INTRODUCTION

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Twelve brilliant short novels, packed with compelling plots and fascinating characters, redolent with literary games of the greatest variety and sophistication, were the author of *Don Quixote*'s response to his suddenly acquired fame. It was a new kind of book, never seen before in the Spanish language, rivaling the influential collections of Italian novellas then circulating in the Iberian Peninsula, and on a par with the best writing by the literary giants among whom its author lived in early seventeenth-century Madrid. When Miguel de Cervantes published *Exemplary Novels* in 1613, he was sixty-six years old, an advanced age for the time. He would die three years later, on April 22, 1616, coincidentally on nearly the same date as Shakespeare, but a few days apart because Spain followed the Gregorian calendar and England the Julian. The fact that this book, his third masterpiece if we count the two parts of the *Don Quixote* (published in 1605 and 1615, respectively) as separate novels, appeared so late in his life says much about Cervantes and the collection of novels that it contains.

In spite of the success that he had with the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605, Cervantes did not profit enough from it to overcome the life of penury and disappointment that he had endured until then. Publishers did become willing to bring out his work, and he managed to bring out in short order a collection of his theater, *Eight Comedies and Eight New Interludes Never Before Published*, in 1615, and in the same year Part Two of *Don Quixote*. But much of the profit remained with the editors, who also printed posthumously, in 1617, *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda*, the Byzantine romance that Cervantes labored over and enthused about during the last years of his life. Collecting the twelve novels separately in one volume was probably due in some measure to the criticism that he endured for having inserted similar stories in the first *Don Quixote*, something he refrained from doing in Part Two.

But *Exemplary Novels* is a work of genius in its own right and would have secured its author a prominent place in the history of Western literature even if he had not written any of his other books. It was an instant success in Spain,

where the novels even found their way into the musical theater (*zarzuelas*), and had an immediate and lasting impact on English literature. Cervantes was a hit in England and elsewhere. Thomas Shelton brought out his translation of *Don Quixote* in 1612, and César Ouidan, the first complete French translation of the novel in 1614. Shakespeare wrote a play based on the character Cardenio, from *Don Quixote*, which has never been found. People dressed as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza for fairs and carnivals in Germany and Peru. *Exemplary Novels* did not fall far behind. Jacobean playwrights Thomas Middleton, William Rowley, and John Fletcher adapted some of the novellas for the stage. Neglected until the last decade of his life, Cervantes then became a prolific literary celebrity.

Exemplary Novels spans nearly the whole creative life of Cervantes. Studies have shown that some of the stories go back at least twenty years from the date of publication, if not more, while others were written in that productive period between the two parts of *Don Quixote*, 1605 to 1615. The book is like a summing up of Cervantes's fiction, displaying its broad range of topics, characters, styles, and plots. The order in which the novels appear in the book is not the one in which they were written, to be sure. For that reason, it is tempting to wonder if Cervantes encrypted a message in the sequence that he gave to the book, and the place that each story occupies with reference to the others. The order may also have been determined by the publisher, though even then Cervantes must have had a hand in it. One story, "The Pretended Aunt," published separately and anonymously but that critics now are almost sure is Cervantes's, was left out of the volume, which adds a significant detail about the process of selection followed. It is very salacious and somewhat clumsy (an early work?). The resemblances of some of the exemplary novels to the ones that he included in Part One of *Don Quixote* also adds an intriguing dimension to the arrangement of this collection. It appears to be certain, to me in any case, that the book constitutes a review and totaling up of his oeuvre by an author who knows that he is near the end of his life and wants to leave a significant legacy for posterity, showing the full spectrum of his creative mind.

The stories are an assemblage of literary artifacts of the utmost complexity and sophistication, as *Don Quixote* had been, presented in such a light, entertaining way that the reader, entranced by the twists and turns of the plots and the antics of the protagonists, hardly notices their artistry. Some of the novels, like "The English Spanishwoman," are lengthy for the genre, that of the Italian *novella*, which is how Cervantes uses the term. *Novela* was not yet available in Spanish in its present sense, it only meant a long short story in the style of Boccaccio, as Covarrubias, who cites the Italian, explains in his 1611 *Tesoro*

de la lengua castellana o española. The geographic settings range from England to the Mediterranean. Italy is featured often, with a focus on Spain, especially Castile and Andalusia, regions of the peninsula that Cervantes knew firsthand, as he did Italy. The historical period is roughly Cervantes's present. The language, as in all of his work, is elegant without being pedantic, with a rich lexical range reflecting the social and native provenance of the characters. The narrators engage the reader in a friendly, complicit manner that invites following along with the narrative. Cervantes's style and language are highly accessible to today's Spanish speakers. Some of the novels in the collection are well-known and widely recognized throughout Spain and Latin America, where they are included in school curricula.

Love is the overarching theme of *Exemplary Novels*. The plots focus on the adventures of young men and women on their way to adulthood and matrimony. As in most literature of the Spanish Golden Age, everything that happens before marriage is the stuff of comedy while all that happens after, of tragedy. In *Exemplary Novels* Cervantes offers highly original variants of this broad scheme, sometimes based on traditional tales, such as that of the old man married to a young woman, or new stories, like that of a young man married to a seasoned prostitute who fools him, steals his jewels, and infects him with syphilis. The variety of the stories, as much in plot and character as in their following the available narrative molds of the period, is one of the appeals of the book, which may get its title from being a collection of samples (*ejemplos*) of novelistic possibilities: picaresque, byzantine, Italianate (comic-erotic), and even one, the last one, a dialogue featuring two dogs as protagonists. One way to see Cervantes's project in this book is as a miniaturization of extant prose-fictional genres that probes into their artfulness and draws out their literary essence by compression. They are exemplary in that way, it seems to me, though there has been much discussion about the adjective "exemplary," in which some want to see a moralistic intention. But Cervantes never wrote that kind of story. He declares in the prologue: "My intention has been to bring out into the public square of our nation a magician's table where each person can be entertained, with no harm to anyone; I mean, with no harm to soul or body, because honest, pleasant pastimes are profitable rather than harmful."

Cervantes knew the works of Giovanni Boccaccio and Matteo Bandello, the premier novella writers, particularly the first. He was familiar with Italian literature which, even this late in the Renaissance, continued to be the defining one in Europe and provided models for poetry—mostly the epic—and prose. When Cervantes boasts in the prologue to *Exemplary Novels* that he is

“the first to have written novellas in Castilian,” he means that he is the first Spanish writer to publish stories whose form, content, and style followed those of the Italian masters, particularly Boccaccio, who was well-known in Spain in the original as well as in translations. (The verb that Cervantes uses, *novellar*, is a neologism.) But he needed no translations from the Italian, having spent several years in an Italy that was still in no small measure part of the Spanish Empire, obviously learning the language. These stories, or *novelle*, were what, by today’s standards, are called long short stories or short novels. “Daisy Miller,” by Henry James, and “The Old Man and the Sea,” by Ernest Hemingway, come to mind as modern examples in English. One could imagine some of Cervantes’s novels in today’s *New Yorker*. Boccaccian stories were sophisticated, lascivious, often humorous, and involved mostly one or two protagonists with a supporting cast of accomplices or victims. They dealt with sexual promiscuity involving sinful activities such as adultery and concubinage, dwelling in a delightful way upon the guiles of young men and women seeking erotic satisfaction against societal and religious restrictions. Priests were often participants in the shenanigans. Bandello was even more daring and lewd, and his stories became a source for writers from other lands, like Shakespeare, who took from him the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. Cervantes was never as bawdy as Boccaccio or Bandello, but he was daring by Spanish standards.

Cervantes added a strong dose of realism to the Italian features of some of his stories that he derived from the Spanish picaresque, which involved settings in low-class environments, such as sordid inns and town squares, and characters like criminals and prostitutes. But in other stories the setting is idealistic, reminiscent of pastoral and Byzantine romances, the latter redolent with sea voyages and their inevitable shipwrecks, unexpected encounters and re-encounters, discoveries of their identities, and other conventional narrative devices. In several stories he manages to merge these two trends, as he did in *Don Quixote*, producing a brilliant synthesis of styles that is one of the most recognizable features of his work. Some have tried to divide the stories into idealistic and realistic, but Cervantes threw them all together in the volume, and not a few stories have features of both.

In Italian, the short novels go back to *Il Novellino*, the Florentine collection of tales written in the late thirteenth century and published in 1525, and ultimately, like all brief stories, to *The Thousand and One Nights* and the dawn of narrative fiction. In Spanish, their antecedents are those stories included in *Libro de los ejemplos del conde Lucanor y de Patronio* (“Book of the Examples of Count Lucanor and of Patronio”) by Don Juan Manuel, first written in 1335.

The length and structure of these texts are probably determined by their oral beginnings, which means that they should be read aloud in one sitting and that listeners ought to be able to remember and connect details of the narrative as they followed the speaker. A silent reading can also be finished in one session, with the same effect. This relative brevity leads to the text's taut artistry, which is still a feature of the modern short story. Cervantes dramatizes this foundational scene in *Don Quixote*, when the priest reads to the group assembled at the inn the story of "The Man Who Was Recklessly Curious." His *Exemplary Novels* and the novels he inserted in *Don Quixote* owe much to this previous history and to the assiduous practice of storytelling by the Italians and their followers. I suspect that he also learned a good deal from listening to tales told by people of all ranks and backgrounds as he roamed through the Castilian and Andalusian towns doing his work as a tax collector. Some of the novels retain the freshness of something heard from real people.

What Cervantes did not need from the Italians or from literary tradition in general were plots and characters. He was full of ideas for stories and seems to have favored the short novel as the preferred length for plots, to judge by the many that he included or worked into his longer works, such as Part One of *Don Quixote* and *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda*. In all likelihood *Don Quixote* started as a brief novel which was going to end after the scrutiny of the hidalgo's library or thereabouts. Cervantes planned a separate collection of novels, to be called *Semanas del jardín*, or *Weeks in the Garden*, which by its title seems to have had an overarching narrative conceit like that of Boccaccio's *Decameron*; a group of storytellers retire to a garden fleeing some catastrophe to tell their tales. But it was never published and instead probably morphed into *Exemplary Novels*, which did not need such a contrivance to buttress it but simply appeared as the work of Miguel de Cervantes because of his newly acquired fame and authority.

Critics of the intercalated stories in Part One of *Don Quixote* have not realized that the experiment that Cervantes was carrying out was merging two broad narrative schemes into his book. On the one hand the sequential, epic-style plot of the chivalric romance, which he was parodying and therefore copying, as it were. On the other, the collection of short novels in the style of Boccaccio. He carried it off brilliantly, particularly in the amalgam of narrative threads that intertwine at the inn, involving the story of Fernando and Dorotea, Dorotea's paranoid version of the story of the giant Pandafilando de la Fosca Vista, the imbroglio of Cardenio and Luscinda, and the main plot of the novel in which Don Quixote and Sancho are protagonists. All of the conflicts in those narratives are resolved in yet another story, Don Quixote's dream,

in which he slays the giant, but has really slashed the wine skins that the innkeeper hangs in the room where the knight sleeps. The nightmare of a madman brings harmony to all. This is a spark of literary genius that went unnoticed by Cervantes's detractors, but it shows the preeminent role that short novels played in his creative mind.

Cervantes's imagination also seemed to be filled with characters; there is the vast array of those in both parts of *Don Quixote*, who range from the pair of unforgettable protagonists to Juan Palomeque, the innkeeper in Part One, to Maritornes, the ugly but kind prostitute accosted by Don Quixote in the dark of night, and to the Duke and Duchess in Part Two. With a mere brushstroke, Cervantes created the galley slave (I, 22), a serial seducer who has impregnated two of his cousins, and the Gentleman in Green, a contented petty nobleman who invites the knight to his home. Then there are those characters imagined by other characters, like Dulcinea in her various guises, the enchanters, and the spectral residents of Montesinos Cave. The same variety and originality prevails in *Exemplary Novels*, where we find a madman who believes that he is made of glass, the wily and wise Monipodio who runs a brotherhood of thugs from his house in Seville, eloquent witches, dogs who live picaresque lives and talk about them, and a delightful Gypsy orphan who turns out to be the stolen daughter of aristocrats. In his fiction, Cervantes is like a minor god, creating individuals who are colorful, unique, entertaining, and often highly articulate.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra had been born in September 1547, probably on the 29th, the feast of St. Michael, to judge by the Christian name with which he was baptized, in Alcalá de Henares, a town near Madrid, hence in Castile and the center of the Spanish Peninsula. In 1498 an impressive university had been founded there, but Miguel and his family had nothing to do with it, as far as is known. Cervantes's father was a surgeon, which at the time did not require a university degree and was an occupation closer to that of a barber than to what a surgeon is today. He was often in debt, moving his family from city to city to escape from debt collectors. It exposed the young Miguel to Madrid, Valladolid, and Seville, cities in which he would live during significant periods of his adult life.

We know very little about Miguel's childhood and education. Because of his praiseful references to them, it seems possible that he attended Jesuit schools. He is believed to have matriculated at some point in a school run by Juan López de Hoyos, who published some of his early verse, reputed to be a follower of Desiderius Erasmus, which has led much scholarship to associate

Cervantes with the captivating philosophy of that prominent humanist. This is all based on speculation, questionable readings of his works, and even more questionable critical practices. Cervantes never attended university. We must assume that the considerable humanistic education that he evinces in his writings was self-acquired and resign ourselves to the fact that it is useless to judge him by the standards we use for ordinary individuals like ourselves. He was obviously brilliant, a genius, motivated, disciplined, and ambitious, all while desperately trying to make a living and secure a decent place in society. Cervantes was also fortunate to have found himself immersed in a high-powered, active, literary, intellectual, and artistic world, packed with first-rate, prolific minds. This was his university. For all the clichés about Spain being intellectually cut off from European trends, the likes of Fray Luis de León, Lope de Vega, Luis de Góngora, Tirso de Molina, Mateo Alemán, Francisco de Quevedo, and Calderón de la Barca constituted an array of literary geniuses without peer in the Continent. Among the painters there were, of course, Diego Velázquez, El Greco, Francisco de Zurbarán, and Juan de Herrera who topped the list of architects (he designed El Escorial). Precariously propped up economically by wealth arriving from its American colonies and ruinous loans from foreign bankers, Spain and the newly designated capital Madrid were undergoing a construction boom in which the arts thrived. In addition, Spain's interests and control over substantial parts of Italy opened wide a door to artistic and philosophical movements that were at the cutting edge in the West. Cervantes profited artistically and intellectually, though not financially, from this enriching environment because he had the intelligence, dedication, and drive to do so.

There are quite a few young characters in *Exemplary Novels* who display these qualities as they mature and look for a place in the world. These novels, as the rest of Cervantes's works, are full of students at various levels of their education. Most are witty, ingenuous, and bent on learning as much as possible from books as well as from life. The most memorable is Tomás Rodaja, the young man who, poisoned by a spurned woman, winds up insane, believing himself to be made of glass. He had earlier managed to acquire a superb education by becoming the servant of well-to-do students at the University of Salamanca, where he became a notable legal scholar. Perhaps in all these students Cervantes portrays the young man that he would have liked to have been. But fate took him in the direction of the military, and the debate between arms and letters will resonate throughout his fiction, no doubt reflecting his own destiny.

Chance would intervene, as it often does in Cervantes's fiction. In 1569 he fled to Italy, accused of wounding a man in a duel, a practice that was forbidden

and severely punished by the right hand being cut off. Cervantes would not return to Spain until 1580. In Rome he joined the household of Cardinal Acquaviva as chamberlain. What qualifications he had for the job is anyone's guess. It was likely a question of influences. But Cervantes was expanding his Italian education. In 1570, however, he enlisted in a Spanish regiment stationed in Naples, part of the vast naval force gathered by the Holy League under John of Austria for the purpose of stopping the Ottoman Turks. On October 7, 1571, Cervantes fought bravely in the Battle of Lepanto, in which the Turks were soundly defeated. In the fierce close combat from ship to ship he was shot in the left arm, forever losing the use of that hand. He would always mention with pride his participation in this battle, which eventually led to his acquiring the rhyming moniker by which he is known in the Spanish-speaking world: "el Manco de Lepanto," or "The One-Handed Man of Lepanto." It was the high point of his military career, which continued in spite of his being partially maimed. In 1575 he attempted to return home with his brother Rodrigo, who was also a soldier, but was captured at sea by Barbary pirates and sold into slavery in Algiers. Because he carried with him letters of recommendation from important people, his captors thought Cervantes to be an important person and set his ransom very high. He spent five years in captivity, during which he made four unsuccessful escape attempts. In 1580 Cervantes was finally ransomed for 500 ducats paid by his struggling family and Trinitarian monks. Captivity left a deep impression on the writer he would become, appearing in his theater and famously in *Don Quixote*, in which he tells his story in the captive's tale (I, 39–41). María Antonia Garcés has written the most thorough account of this period in Cervantes's life and its impact on his writing.

Cervantes's experiences as a soldier and captive in the Mediterranean enriched his life with characters and stories, some of which would emerge not just in his longer fictions but also in *Exemplary Novels* and his theater. The decade away from home, however, had put his literary career and ordinary life on hold. In 1580 Cervantes was thirty-three, unmarried, putatively childless (he may have left an illegitimate son in Italy), and had yet to publish a book or stage a play. It was this late start that likely provoked his late blooming in the last ten years of his work. Ana de Villafranca, a married woman who was his mistress in Madrid, gave him a daughter, Isabel, around 1584. In that same year, Cervantes, who was by now thirty-eight, married Catalina de Salazar, an eighteen-year-old from Esquivias, a wine-producing region near Madrid. Her family owned some land. The next year, in 1585, he published his first book, *La Galatea*, a pastoral romance, and sold two plays which have not survived.

The romance showed promise, particularly because we now know what came after, but it would not have made Cervantes famous. To judge by the theater that did reach us, the plays were not successful because he made the wrong choice at a crucial juncture in the history of the Spanish stage. He sided with those who would follow Aristotle's *Poetics*, as they were being touted by theorists like Alfonso López Pinciano—keeping to the three units of action, time, and space. Lope de Vega (1562–1635), who would emerge as the unsurpassed playwright of the period, was founder of the national theater and had developed his own formula, which disregarded the unities. Lope became a thorn in Cervantes's side throughout his career. He lorded over the literary landscape and did not hold the author of *Don Quixote* in high regard. And as the theater was the only literary activity from which Cervantes could hope to derive a profit, he was, as he would be for much of his life, out of money and without work.

Cervantes found a job as king's purchasing agent in Andalusia, part of the effort to provision the great Spanish Armada that Philip II was assembling to finally put away the English. He spent seven years all told in this activity, as tax collector in the same area after the defeat of the Armada in 1588. This occupation would allow him to come to know intimately the Andalusian countryside, with its dusty roads, ramshackle inns, and its quarrelsome small towns, where the residents resented his presence and occupation. Cervantes also spent a great deal of time in Seville, gateway to the New World, a bustling port thriving with all the legal and illegal activities typical of such a place. Cervantes was jailed twice for apparent irregularities in his accounts. In 1597–98 he spent several months in Seville's jail, where he purportedly conceived the idea for *Don Quixote*.

Miguel and Catalina did not live together for long periods during these years, and the marriage remained barren. He came to grief because of the illicit activities of his sister Magdalena and his daughter Isabel, who had a variety of affairs with wealthy men, in part no doubt due to their precarious financial situation. In 1604 the family moved to Valladolid, which had become the capital of Spain for a brief period, obviously looking for ways to make a living. The women worked as seamstresses. It was then that Cervantes finished *Don Quixote*, which was published in early 1605 to great acclaim. It was a distillation of his vast readings including, of course, the romances of chivalry, and his intense engagement with the realities that he had experienced as a soldier, captive, itinerant tax collector, and aspiring author. Spain had begun its decline, and the catastrophe of the Armada in 1588 was a clear sign of it. The economy was beset by inflation, which was partly due to the riches arriving from the Indies, as well as demographic changes that soon would include

the expulsion of the *moriscos*, or the Muslims who remained in the Peninsula after the fall of Granada in 1492. (The best account of all this in English continues to be J. H. Elliott's magnificent *Imperial Spain*.) *Don Quixote* was not, in spite of it all, a disillusioned book, in great measure because of its humor and the humane way in which Cervantes portrays people from all ranks and occupations. No character in Cervantes is uniformly evil. He is not a pessimistic writer, like his contemporary Shakespeare. As Melveena McKendrick puts it in her excellent book *Cervantes*, addressing the misguided opinion that in *Exemplary Novels* there is a progression from idealism to pessimism, "Cervantes's literary disillusion is never cruel and is usually good humored; and in his work as a whole he balances his exposure to the folly of man with an affirmation of right values and right behavior—just as in *Don Quixote* his parody of the literature of knight errantry is underpinned by his assertions of what literature ought to be: responsible, congruous, and truthful" (172). The several happy endings in *Exemplary Novels* attest to this.

McKendrick also points out that toward the end of his life Cervantes seems to have found solace in religion. In 1609 he joined the brotherhood called the Confraternity of Slaves of the Most Blessed Sacrament. He had never been the religious rebel that some have tried to make him out to be. As McKendrick also writes, "throughout his life and work Cervantes gives us no reason to believe that he was not as true a son of the Church as he was a fervent patriot" (123). It is tempting to make Cervantes into a modern thinker because of his emphasis on ambiguity, perspectivism, the fragility and elusiveness of the self and of the truth, and the shiftiness of the literary text. He takes these issues as far as they can go even today, and they may appear to have been heretical in the Spain of his time. But Cervantes never had any trouble with the Inquisition and none of his works suffered from censorship. I believe that in these matters he practiced a double truth, as Américo Castro suggests in *El pensamiento de Cervantes*, where he disavows the idea that the author of the *Quixote* was an *ingenio lego*, an unlettered wit. The two truths were those emerging from the new ideas that developed in the Renaissance and beyond, leading to modernity, and Catholic doctrine, particularly the Spanish kind, which seemed to favor a return to the Middle Ages and scholasticism. Cervantes found a way to harmonize both without straining either. Nothing shook him from his faith, as he expounds in the prologue to the *Persiles*, practically written on his deathbed. Cervantes had extreme unction, the last sacrament of the Church, administered, and he was buried in Madrid's Convent of the Barefoot Trinitarian Nuns, where his bones have apparently just been found to the foolish glee of the Spanish state.

A characteristic that makes Cervantes sound like one of us is his delightful self-deprecation, which seems sincere, not a mere rhetorical convention to garner the reader's approval. In the prologue to the 1605 *Don Quixote*, he takes self-effacement to a high philosophical level, questioning what it means to begin a book, pretending to disavow his authorship of it, inventing a friend who advises him to dispense with the conventions of a prologue and with literary tradition as a whole, and making the difficulties of writing the prologue its very subject. The prologue to *Exemplary Novels*, in which he alludes to the previous one, is much more personal and his self-mockery more humorous and physical. To tell the reader how he looks, Cervantes writes what a friend of his would write if asked to describe a portrait of him:

The man you see here, with the aquiline face, chestnut hair, smooth clear brow, joyful eyes, curved yet well-proportioned nose, silver beard that was golden not twenty years ago, large mustache, small mouth, teeth neither short nor long because he has only six, and those are worn down and badly placed since they are not distributed in a symmetrical manner; his body lies between the two extremes, neither large nor small, his coloring is vivid, more fair than dark, and he is somewhat stoop-shouldered and not very light on his feet; this, I say, is the appearance of the author of *La Galatea* and *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, and of the man who made the *Viaje del Parnaso*, imitating the one by Cesare Caporali of Perugia, as well as other works that have gone astray and perhaps are missing the name of their owner, who is commonly called Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. He was a soldier for many years, and a captive for five and a half, when he learned to be patient in adversity. In the naval battle of Lepanto he lost his left hand to a harquebus, a wound that, although it looks ugly, he considers beautiful because it was acquired on the highest, most memorable occasion witnessed by past centuries or that future centuries can hope to see, as he served under the victorious banners of the son of the thunderbolt of war, Charles the Fifth, of happy memory.

It is typical of Cervantes that he does not write directly about himself but, as in the 1605 *Don Quixote* prologue, invents a friend who does it for him, pretending to take his distance. But what is so charming is the description of his well-worn body and how it has suffered the ravages of time and of war—missing teeth, gray beard, hunched back, and crippled hand—compared to his long gone, youthful attractive attributes such as an aquiline profile, happy eyes, well-proportioned nose, brown hair, and blond beard. The description is similar

to those he would write of some of his characters, deftly combining physical and moral features, all in a state of flux that renders the combination mildly comical. In some instances a physical trait defines a character like Preciosa's cleft chin in "The Novel of the Little Gypsy Girl," or Ginés de Pasamonte's crossed eyes in *Don Quixote*. It is the Cervantes portrayed in the prologue, with all his faults and physical defects, who is the author of the "inventions" (as he calls them) that the reader will find in *Exemplary Novels*; not an intellectual or physical giant, but an ordinary fellow who is near the end of his life. Age and experience have given him an unembellished, ironic perspective of himself and the world, but not a pessimistic one, to which the humor attests.

In the front matter to the book, specifically in the poems that serve the function of today's literary endorsements, and which Cervantes composed himself of course, he refers to the novels in the book as "twelve labyrinths" (8) and "fables" with a "secret" (9). He was well aware and justifiably proud of the depth and deftness of the fictions that he had created, of their sophistication and originality. And he was right to be so. From the first to the last, all the tales carry the Cervantean imprint of unobtrusive self-reflexiveness and an invitation to do the keenest interpretive reading, like both parts of *Don Quixote*, particularly the second with its several internal authors and readers of the first. The *Exemplary Novels* engage literary and philosophical issues of the highest complexity and reach, augmented by their relative brevity which demands critical concentration. Even the opening novel, which has the air of being just an entertaining romance about a charming character, the young Gypsy girl Preciosa, who turns out to be the daughter of aristocrats, and who is virtuous and adept at singing and dancing, is a complex and challenging work. That it was chosen to open the volume seems to suggest that it announces the collection's main premises and themes, and it does.

The story hinges on anagnorisis, the discovery by the young woman of who she truly is, which retrospectively explains her principled ways and physical beauty (Cervantes, like his contemporaries, believed in the power of heredity). This is a traditional motif and has as background the story of Cinderella. Self-discovery is a serious matter, as Oedipus, and Segismundo in Calderón de la Barca's masterpiece *Life Is a Dream*, famously show. Just as important are Preciosa's and Andrés's creation of identities; he, a young nobleman, willfully turns into a Gypsy to gain Preciosa's love and acceptance by her people. The idea of undergoing a rigorous test to make oneself worthy of a woman is also a traditional motif. Preciosa plays to the hilt the role of the captivating young Gypsy woman, endowed with the talents of such an individual. She can sing,

dance, and be alluring to all, particularly to men, which makes her seductive and profitable, a crucial trait for Gypsies, whose main occupation is robbery, but also charming others out of their wealth. Later, Preciosa will have to learn to be the young aristocrat that she was from birth, but this comes easy to her.

The restitution of her true kinship at the end follows precise legal strictures, as if to underline the gravity of the matter which, after all, began with a crime: her abduction by the Gypsies. The juridical allusion also highlights the picaresque setting of the story, with and against which Cervantes is working. The Gypsy camp appears as a scaled-down prototype of picaresque fiction, being that its denizens are criminal by nature and adhere to the rules of a self-invented but strict organization, like those of a novel. The main conceit of picaresque novels is that they portray the disorder of criminal low life, in contrast to mainstream society's order, but Cervantes's representation of it shows that the lower classes have, too, their own very rigorous internal organization. (It is in this feature that the brilliant Spanish criminologist Rafael Salillas found in Cervantes's works the origins of modern social science.) The Gypsy band is the inverted image of society, and the counterpart of the Neoplatonic perfection displayed by Preciosa and her mores, whose backdrop is the pastoral. This conflicting combination of the real and the ideal is Cervantes's signature.

In "The Novel of the Little Gypsy Girl" Cervantes has rewritten the picaresque, mixing its strongest traits with features of Neoplatonic, idealist literature like the pastoral. But he has shown, in the character of Andrés, that the picaresque, which draws stories and characters from the legal archive purported to reflect reality and not literature, has turned into a literary paradigm, even providing a new role to play, like that of knight or shepherd. Andrés willfully becomes a kind of *pícaro* when he joins the Gypsies. When Cervantes returns to the picaresque in "The Novel of Rinconete and Cortadillo" and "The Novel of the Illustrious Scullery Maid," he again underscores that the protagonists of these novels choose to become rogues in a similar way to Alonso Quijano, the hidalgo who becomes Don Quixote, chose to become a knight. Picaresque life appeals to these young men, as it did to the first innkeeper in *Don Quixote* (a retired *pícaro*), because it is a life of freedom, without society's rules and restrictions. This is a constant in Cervantes: characters exercise their free will to turn themselves into whatever they want to be, which is often to play the role of literary characters.

In "Rinconete and Cortadillo," Cervantes sets the action in Seville, the capital of picaresque life, a bustling port through which Spain communicated with its vast empire, and a place where he spent a good deal of time sampling its most sordid sectors, including the city's jail. There is an immediacy in the

portrayal of Seville that betrays these autobiographical elements. But, as in “La Gitanilla,” Cervantes avails himself of literary, including most importantly theatrical, conventions. The eponymous young men join a gang of thugs run authoritatively by Monipodio, who rules crime in Seville like a business venture centered around his house, within which Cervantes sets memorable scenes that give the novel the air of a play, perhaps an interlude (“entremés”) like those he excelled in writing. The action includes a sophisticated and hilarious altercation between Cariharta (Full Face), a prostitute, and her pimp Repolido (Hairless). He, whose baldness suggests a venereal disease, has beaten her badly, she claims, but it turns out that they engaged in consensual sado-masochistic sexual play. “The Novel of Rinconete and Cortadillo” does not have a very satisfactory ending; it reads like the prelude to a longer story. The young men leave the confraternity to get on with their lives, closing the picaresque period which took the form of a fun-filled education.

But the wake of “The Novel of the Little Gypsy Girl” is felt most strongly in two stories that rely on anagnorises and a young man’s effort to gain the love of a young woman by passing an arduous test. They both center on a female protagonist made up of contradictory qualities that give titles to the novels: “The Novel of the Illustrious Scullery Maid” and “The Novel of the English Spanishwoman.” How can anybody be an “illustrious” scullery maid, or even more implausibly, an “English Spanish” lady? Costanza, the product of the rape of an aristocratic widow, lives unaware of who she really is while working as a maid at the notorious “Sevillian’s Inn” in Toledo. Isabella was abducted as an infant during the English raid on Cadiz and brought up in London by an English family. Both young women are gorgeous, of course, as well as virtuous. Isabella, brought up by covert Catholics, remains true to her Spanish roots, though she otherwise becomes a young English lady, soon courted by two young men of quality. Costanza is so famous for her beauty that two young men who have left home with a servant to study in Salamanca divert to Toledo to see her. They had, in any case, decided to abandon their studies to become *pícaros* in Seville. One of them, Tomás, falls madly in love with Costanza and devotes all his energies to making her his wife. He manages to do this after much effort and the unexpected appearance of Costanza’s mother, which leads to the discovery of her true origins, and makes the marriage possible. The portrayal of life at the inn and its environs, featuring working-class people of the lowest classes, particularly carriers, is as detailed as that in “The Novel of Rinconete and Cortadillo.” It includes much card playing. In one such game, Tomás loses his precious donkey, which he wanted to use to earn a living by carrying water, and recovers it through an elaborate trick that en-

crypts the very nature of the complicated text of the novel and the role chance plays in life, as Katherine L. Brown has shown in a brilliant essay. Meanwhile, Isabella's suitor, Ricaredo, to meet conditions to attain her established by none other than the English Virgin Queen Elizabeth herself, is forced to captain a fleet of ships that attack Spanish vessels. He is in the predicament of fighting against his own, meaning Catholics. After protracted adventures reminiscent of Byzantine romances that include a very conventional stopover in Rome, and the return of Isabella to her parents in Cadiz, they marry and live happily ever after, as did Preciosa with her Andrés.

The way Cervantes closed the volume of *Exemplary Novels* could not have been the result of chance or the editor's intervention. It is a very significant conclusion to the book because it involves two interconnected novels, and the final one is left unfinished, with a second part still to be told. It is as open-ended as can be. We have here Cervantes returning to his games of authorship by playing with the origins of his text, its reliability, and the roles of author and reader. To top it all off, the last novella is about two dogs who tell their stories to each other. The potentially fantastic element and the framing-tale structure hearken back to the origins of fiction, so it is clear to me that Cervantes is winding up his book with a meditation on storytelling and on writing. Although the enveloping novel appears to be a conventional one with, again, a realistic setting reminiscent of the picaresque, it is anything but that.

The protagonist is lieutenant Campuzano, who is staggering out of the Hospital of La Resurrección in Valladolid, where he has been treated for a bout of syphilis. He stumbles upon his old friend Licentiate Peralta, a lawyer, who invites him to his place for a meal to help him recover. There, Campuzano tells his friend how one night, while half asleep in the hospital, he overheard a conversation between two dogs, Cipión and Berganza, which he had committed to memory and then written down in a manuscript that he pulls out of his bosom and hands over to the licentiate. He also tells him how he came to be in the hospital, which is "The Novel of the Deceitful Marriage," the eleventh story in the book. That frame tale, for all its apparently standard adventures, is a novel told backwards. Whereas nearly all the other novels in the volume lead to a marriage (except the one about the old man married to the young woman, "The Novel of the Jealous Extremaduran"), here the action nearly begins with a wedding. The soldier, to have a good time, picks up an attractive woman—she is not beautiful—whom he plans to marry, and after a while, skip town and return to the army. She seems quite willing and offers the use of a substantial house where she seemingly lives. The woman, Estefanía, who is a prostitute, plans to bilk the soldier out of his money and jewels. Under these false

pretenses they marry and move into the house, where they enjoy a brief period of matrimonial bliss. But the true owners of the house show up unexpectedly, Estefanía disappears with the jewels which Campuzano regrets—but not so much because he knows that they are fakes anyway. It is Estefanía, however, who has the last laugh because Campuzano winds up in the hospital with syphilis. So marriage, which in the *Exemplary Novels* stands for order, is used here for deceit and leaves the protagonists in a social, moral, and physical wilderness. Though quite funny, this is a very depressing ending. But all is saved by literature because, in the hospital, the ensign is inspired to write “The Dogs’ Colloquy,” a truly remarkable novel that is arguably the masterpiece of *Exemplary Novels*. It is, as it were, the child of the fraudulent marriage.

The debate as to whether the dogs could actually speak, or whether the ensign suffered a hallucination or (most probably) that he just wrote the story himself and created a fiction about its origins, is never resolved. The soldier has asked his lawyer friend, presumably trained in reading for the truth, to tell him if he should write the second part, for only Berganza’s story is told, and the dogs had agreed that Cipión would go ahead with his tale the following night. Peralta tells him that he should proceed; that whatever the nature of the tale, it is good enough to deserve being completed.

Berganza’s story is like a picaresque autobiography, and it includes a story about the dogs’ origins and their ability to speak. They are presumably children of a famous witch who appears in the novel, but no conclusive evidence of this is given. The action takes place in Seville, of course, and the picaresque convention of a rogue serving several masters is easily worked into the tale because the dogs, naturally, have various owners who use them for different tasks, some illegal, to be sure. Their early lives center on Seville’s slaughterhouse, filled with violence and blood, not all from animals, and peopled by criminals of all sorts. Cervantes’s perversion of the picaresque is original, brilliant even, as people are observed from the perspective of dogs that can assume and express a detached critical attitude. Some of the episodes are hilarious. Cipión, meanwhile, is an informed, skeptical, and pedantic interlocutor who keeps Berganza to his story line by criticizing digressions, distractions, and unnecessary moralizing. He is a very funny editor in action who, with the lawyer Peralta, represents us, the readers, in the story.

If any writer encouraged his readers to read behind the story being told, it is Cervantes. In the case of Berganza’s account of his life, it is possible to discern the ensign Campuzano’s own veiled autobiography. His mother may have been a whore, we are led to suspect, like the witch who presumably gave birth to both dogs, and his childhood may very well have been like those of the animals in

Seville's sordid slaughterhouse. The untold life of Cipión, because of the dog's martial name (two famous Roman soldiers were named Scipio), could be Cam-puzano's embellished soldierly adventures, a Quixote-like life of heroic deeds, though, because of his punctilious concern with narrative form, it would also contain a bookish side. Cipión could then represent the marriage of arms and letters that Cervantes himself embodied, and provide through his story a synthesis of their timeless quarrel, potentially, as well as a mirthful self-portrait. But the reader is left waiting for it, eagerly anticipating that next night when Cervantes's fictional world would again awaken to bring us, the readers, renewed joy.

I cannot finish this introduction without acknowledging the crucial assistance that I have enjoyed from Matthew Tanico. This young *cervantista* helped me not just with technical issues and bibliographical queries, but was my interlocutor throughout. His observations and criticisms were invaluable and are reflected in the final product, whose failings are all my own, of course. I thank him sincerely and wish him well in what will no doubt be a distinguished career as a scholar and professor.

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