fact, what is most obvious concerning the picaresque in *La ilustre fregona* is how contrived it is. The omniscient narrator states that Carriazo left home 'llevado de una inclinación picaresca, sin forzarle a ello algún mal tratamiento que sus padres le hiciesen, sólo por gusto y antojo' (p. 613) (carried away by a picaresque inclination and not because of any mistreatment by his parents, but rather for pleasure and appetite), underscoring the protagonist's ability to determine his path in life and his exhilaration in choosing an exciting one.<sup>14</sup> Carriazo makes his way to the Zahara de los Atunes fisheries in

Cádiz where he perfects dice games and card playing, ruses that the narrator calls notable picaresque activities. Throughout the first parts of the story, Carriazo is distinguished for his intelligence and ability to adapt to the ruggedness of the fisheries to such an extent that 'En fin, en Carriazo vio el mundo un pícaro virtuoso, limpio, bien criado y más que medianamente discreto. Pasó por todos los grados de pícaro hasta que se graduó de maestro en las almadrabas de Zahara, donde es el *finibusterrae* de la picaresca' (p. 613) (Therefore, in Carriazo the world saw a virtuous picaro, clean, well-mannered, and more than a little prudent. He passed all the classes for being a picaro and graduated as a master from the fish houses of Cádiz, the home of the picaresque). To underscore the value of Carriazo's training and to maintain the deception, the narrator rhetorically exclaims that one cannot truly be a picaro if not trained in Zahara: '¡no os llaméis pícaros si no habéis cursado dos cursos en la academia de la pesca de los atunes!' (p. 632) (You can't call yourselves picaros if you haven't taken classes at the academy of tuna fishing!).

From the outset, the reader comes to know the exact opposites of either Lazarillo or Guzmán: a well-behaved, well-groomed and well-spoken young man who is not orphaned and does not go hungry but who deliberately worsens his life for his own amusement. While the narrator claims that Carriazo remained a virtuous picaro – if one could be said to exist – he also emphasises that the boy has 'mastered' his craft and could easily teach even Guzmán de Alfarache a thing or two: 'salió tan bien con el asunto de pícaro, que pudiera leer cátedra en la facultad al famoso de Alfarache' (p. 613) (he did so well as a picaro that he could dissertate on the topic to the famous Alfarache). The unambiguous reference to Alemán's work is the only one in Cervantes's fiction. It is a clear acknowledgement of *Guzmán's* success, regardless of how Cervantes felt about Alemán's novel.

Deliberate and blatant references to 'picaro' and 'Guzmán de Alfarache' are certainly meant to call attention to the burgeoning picaresque genre, but *La ilustre fregona* is only picaresque in that Carriazo is unmistakably labelled a picaro, for a picaresque novel cannot exist without one. If readers believed that the story would take the route of any of the popular picaresque tales of the time, they were sorely misled or mistaken. It is apparent that Cervantes sees the fictional rending of the picaresque in *La ilustre fregona* more as a role-playing exercise than an authentic phenomenon. For example, both Avendaño and Carriazo believe that a change in clothing and location can prompt a transformation in their born nature. They declare their desire to seek an adventurous lifestyle which, for them,



means becoming picaros. And it is perhaps their ability to put on and remove the picaro's mask at any time that divulges one of Cervantes's criticisms of the genre: Lazarillo learns from the squire that upward mobility means purchasing second-hand clothing, a cloak and a sword; Guzmán believes that a move to Italy will help him to overcome his lineage and prosper materially; Pablos, from Quevedo's *El buscón*, pursues a new life in the Americas to seek upward mobility. When Avendaño and Carriazo – especially Carriazo – modify their appearance and migrate south, Cervantes is suggesting the ridiculousness and futility of the entire affair. Genuine picaros, after all, are not afforded the option to modify their social status by altering their appearance and discarding earlier lifestyles.<sup>15</sup> The overturning and reversing of the picaro's trajectory implies parody and thus supports Blanco's claim that *La ilustre fregona* was a 'novela idealista' and in no way picaresque.<sup>16</sup> There are no prison sentences or criminal investigations, no adultery, there is no 'caso' propelling the need to compose one's life story and all is well in the world because each can simply return to his rightful place in society. Ultimately, we are even informed that Carriazo – he who was 'tan contento de la vida libre' (so happy with the free life) – is happily married and has three sons studying in Salamanca, and none of them know anything about their father's training in the 'academia de la pesca de atunes' (p. 613) (tuna-fishing academy). To make matters even more bizarre, the narrator states that Carriazo has completely abandoned his previous life: 'apenas ve algún asno de aguador, cuando se le representa y viene a la memoria el que tuvo en Toledo' (p. 632) (he hardly remembers the donkey he had as a water seller in Toledo). Selling water on the streets of Toledo can only be a reference to Lazarillo, who did the same. More telling, however, is that Carriazo scarcely remembers those events, suggesting he never took the lifestyle seriously even though his first experience as a picaro lasted three years. Moreover, in much the same way that we laugh at Ginés de Pasamonte's conviction that he can recall all that has befallen him since his birth, Carriazo's faulty memory or wilful abandonment of his past indicates that relying on memory is slippery and erratic, not suitable for a true historical account. We might say that Cervantes was criticising the fractional and devious nature of autobiography, a point to which I will return below.

Among the stories by Cervantes most often identified with the picaresque is *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, the tale of two poverty-stricken boys who, like Carriazo and Avendaño, abandon their homes, then meet at an inn near Toledo and make their way to Seville where they briefly join the criminal

brotherhood ('cofradía') headed by the repulsive-looking Monipodio. Together the two youths make a formidable team as they cheat a mule driver before departing from Toledo and steal from the group with whom they travel to Seville. Once in the sprawling commercial capital, opportunities for their deceptions abound, but it is Cortado's pilfering of a Sacristan's purse that leads them to Monipodio's residence where they are told they must register as accomplices and seek permission from the gang leader. The reader may be surprised to learn that Monipodio is the seemingly benevolent leader of an organised, efficient and structured society of criminals. Rincón and Cortado learn about the association's statutes and expectations as well as its agreements with the police and other corrupt officials. Monipodio calls the boys 'Rinconete' and 'Cortadillo', nicknames that denote their acceptance into the criminal union as novices in training and almost certainly recall the typical diminutive forms of *Lazarillo* and *Guzmanillo*.

In *Rinconete y Cortadillo* the two main protagonists physically resemble picaros such as *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán*. First, they are quite impoverished judging from their tattered clothing, lack of cloak and broken shoes. Character traits also signify an imitation of picaresque models as both use their wit and shrewdness to become experts at trickery, either through outright theft (Cortado) or through card-playing deception (Rincón). It is the emphasis on criminality, however, that leads many to associate *Rinconete y Cortadillo* with the picaresque. Monipodio's lawless organisation features characters who are specialists at certain criminal enterprises: petty thieves, prostitutes, ruffians and hit men. All are responsible for certain tasks which are to be completed based on a very particular schedule. One group, for example, is responsible for adjudicating disputes and maintaining detailed records of all activities in the infamous 'libro de memoria' ('diary'), which Rinconete is asked to read: 'y en la primera hoja vio que decía: *Memoria de las cuchilladas que se han de dar esta semana*' (on the first page he saw that it said *Memorandum of Cuts to be Given this Week*) followed by '*Memoria de agravios comunes. Conviene a saber: redomazos, untos de miera, clavazón de sambenitos y cuernos, matracas, espantos, alborotos y cuchilladas fingidas, publicación de libelos, etc.*' (p. 568) (*Memorandum of Common Injuries: Namely, Beatings, Staining People, Defamations and Libels, False Alarms, Threats, False Disturbances and Fake Stabbings, Publicising Lies, etc.*). Despite such illicit undertakings, the narrator highlights the light-heartedness of the affair. Monipodio's band of misfits consider themselves good Christians and go to great lengths to protect themselves from God's wrath and from falling on the wrong side

of the church: they regularly attend mass (but do not go to confession), they purchase candles to honour the saints and the virgin, and they return stolen church property or make swift restitution. Through this portrait of Spain's criminal underworld, the reader becomes familiar with the pilfering and deception for which Seville and a few other large cities had become infamous. As a metaphor positioned against a depiction of imperial Spain's disreputable citizens and inefficient institutions, Cervantes describes Monipodio's association as a competent organisation that challenges the old maxim that there is no honour among thieves.

Anyone familiar with *Lazarillo* and *Guzmán*, however, knows that criminal activity in itself is not a predisposition for the picaresque. Instead, criminality is a necessity to satisfy incessant hunger and assure survival. Not so in this tale where Monipodio's personnel are plainly criminals, even dangerous ones like Chiquiznaque who is charged with slashing people's faces, or Maniferro, an assassin, who has an iron arm because 'le habían cortado por justicia' (p. 563) (justice cut it off). As a result, the reader becomes acquainted with Seville's well-known criminal element, either the institutionalised form as evidenced by religious and police corruption, or the underworld sort as demonstrated by the cavalcade in Monipodio's compound. Their portrayals serve to destabilise the true socio-economic circumstance of picaros like Lazarillo or Guzmanillo. In fact, the entire story imitates very specific elements of the picaresque precursors almost to the point of parody. Golden Age Spain is largely known to have been a difficult place for orphaned boys as evidenced in *Lazarillo*, *Guzmán* and other picaresque narratives. Nonetheless, nowhere in *Rinconete y Cortadillo* are such unforgiving realities evident, or depicted with any urgency or seriousness. For example, when Rinconete discusses his punishment for stealing money from the sale of papal bulls, he describes his flogging with great amusement and with little concern for either the crime or the punishment. Similarly, Monipodio's offenders are presented candidly and indeed as if the criminals and their crimes are commonplace and nothing to worry about.

Critics have had a challenging time trying to tease from the story Cervantes's true feelings about the picaresque. For Blanco the story suffers from a lack of direction and a loss of moral commentary to such a degree that the tale is precisely a parody or at least a 'cuadro de costumbres' (description of local customs) whose realism is nothing like that found in *Guzmán*.<sup>17</sup> Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce asserts that the youthful cheerfulness that penetrates *Rinconete y Cortadillo* totally contradicts *Guzmán*'s pessimism and determinism, which nonetheless has not stopped critics from labelling it a picaresque work.<sup>18</sup>

And Joseph Ricapito believes that Cervantes provides a 'typical picaresque touch' in the story by utilising 'features, characters, themes, episodes, but not always in a strict manner'.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore impossible to conclude that the picaresque does not inspire various aspects of *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, but it is equally clear that Cervantes deviates a great deal from what informed readers then and now would expect of the genre. For example, neither of the two boys provides sensible reasons for abandoning their parents, they do not suffer hunger in any way nor do they aspire to social climbing to improve their position, and nowhere does the narrator imply that they will compose their own autobiography. Moreover, the story is missing any 'caso' that would propel the tale and there is an equally noticeable absence of any assessment of the picaro's humble origins or his pursuit of respectability. In fact, in the final paragraphs of the story, we are told that Rinconete is so taken aback at 'cuán descuidada justicia había en aquella tan famosa ciudad de Sevilla, pues casi al descubierto vivía tan perdida y tan mala, tan inquieta y tan libre y disoluta' (p. 570) (how carelessly justice was administered in the famous city of Seville since such pernicious, evil and worrisome ruffians lived openly and dissolutely) that he discourages Cortadillo from continuing with Monipodio. In the end, Monipodio's crew are simply criminals. The boys' abandonment of Monipodio weakens the marginal glorification of the criminal life. In other words, Cervantes seems to view the picaresque as a provisional framework that is always in motion and perpetually changing, one that is always open for interpretation.

It should be noted that the unsupported first-person autobiographical narrative so vital to the picaresque is absent in *La ilustre fregona* and *Rinconete y Cortadillo*. Indeed, Cervantes does not implement the authoritative 'I' in any of his works except *Viaje del Parnaso*, which is written in verse and has absolutely nothing in common with the picaresque. Instead, Cervantes mixes a number of narrative conventions usually led by the third person, which helps to avoid problems related to subjectivity. One of the reasons scholars believe *Don Quixote* to be the first modern novel is precisely because of its multifaceted – and constantly shifting – narrative perspective that offers a degree of impartiality. Impartiality is even central in the episode featuring Ginés first-person story which becomes a third-person tale when the knight begins to enquire about the picaro's text and story. Ginés's life is written down in his text, which he left in pawn for 200 ducats. The second part of his account is his lived experience from the moment of pawning the text up to the point when Don Quixote meets him, which from then on can be told in the third person by any of the novel's narrators and by Don Quixote himself. Thus, with a sleight of hand, Cervantes superimposes

an omniscient third-person point of view upon a first-person autobiography. To complicate matters further, Ginés states that he can finish the story of his life easily enough for he knows the end by heart before it has happened, which elevates fictional storytelling over authoritative autobiographical form. In a more general sense, with the introduction of the third person, Cervantes is able to superimpose some degree of impartiality, realism and verisimilitude. On the other hand, one must likewise consider that if Ginés is the admitted author, then his protagonist and his protagonist's actions must be fictional. To admit to authorship of a picaresque work is akin to admitting the untruthfulness of the narrative, its themes and actions, characters, plot and nearly everything else. In this respect, Cervantes is mocking the picaresque. Taken as a whole, *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte* permits Cervantes to transform the genre, revealing it to be what he believed it really was.

These innovations find their maximum development in the *Novelas ejemplares*, where Cervantes amalgamated and fused the fiction genres of the day, experimenting with *admiratio* and formal realism.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly the case with *El coloquio de los perros* where first-person narrative is absent but replaced by a dialogue between two dogs whose viewpoint holds the same authority as first-person autobiographical narrations because one tells his story as if it were a memoir. Authority is further developed and debated through a framing mechanism. *El coloquio de los perros* is contained within the frame of a preceding story called *El casamiento engañoso*, the short history of Campuzano who rests in a hospital where he transcribes the conversation between the two canines he claims to have overheard. Whereas *El casamiento* is told in large part by a third-person narrator, *El coloquio* is dominated by the canine Berganza, who tells his story, thus conserving some autobiographical authority. The eventual collapse of third into first-person dialogue amplifies the distance between the stories and the storytellers in the outer frame while intensifying authorial control and authority in the inner frame. In short, the dialogue in the first person preserves some of the reliability found in picaresque novels, a 'new literary genre of such extraordinary novelty that it has had no followers: the autobiography in dialogue form'.<sup>21</sup>

Berganza's story commences in much the same way as other picaresque narratives: Berganza informs his counterpart, Cipión, of his birth, his family origins, his apprenticeship to a series of masters and a revealing meeting with the witch La Camacha who claims that the two dogs are actually the children of the witch La Montuela and the devil. The dogs' bizarre birth could be considered the 'caso' that drives the story. Most of

Berganza's verbal autobiography is devoted to characterising his many different masters: a slaughterhouse worker, shepherds, a wealthy merchant, a sheriff, a soldier, a group of gypsies, a Moor, a poet, a theatre manager and Mahudes, the night watchman at the Hospital de la Resurrección where Berganza and Cipión meet. Throughout the story, Berganza is portrayed as an outsider who enjoys a unique vantage point from which to judge these characters and from which he can offer biting and satirical commentary on man's deficiencies. He does so with great wit and humour, underlying a spectacular criticism of all social classes, races and genders, to such a point that the reader is led to believe that Berganza is simultaneously a neutral eyewitness and victim.

Of all of Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares*, *El coloquio* is the one that interacts most seriously with the strict picaresque models. It contains a number of characteristics that clearly owe a debt of gratitude to *Lazarillo*, *Guzmán* and the other picaresque narratives published around the time Cervantes was writing:

- the pseudo-autobiographical authoritative form, but in dialogue;
- the story of a marginalised figure (a slaughterhouse dog) whose origins are unclear;
- the presence of various masters whose malevolent nature is described in exceptional detail but who nonetheless contribute to the training of the protagonist;
- the necessity to survive moments of great hunger and abuse;
- an episodic plot structure which facilitates coverage of a large number of themes and characters;
- a gritty socio-religious and political criticism that is sarcastic, satirical but also serious and precise;
- a moralising point of view levelled equally at the aristocracy and at the lower classes;
- denigration of marginalised groups popularly linked to criminal activity such as the gypsies whom Berganza calls full of malice, falseness and prone to robbery or blacks who are viewed as socially, economically and racially inferior;
- an attempt to improve one's social status by changing both physical location and appearance.

Moreover, several characteristics could be said to be taken right from Alemán's playbook: a dark and murky tone characterised by frequent interruptions, digressions, silences and bouts of gossip ('murmurar') as well as a fixation on Seville, a picaresque focal point described as the

'amparo de pobres y refugio de desechados, que en su grandeza no solo caben los pequeños, pero no se echan de ver los grandes' (p. 668) (protection for the poor and refuge for the rejected where, in its immensity, not only is there space for the little people, but also for the higher-ups). Seville appears unflatteringly in several of Cervantes's stories, but is a marvel in others.

It is especially important to note that, similar to *Guzmán*, but unlike Cervantes's other *novelas* studied above, a majority of Berganza's commentaries are highly moralistic. In fact, Cervantes portrays Berganza as a half-outsider who holds strong social views but who tries to avoid becoming a part of the same greed, corruption and deception he critiques. His defence mechanism is his flight and he routinely flees to the next master where he offers yet another stinging set of condemnations. Also like Guzmán whose autobiography, we are told, was meant to teach the reader what not to do in life, Berganza's commentaries provide lessons on how to avoid a life marked by deceit and deception.

*El coloquio* is marked by a digressive nature and as interlocutor Cipión's role is to keep Berganza from incessantly meandering from topic to topic and also to reproach him for his constant gossiping about others. There are numerous instances when Cipión interrupts Berganza to remind him not to stray into topics that are unrelated to his tale: 'adelante y no hagas sogá, por no decir cola, de tu historia', 'Sigue tu historia y no te desvíes del camino carretero con impertinentes digresiones; y así, por larga que sea, la acabarás presto', 'No más, Berganza; no volvamos a lo pasado: sigue, que se va la noche, y no querría que al salir del sol quedásemos a la sombra del silencio' (pp. 671-5) (keep moving and don't unnecessarily lengthen your story, continue your story and don't depart from its path with impertinent digressions and regardless of whatever length it is you will finish it quickly, No more, Berganza, let's not return to the past. Keep going because the night is ending and I don't want the sun to replace the silence of darkness). It seems quite clear that Berganza's habitual digressions – and Cipión's continued chastisement – is acknowledgement of *Guzmán*. Alemán's work was built around the constant interruption of stories by interpolation of comments, fables and anecdotes that deviate from the main story so much that the reader easily loses the main story line. Cipión's frustration and anger with Berganza's storytelling incoherence is akin to early modern readers like Cervantes who must have been maddened by Alemán's prominent digressive nature. Indeed, scholars have zeroed in on this technique as one indication of Cervantes's unhappiness with Alemán's style. For example, Sobejano believes that Berganza is *Guzmán*'s Cervantine

equivalent and that the *Coloquio* is so marked by digression that Cervantes does not really oppose Alemán at all; Viviana Díaz Balsera calls Berganza's story an 'allegory' for the new sort of picaresque perfected by Alemán; Ricapito holds that Berganza's 'verbal level' matches 'the style and diction' of Guzmán; and Antonio Rey Hazas perceptibly notes certain linguistic and rhetorical correspondences between Cervantes and *Guzmán* because 'si hay una novela autobiográfica y picaresca que constantemente interrumpe la relación de su vida para interpolar en ella una ingente cantidad de digresiones discursivas, reflexiones, moralizaciones, anécdotas, ejemplos, fábulas, cuentos, etc. ésta es la obra de Mateo Alemán' (if there is an autobiographical picaresque novel that constantly interrupts the story to interpolate an astounding number of discursive digressions, reflections, moralisations, anecdotes, examples, fables, stories, etc., it is Mateo Alemán's work).<sup>22</sup> Storytelling – like a typical conversation – is usually marked by slips into seemingly unrelated topics. But, Alemán takes the technique to extremes so as to disregard his reader almost completely, an approach that is unacceptable to Cervantes who shows his dissatisfaction through Cipión's condemnation.

There is another trait in *El coloquio* that closely tracks *Guzmán*: the vice of gossiping or spitefulness ('murmurar' or 'murmuración'). Berganza admits that he cannot stop himself from gossiping about others: '[...] el dejar de murmurar lo tengo por dificultoso' (I find it difficult to stop gossiping) and 'Así yo, cada vez que fuere contra el precepto que me has dado de que no murmure y contra la intención que tengo de no murmurar, me morderé el pico de la lengua de modo que me duela y me acuerde de mi culpa para no volver a ella' (pp. 669–71) (So, I will bite my tongue until it hurts and remind myself that the blame is mine alone every time I go against my own oath not to gossip). The vice of gossiping is so bothersome to Cipión that the latter criticises Berganza tenaciously: 'Ya hemos dicho que no hemos de murmurar', ('We've already said that we are not going to gossip') '[...] quedarás imposibilitado de murmurar' (it remains impossible for you to stop gossiping), '¿Al murmurar llamas filosofar? ¿Así va ello! Canoniza, canoniza, Berganza, a la maldita plaga de la murmuración, y dale el nombre que quisieres, que ella dará a nosotros el de cínicos, que quiere decir perros murmuradores; y por tu vida que calles ya y sigas tu historia' (pp. 669–71) (You call gossiping philosophising? So it goes! Glorify it, glorify the damn plague of gossiping, Berganza, and give it whatever name you want, and we will look like cynics, gossiping dogs I mean; and I swear you'd better shut up and continue your story) and 'Ahora sí, Berganza, que te puedes morder la lengua, y tarazármela yo,



porque todo cuanto decimos es murmurar' (Now you can bite your tongue, Berganza, and bite it off for me because everything you have just said is gossip). According to Riley, gossiping, it seems, was precisely what Cervantes found objectionable about *Guzmán* while William Clamurro sees the issue of 'murmuración' to be one related to the 'moral challenge of narrative, of talking about one's life and, in the process, of passing judgment upon one's world', which is ultimately the writer's problem.<sup>23</sup> Either way, the two dogs constantly criticise one another about their spitefulness towards others to the point that discussions about gossiping riddle the entire story.

*El coloquio* is as close to the picaresque of *Guzmán* and *Lazarillo* as Cervantes would allow himself to get. Alban Forcione believes Cervantes had Alemán's work in mind when he wrote the story; Avall-Arce views *El coloquio* as the 'most revolutionary of Cervantes's approaches to the picaresque genre'; and Sobejano utilises nine characterisations to denote the *Coloquio* a picaresque work.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Guillén has branded *El coloquio* a criticism of the picaresque, Blanco believes it to be a parody, Edwin Williamson views it as an alternative to Alemán, Durán calls it a satire, and Lázaro Carreter and Bataillon assert that it is a clear rejection.<sup>25</sup> *El coloquio* is no doubt not a picaresque work in the defined way that Guillén has characterised either *Lazarillo* or *Guzmán*. However, based on the short review above it seems far too difficult – if not impossible – to believe that Cervantes was not extensively drawing on the picaresque. Put another way: without the picaresque of *Guzmán*, *El coloquio de los perros* would not have been written in the same way.

Cervantes keenly relied on previous literary models. *Don Quixote*, after all, is clearly a parody of the chivalric romances, as the author himself tells us in the prologue that by writing a book of chivalry he hoped to ridicule them. Within the novel itself, the reader is likewise confronted with imitation of virtually every literary form in Cervantes's day: the *comedia*, lyrical verse, Italianate *novella*, letters, *novela morisca*, Byzantine romance, pastoral novel, and so on. Just because an explicit statement regarding imitation does not exist in the prologue to the *Novelas ejemplares* does not mean that the same technique is not at work. The picaresque offered Cervantes yet another opportunity for imitation through thoughtful redesign and redeployment. Cervantes certainly saw great potential in the picaresque and worked to integrate it into his own fiction to varying degrees – sometimes with great enthusiasm, sometimes with utter disdain. So, whereas *La ilustre fregona* is playful with the genre to the point of mockery or parody, *Rinconete y Cortadillo* draws on some of the

picaresque's more realistic and sombre conventions. *El coloquio de los perros* stands out to me as Cervantes's most serious interplay with the structural and thematic foundations of the picaresque as introduced by *Lazarillo* and perfected in *Guzmán*. In this sense, Cervantes is an author of the picaresque only in that he believed the genre held promise for what narrative could be – and should be.

### Notes

- 1 M. Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, in *Obras completas*, ed. F. Sevilla (Madrid: Castalia, 1999), p. 209. The subsequent references to *Don Quixote* are from this edition.
- 2 Some arguments made here appear in a very different form in C. Gasta, 'The Picaresque According to Cervantes', *Philological Quarterly*, 89.1 (2010), 87–109.
- 3 F. Márquez Villanueva, 'La interacción Alemán-Cervantes', in *Actas del Segundo Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Cervantistas* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991), pp. 241–97 (pp. 149–50) explains that when Alemán arrived in the New World, his first-edition copy of Juan de la Cuesta's *Don Quixote* was confiscated, but was returned when a powerful friend intervened.
- 4 E. C. Riley, 'Romance, the Picaresque and Don Quixote I' in D. Fox, H. Sieber and R. Ter Horst, eds., *Studies in Honor of Bruce W. Wardropper* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1989), p. 237.
- 5 M. Menéndez y Pelayo, 'Cultura literaria de Miguel de Cervantes y elaboración del *Quijote*', in *Obras Completas de Menéndez Pelayo*, Vol. VI: *Estudios y discursos de crítica histórica y literaria* (Madrid: CSIC, [1905] 1941), pp. 323–56.
- 6 *El pensamiento de Cervantes* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Librería y Casa Editorial Hernando, 1925).
- 7 C. Blanco Aguinaga, 'Cervantes y la picaresca: notas sobre dos tipos de realismo', *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, II (1957), 313–42.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 313.
- 9 P. Dunn, 'Cervantes De/Re-Constructs the Picaresque', *Cervantes*, 2.2 (1982), 982.
- 10 C. Guillén, *Literature as System* (Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 148.
- 11 G. Sobejano, 'El Coloquio de los perros en la picaresca y otros apuntes', *Hispanic Review*, 43.1 (1975), 39.
- 12 Riley, 'Romance, the Picaresque and *Don Quixote*', pp. 84–5.
- 13 M. Cervantes, *La ilustre fregona*, in *Obras completas*, ed. F. Sevilla (Madrid: Castalia, 1999), p. 620. Subsequent references to the *Exemplary Novels* are from this edition.
- 14 D. A. Boruchoff, 'Free Will, the Picaresque and the Exemplarity of Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares*', *MLN*, 124 (2009), 392.
- 15 P. N. Durán, 'Picaresque Elements in Cervantes's Work', in Giancarlo Maiorino, ed., *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 237.

- 16 Blanco Aguinaga, 'Cervantes y la picaresca', p. 330.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- 18 J. B. Avallé-Arce, 'Cervantes entre pícaros', *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 38 (1990), 592.
- 19 J. V. Ricapito, 'Cervantes and the Picaresque: *Redivivo*', in J. V. Ricapito (ed.), *Hispanic Studies in Honor of Joseph H. Silverman* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1988), p. 334.
- 20 F. Sevilla and A. Rey Hazas, 'Introduction', in Miguel de Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2004), Vol. I, pp. 11–60 (23–32).
- 21 J. B. Avallé-Arce, 'Novelas ejemplares: Reality, Realism, Literary Tradition' in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Cervantes: Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 149.
- 22 Sobejano, 'El Coloquio de los perros', 38–9; V. Díaz Balsera, 'Un diálogo cervantino con la picaresca: Intertextualidad, desplazamiento y apropiación en el Coloquio de los perros', *Crítica Hispánica*, 17.2 (1995), 191; A. Rey Hazas, 'Género y estructura del *Coloquio de los perros* o cómo se hace una novela', in José Jesús Bustos Tovar (ed.), *Lenguaje, ideología y organización textual en las 'Novelas Ejemplares'* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1983), p. 131.
- 23 E. C. Riley, 'Cervantes and the Cynics: *El licenciado vidriera* and *El coloquio de los perros*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 53.3 (1976), 196; W. H. Clamurro, 'Cervantes's *Casamiento/Coloquio* and the Complicities of the Picaresque Reader', in Mark Groundland, ed., *Aquí se imprimen libros: Cervantine Studies in Honor of Tom Lathrop* (University, MS: Romance Monographs, 2008), p. 34.
- 24 A. K. Forcione, *Cervantes and the Mystery of Lawlessness: A Study of 'El casamiento engañoso' y 'El coloquio de los perros'* (Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 143; Avallé-Arce, 'Cervantes entre pícaros', p. 597; Sobejano, 'El Coloquio de los perros', pp. 35–6.
- 25 Blanco Aguinaga, 'Cervantes y la picaresca', pp. 333–4; E. Williamson, 'Cervantes as Moralizer and Trickster: The Critique of Picaresque Autobiography in *El casamiento engañoso* y *El Coloquio de los perros*', in Jennifer Lowe and Philip Swanson, eds., *Essays on Hispanic Themes in Honour of Edward C. Riley* (University of Edinburgh Press, 1989), p. 113; M. Durán, 'Picaresque Elements', pp. 226–47; F. Lázaro Carreter, '*Lazarillo de Tormes*' en la picaresca (Barcelona: Ariel, 1972); M. Bataillon, 'Relaciones literarias', in J. B. Avallé-Arce and E. C. Riley (eds.), *Suma cervantina* (London: Tamesis, 1978), pp. 215–32.