

PRODIGAL SONS, PRODIGIOUS DAUGHTERS: IRONY AND THE PICARESQUE TRADITION

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The discourse of picaresque narrative is almost always ironic. First-person narration would seem to give autonomy to the speaker, but the more one studies the message systems within the texts, the more perceptible the interplay of the narrator with an implied author.¹ Fictional autobiography is hardly unmediated; the authorial overlay, as it were, often sets itself up to counter and to contradict the speaker's words. The early Spanish picaresque novels—including the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*, and Francisco de Quevedo's *La vida del Buscón*—demonstrate the dialectics of constructed and deconstructed discourse. In novels that feature female protagonists, such as Francisco López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina* and Alonso de Castillo Solórzano's *Teresa de Manzanares*, male authors create female narrators, and the gender gap intensifies the manipulation of the discourse, and thus foregrounds the irony of the ventriloquized voices. Men writing as women was a focus of my study entitled *The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque*. In this essay, I accentuate three novels, written and narrated by women, which relate to the discursive levels of the picaresque. My premise is that the narrative structure of the early modern Spanish picaresque is predicated upon irony, in thematic and technical terms, and that twentieth-century writers—notably, women writers—appropriate and invert the initial premises. They use the ironic foundation to exalt the antiheroine, and thereby to redefine the discursive parameters and the socio-historical contexts of the fiction. Irony is *trope* and *troped*, a sign of dialogical discourse and a sign of object turned subject. I will point to three types of irony in contemporary variations of the feminine picaresque, and I will put forward an example of each.²

In Francisco Delicado's *La lozana andaluza* of 1528, the dialogue gives voice to the protagonist, a Spanish prostitute who resides in Italy, and to an authorial figure, the *auctor*. His commentary is not extratextual or extraneous; rather, it forms part of a polyphonic structure, where sin and moralization intersect. Delicado can have his cake and eat it, too. He is the moralizer, Lozana the sinner. He can violate the boundaries of taste and decorum through her, but he is, of course, her inventor. He controls her much as society controls her, and, to a degree, he is able to maneuver

literary protocol, and censorship, by separating himself from his creation and by adding a veneer of morality. Lozana's power, in turn, comes from her very presence in the text. Proper society would erase her from the picture, but Delicado immortalizes her, her point of view, and her idiolect. He engages her in a battle with society, a battle that she is destined to lose but that marks her individuality and the force of the opposition. Within the dialogical format, he represents but a single voice, but as "author," editor, and organizer of the materials, he devises the frame for Lozana's story and, significantly, for her discourse. *La lozana andaluza* captures the push-and-pull between author and character that typifies picaresque narrative. It demonstrates, as well, a comparable phenomenon along gender lines, wherein the male author occupies a position superior to the female protagonist, who nonetheless gains, in the fictional enterprise, a discursive space that society denies her. The mechanisms of control win out, but in doing so they expose their seams. From a distance—and irony generally operates at a distance—the power structure seems less a natural order than an imposed order. By the same token, woman's place seems to be more profitably problematic, more open to scrutiny.

La lozana andaluza constitutes a type of middle ground between *La Celestina* (1499, 1502) and *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). Rojas calls attention to the go-between Celestina and the passionate (and sexually active) Melibea. Each has a distinct and eloquent voice, and each dies as retribution for her errors in judgment and for her vices, which are theological as well as social. Lozana also speaks for herself and suffers for her vices, and, like her predecessors, she is inscribed onto the page, into the record. Melibea acknowledges the dilemma of women, who must conceal their desires while men may verbalize and act upon theirs. Celestina is a consummate rhetorician, but her linguistic expertise is at the service of transgression (see Friedman, "Rhetoric"). Lozana, as her name suggests, is robust and lascivious, free with her sexuality and with her words. Her defiance of social norms cannot go unpunished, but she chooses notoriety over nonentity. She is subject to the condemnation of the public, to venereal disease, and to self-denunciation. Concurrently, she is the protagonist of a text and thus subject to textuality,³ to shifting perspectives and focal points, some of which offer her a redemption of sorts. Lázaro the outsider follows in the path of these marginalized, antisocial women. He asserts himself into mainstream society, but he never escapes the limitations occasioned by his birth. He reifies the unacceptable, the odious, the parasitic. Lázaro is Sisyphus as rogue. His goal is to enter into a system that has traditionally ostracized those of his ilk. He attempts to invade a sacrosanct domain, while his adversaries seek to protect themselves from contamination. Analogically speaking, he uses the conventions of idealistic literature to rehearse an unexemplary and often cor-

rupt life. He is the object of scorn and the object of parody, yet he is, nonetheless, a full-fledged subject, with a personal history, a psyche, and a forum from which to *explain* himself, in the multiple sense of the term.

Lazarillo de Tormes features a single narrator, whose account denotes the outer fringes of Renaissance self-fashioning. The narrative thrives on what could be called its unlikelihood. It is rare that a person of Lázaro's station in life would have the occasion to enter the literary domain, even as a defensive gesture. Although the pretext is an explanation of the "case" to the looming figure known only as *Vuestra Merced*, Lázaro chooses to set forth his exculpatory statement as autobiography, or at least as modified autobiography, in order to strengthen the argument. That is, Lázaro employs a clearly defined rhetorical strategy in his remarks. He wants the reader to base the final judgment on the big picture, which includes a consideration of his lowly birth and meager opportunities for success, factors that will shed light on—elucidate and glorify—his accomplishments in life (his residence in Toledo, his *oficio real*, his marriage, and his working relationship with the Archpriest of San Salvador). Within this argument is a counterargument aimed at covering the other end of the credibility spectrum: If one cannot admit the proposition that Lázaro is a successful or a good person, let it be understood that he is no worse than his neighbors. Therein lies the complex foundation of irony in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The nominal authority of the speaker is an illusion, for he is controlled from without by an implied author, poised to convert the self-defense into an incriminatory, and parodical, document, and poised to let the hierarchical social structure crush the unworthy individual. It is ironic, of course, that the narrator/protagonist becomes consumed in his own chronicle of events and that he thus becomes the butt of the satire. And it is additionally ironic that the society whose standards he cannot live up to is found wanting in every respect. In pre-capitalist Spain, goodness is anything but a plentiful commodity.

The discursive play of *Lazarillo de Tormes* is a fundamental aspect of the text, for several reasons. The narrative begins as a deconstruction of idealism, on numerous levels, but the process inevitably must lead to a reconstruction. The pseudoautobiographical structure, the emphasis on character formation and on causality, and the continual clash of the individual with the dictates of society direct the story and the discourse. Lázaro's trajectory brings bloodlines, the survival instinct, the influence of guardians, lessons in life, the search for stability, and the trappings of respectability into the equation. At one end stand ignoble ancestry and a predetermined isolation from the communal center, and, at the other, an incongruous but understandable obsession with honor (see Friedman, "Coming to Terms"). Lázaro makes his way, albeit by the skin of his teeth, into the middle class. As a result, he suffers the consequences, rather than

the privileges, of middle class morality. Poverty and mandatory subordination no longer detach him from social responsibility, from a preoccupation with appearances. Ironically, he sees himself with an image to maintain, and he is concerned, justifiably, that the image is tarnished. It is ridiculous that Lázaro should portray himself within the parameters of reputable society, and it is ridiculous that he should be the prime mover of judgment against himself. The fact that he does not belong in this system makes a mockery of both the *pícaro* and social values. Both are compromised, the first because his identity stems from deviation from the sanctioned behavior and the second because he is *de ex illis*, a player situated, however precariously, within the circle of legitimacy. Destiny separates him from the realization of his goals, whereas an ironic chain of circumstances integrates him into the community bent on opposing him at every juncture. At the end of his narration, Lázaro refers to his prosperity, but it is a prosperity born of deception, notably of self-deception.

Lázaro de Tormes's discourse is ultimately a metadiscourse. Its messages function on diverse, and interdependent, planes. Every sentence reverberates, and epitomizes Bakhtinian dialogism.⁴ The narrator's story encompasses his particular stance, the "laying bare" of his devices, and, implicitly, an institutionalized reading, or rewriting, of his testimony. The implied author constructs—fabricates—Lázaro's discourse in such a manner as to reveal the inner life, so to speak, of his line of reasoning. The implied reader probably is not meant to give credence to the narrator's points as much as to critique them, to use them as a means of access to the "real" story, which is also ripe for deconstruction. The traps into which Lázaro falls are so deliberately set that they undermine not only the *pícaro* but also the implied author and the social foundations on which the subversion of authority rests. Stated a bit differently, the laying bare of devices unveils the designs of the puppet and the puppeteer, and the behavioral patterns of the id and the superego. Exploitation in the picaresque is a double-edged sword, primarily because the author and social doctrine overpower the would-be cohort, who, in trying to negate his difference from his fellow men, only makes the disparity more pronounced. Apparently unwittingly, the author projects a verbal equivalent of the social scenario, as he usurps his character's discursive space. What pretends to be unmediated discourse—a single voice and a single point of view—is precisely the opposite, a calculated and ironic intrusion into the semantic sphere. Even within the narration proper, Lázaro must be differentiated from Lazarillo, the mature narrator from the youthful protagonist, and at times the two personas collide and (con)fuse. Lázaro puts words into his own mouth, but in this respect he is overshadowed by the implied author, who negotiates text and subtext, plot and plotting, rebellion and containment.

Published forty-five years after *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Guzmán de Alfarache* has a named author. Mateo Alemán distances himself from Guzmán de Alfarache through bold strokes. The *pícaro*'s Semitic heritage on the paternal side and a tradition of impropriety and promiscuity on the maternal side place him at the lowest rung of the social ladder. Alemán, a New Christian posing—or passing—as an Old Christian, adopts an attitude of detachment from the outsider. Like Guzmán, and anticipating Quevedo's Pablos, he overcompensates as a means of self-protection. It could be argued that he positions himself against his narrator/protagonist in order to conceal, and to displace, his own sense—and fear—of alterity. Whatever his motives, Alemán succeeds in creating an inferior being, a boy (and then a man) from whom he and the reader may stand aloof. Guzmán is decidedly not a sympathetic character, yet it would be difficult to disregard the pain and humiliation of his futile struggle to integrate himself into society. The reader can view him with scorn but not with complete indifference, because Guzmán articulates his woes in excruciating detail. The so-called moralizing digressions of *Guzmán de Alfarache* find a common denominator in the theme of injustice. The world prejudices and mistreats Guzmán, and he remains defenseless against a cruel fate. None of his efforts grants him upward mobility; he receives no fair chances. The amorphous quality of the text—a combination of novel and miscellany—allows a key voice to be heard, that of Alemán, who may insert himself and his personal complaints into the scheme. Guzmán's illegitimacy offers Alemán a podium from which to air his own grievances without disturbing his claims to legitimacy, to blood purity, to pre-eminence over the roguish upstart. This is the space in which Alemán becomes anonymous, and it is the base of *Guzmán de Alfarache*'s irony.⁵

Alemán seems, rather self-consciously, to want to sever any connections that he might appear to have with Guzmán. Logically, he would endeavor to link himself to the group for which the *pícaro* is the undesirable Other. The incorporation of Guzmán's opinions on all manner of topics permits Alemán to combine his anger and resentment with the character's frustrations, under the guise of fiction. The officially disengaged author fully engages himself, but surreptitiously, from the background. The publication in 1602 of a "false" sequel to the *Guzmán*, by Mateo Luján de Sayavedra (the pseudonym of Juan Martí) introduces further irony into the master narrative, for in his own second part, published two years later, Alemán begins a campaign to defend the authentic Guzmán from the interloper. In doing so, he must reassess the motives and the mission of the narrator/protagonist, as well as his own. The 1604 *Guzmán* is a different text by virtue of the intrusion. The narrator's professed conversion brings closure, together with a stream of interpretive possibilities, each tinged with irony. By taking Guzmán's side, Alemán

eradicates the barriers that he has established in Part 1, barriers already compromised by cries of the heart. He proves that Guzmán is superior to his rival, but it seems to elude him that superiority in a rogue is a dubious triumph, and, more strikingly, that he has strayed from his original premises.

The concept of the implied author is an abstraction, and especially so in the case of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*. While the implied authors of *Guzmán de Alfarache* and *La vida del Buscón* (1626) have no identities per se, they are aligned artistically and ideologically with their historical counterparts. Consumers can read the texts through whatever knowledge they may have of Alemán and Quevedo. As an indisputable Old Christian, as a nobleman, and as a baroque artist, Quevedo can effect, and hyperbolize, the antagonism between author and character. Pablos is the antithesis of his creator. He is a New Christian at the nadir of the gene pool, and his baroque discourse, conspicuously tied to Quevedo, bespeaks a voice-over. Quevedo brings his authoritarian principles into the production of the text by exercising control over Pablos's destiny and over his language. The demeaning of the *pícaro* reenacts the author's—and his society's—dismissal of those who would defy their place in the margins. In the *Buscón*, even the illusion of control is short-lived, because the baroque flourishes are most prominent in the first three chapters, as is the elaboration of Pablos's ghastly lineage. What may be most ironic about the *Buscón*, nonetheless, is not the palpably uneven conflict between Quevedo and Pablos but the ability of the fictional character to display a will and a mind, relatively speaking, of his own (see, e.g., Williamson). Quevedo situates Pablos in the most degrading and mortifying episodes imaginable, but scorn is tempered with desperation. The reader may extract, and may commiserate with, the solitude and helplessness of the *pícaro* amid the dark humor, the linguistic turns, the contemptible waywardness, and the dialectics of crime and punishment. Quevedo sets the stage for shifting sensibilities to metamorphose the social pariah into an underdog, to be understood, if not lauded, for his misdeeds and for his civil disobedience.

In the archetypal picaresque narratives, fictional autobiography replicates the poetic license—the impulse toward self-fashioning—of non-fictional autobiography. The vita is extended, or supplemented, by the act of writing. The fictional form distinguishes itself from nonfiction by adding a competing authorial construct that appropriates the discursive center and that relegates the *pícaro*—always in the social periphery—to the margins of discourse. The narrators survive, and, to a degree, prosper, because the intervention of the authors is transparent, and because the literary ne'er-do-wells carry the banner of an emerging subjectivity. The structure of these and other early modern Spanish picaresque texts

narrated in the first person manifests a discursive analogue of the confrontation between the individual and society. The implied, yet invasive, author spoils any chance of a fully convincing argument on the part of the *pícaro* or of a bending of the social contract. In this regard, picaresque narrative is overdetermined, and overwhelmingly biased toward maintaining the status quo. The *pícaros'* greatest strength is, paradoxically, their excruciating impotence as authors and as citizens. When the principal character is a woman, the feminine inexorably falls on the wrong side of law and order. Male authors catch female narrators in their snares, ostensibly to give voice to the women's circumstances but really to denounce their moral lapses, or, rather, to have the women denounce themselves. In some of the variations, such as Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo's *La hija de Celestina* (1612) and Castillo Solórzano's *La garduña de Sevilla* (1642), the first-person narration shifts to the third-person, and in these texts the mere semblance of discursive control disappears. María de Zayas and other spirited seventeenth-century Spanish writers advocate women's causes, but there are no extant picaresque narratives by women.

Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) marks a crucial transition from the classic Spanish picaresque to transformations of the subgenre in world literature. Defoe's version of the discursive give-and-take is the rendering of Moll Flanders's life, in her "own" words, as revised and purged by an editor. The form follows the Spanish precedent, but the content moves in a radically different direction: toward society's rehabilitation of its errant souls. Moll's story arguably has a happier ending than the protagonist deserves, because external authority (the novelist and the social vision of the Enlightenment) has revalued its commitment to the individual. While Moll Flanders's discourse is strongly mediated, the agent of mediation is not her adversary, but a contributor to her well-being. Like society, the author/editor sees his role as helping her to "clean up her act." The union reverses the paradigm of the Spanish picaresque, but contains its peculiar irony. A man has the (first and) last word on a woman's discourse. And reminiscent of Lazarillo, the blind man, and the bottle of wine, what cures Moll is what makes her ill; the very society that aspires to redeem her has orchestrated her downfall. She is a sinner cognizant of her deceitful tendencies, but life has been her teacher. In this transitional stage, the *pícaro* is not ridiculed but regenerated. The vindictive authority in the Spanish models is replaced by a merciful society, dedicated to winning her over and to guiding her back into the fold. Literary determinism in this case allows Defoe to pardon Moll and to use his imaginative power in her favor. Although the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European novel gives unprecedented consideration to women's issues, women writers do not build upon the picaresque foundation. That does happen, however, in the twentieth century, and on an

international scale.

Enlightened England devises means to save delinquents, and delinquents inhabit the novel. Not only can their stories be instructive but, honoring the Horatian dictum, they can also be entertaining. In general, the laughter produced by the narratives is far less mocking than in the Spanish picaresque, because the goal is reintegration as opposed to continued segregation. It might be said that Spain transforms the heroes of idealism into antiheroes and that England, through its antiheroes, makes society the hero. In neither instance is the purported narrator in charge of the discourse. Mediation, even when benevolent, is a form of control, of silencing. Throughout history, women have fought to break the silence, to assert their own voices, and to record their own words. The question that concerns me here is not whether a given novel can be classified as picaresque, but how contemporary narrative, written by women, refashions the discourse and, by extension, the irony of the picaresque archetypes.

The *pícaros*, male and female, are bearers of negative exemplarity, to be emulated in reverse. They reify society's ills, and they must be exposed, contained, and expunged. They are society's refuse, its scapegoats. Myriad flaws notwithstanding, picaresque narrative—ironically—rescues the protagonists from the margins. The literary center has no correlative in society, and even the most awkward and anguishing centrality has its advantages. Exposure works in multiple directions; the satirical base of picaresque narrative applies the “warts and all” approach to society as well as to the individual. The picaresque conveys the deep structure of power, in and out of the text. More acted upon than acting, the protagonists set out to carve their destinies, but end up as the playthings of a fortune that is both textual and extratextual. An extreme example is the *Buscón's* Pablos, the presumed embodiment of all that is despicable to Quevedo. Pablos seems powerless before the aggregate of forces that would negate his humanity and his rhetoric, but he refuses to fade away, and he is capable of moving the reader and of eternizing his marginality. Even more extreme are the *pícaras*, whose first-person perspectives are gender inflected, but contrarily and counterproductively, by male authors. The female voice that transmits a male point of view serves as an emblem of the imbalance between authority and subjection in the real world. In the drama of picaresque narrative, the author allies himself with society. In the novels of *pícaras*, this translates as an alliance with the patriarchal order, in which women are left open to the slings and arrows of male domination. *Moll Flanders* deploys the picaresque template, but with an altered social coordinate. Narrative realism explores the standing of women in society while creating a special space for the woman novelist. Along with the literary innovations of the twentieth century come a new

feminism, a revisionist history of women, and novel forms of irony.

A number of contemporary texts by and about women show variations of the discursive structure of the Spanish picaresque and, as would follow, lead to variations of irony. My examples include a Mexican novel (*Hasta no verte Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska) and two American novels (*Fanny* by Erica Jong and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison). The novels under scrutiny portray individuals pursued by a social establishment that could be described as antifeminist and/or racially prejudiced, and the authors experiment with narrative form as an intrinsic part of the message systems. I will concentrate on how mediation works in each of the novels and on the social implications of the narrative process. Finally, I will identify three categories of irony: *symbolic*, *feminist/ideological*, and *tragic*.

Hasta no verte Jesús mío (1969) contains a collaborative first-person narration. Poniatowska's taped interviews with the subject yield Jesusa Palancares's discourse. Jesusa is the speaker, and the life experience is hers, but the organization—the disposition—and the conceptual center belong to Poniatowska. In a most sincere and distinctive voice, Jesusa reveals her personality as she discusses the events in her life. She has known poverty, abuse, and discrimination, but her strength far outweighs her considerable suffering. She is a survivor with a steely determination and a fervent spirituality. Life has conditioned her to trust her instincts and to fight for the underdog, but she is unaware of her true worth and of the laudable nature of her struggle. She has followed men into battle, but she is a warrior on many levels. She has lived a long and diverse life, and she has much to recount. The most significant "self-fashioning" in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* comes not from the narrator/protagonist but from the author, who recasts the antiheroism as heroism. Jesusa Palancares is an eccentric character; she is unusual, impulsive, irritable, guarded, modestly magnanimous, and off-center. Class, economics, and gender work against her, and she would be the last person to see herself as successful, much less as heroic. Yet it seems clear that Poniatowska wants to elevate the protagonist "in her own words" and to make the story individualized and intimate, on the one hand, and broad-ranging and political, on the other. Her principal models may be *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Moll Flanders*.

Lázaro's defensive explanation implicates him in deception and self-illusion. The implied author manipulates the signifiers into an altered, and ironic, set of signifieds (which also lack stability). Similarly, Poniatowska exerts control over Jesusa's words and the structure of her memoirs, but to commend, not to denigrate, the narrator. Lázaro is interested in proclaiming his success, while the implied author wants to stress the extreme relativity, at best, of the social triumphs. In contrast, Jesusa is

self-effacing, while Poniatowska seems committed to converting perceived defeats into victories. In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe "edits" Moll's manuscript and sets it on an enlightened track. The transgressions are less important for their own sake than as a necessary prerequisite for social salvation. From this angle of vision, the crux of *Moll Flanders* is not the life of sin but the ultimate redemption, as provided by a compassionate society. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* uses the life of Jesusa Palancares to demonstrate her natural gifts, her courage, and her powers of resistance, but also—and, arguably, overridingly—to advocate the rights of the disenfranchised. Always positioned in the nether zones of public acceptability, Jesusa endures indignity after indignity, but Poniatowska uncovers her inner fortitude, her innate social activism, and a depth of character that surpasses all those with whom she comes in contact, and who more often than not demean her. Jesusa becomes an unlikely symbol, but she stands for—and stands up for—the needy, the persecuted, and the defenseless. That the heroic antiheroine is not an oxymoron is ironic, and the symbolic irony of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* derives from a narrative strategy that alters the Spanish model by pushing the adversarial relationship between the individual and society in the opposite direction, by inverting the self-incriminatory discourse, and by finding goodness, humanity, and valor in the margins. Society judges Jesusa Palancares only in terms of negative values, and she certainly would judge herself as undeserving of praise, but the implied author refutes those points in a respectful and paradoxically idealistic narrative.

In *Fanny, Being the True History of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (1980), Erica Jong also reverses the conventions of the classic picaresque, in a compelling blend of the narrator's pretext and the implied author's not-so-hidden agenda. Fanny tells her life story to her daughter Belinda, in order to make Belinda aware of the adventures and misadventures that she has faced. Gender politics, sexual partnerships, child rearing, piracy, witchcraft, and the literary market make their way into the story, a story bound to the issues of women's rights and freedom. Fanny is precociously feminist. Her inventor, from a distance, can parlay the precocity into irony. Jong attempts to imitate the stylistic recourses of the eighteenth-century English novel, and the anachronistic language intensifies the contemporary quality of both story and discourse. The form may be out of date, but the content is highly relevant; the vehicle may be old, but the tenor is state of the art. An aspiring writer, Fanny comes into contact with notable, and notorious, artists of her day (Alexander Pope, Colley Cibber, William Hogarth, and John Cleland, among others), but the message regarding women's intellectual capacities and the need for a creative space of one's own seems directed to fin-de-siècle readers. While Fanny "innocently" narrates her life, Jong engineers a translation—*translatio*—of her

commentary to the present. Fanny's social rebellion, condemned at the time, coincides with the questions raised by twentieth-century feminism.

Fanny is a feminist text clothed in prefeminist garb. Jong moves backward, temporally and rhetorically. She introduces historical personages, and she takes liberties with art history and literary history to make Fanny the subject of *The Harlot's Progress* and *Fanny Hill*. Jong's retracing of earlier narrative is not about the past, or it is only about the past as a means of access to the present. The events—and, consequently—the ideological subtexts—of *Fanny* reverberate. They demand that the reader contextualize them according to current sensibilities; that is, they demand to be read ironically. Borrowing from the Spanish picaresque tradition and the eighteenth-century English novel, Jong articulates the issues and the debates of contemporary feminism, and in this way she puts a new twist on Quevedo's baroque rewriting of Pablos's discourse in the *Buscón*. She draws on the discrepancy between the type of person that Fanny is and how society perceives her to interrogate the themes of difference and deviance, in their numerous manifestations. Fanny's talent, daring, loyalty, liberalism, generosity, and integrity do not prevent her from being victimized. She cannot escape the restrictions of her gender, and she has no desire to reject her femininity or her sexuality. The novel's utopian solution is ironic in itself, for it excludes men from the realm of peace and harmony.

Fanny seems to suggest that time has not brought wisdom, and that modern (and postmodern) women still must contend with inequality. One can admire the cross of archaism with ironic modernity, of rowdy self-assertion with the depths of subjectivity. Pecola Breedlove, the focal figure of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), lacks the aggressive determination and the single-mindedness of Fanny, and she inhabits a world circumscribed by poverty, bigotry, and hypocrisy. In this environment, there is little room for the playful spirit that pervades Jong's novel. The structure of *The Bluest Eye* is related to the transformation of discursive prototypes of the picaresque, but the irony here is tragic. Morrison maintains a silent and invisible protagonist in the center of the novel, and she converts erasure into the principal movement of the text.

The Bluest Eye begins prior to the Civil Rights movement and prior to the organized demonstration of black pride. The novel re-creates the archetypal picaresque situation of the abandoned youth in a hostile society. Morrison devises a discursive system that examines prejudice and that dignifies the objects of prejudice. Unable to redeem the lost protagonist, the narrators—who include a childhood friend, now a woman, and an omniscient narrator—acknowledge the tragedy of Pecola Breedlove's life and provide, in the text, the identity that has eluded her. Pecola has no control over the factors that make her contemptible to those who sur-

round her, and she is voiceless, dependent on the narrators to do her justice, to compensate for her silence. Morrison's discourse reverses the priorities, condemning the society that discriminates against the protagonist and speaking eloquently on behalf of the character who cannot speak for herself. The primary narrator, Claudia MacTeer, structures the events according to her own "reading" of the circumstances. She thus redeems herself from indifference and delivers Pecola from oblivion. The omniscient narrator adds complementary perspectives in an effort to clarify, if not to comprehend, the inexplicable laws of intolerance. Pecola's isolation from society has an analogue in the narrative. She is physically absent from many of the episodes, and she does not figure directly in all the commentary, but there is not one narrative event or statement that does not relate to the question of her identity. Narrative time and space fall into identifiable patterns of symmetry that counterbalance the shattered ego of the protagonist. The pretext of the work is an explanation of Pecola Breedlove's fall into disgrace, but the result is more obviously an examination of the power of society over those who must bear the collective guilt. Unprotected, Pecola is abused by many and raped by her father. The baby dies, and Pecola retreats from the world into the realm of the imagination, and of hallucinatory spells that mark her only direct discourse in the novel. The portrait of the deposed self becomes a fortunate contradiction, allowing her the privileges of selfhood within the literary frame.

The narrative portrays Pecola as free of resentment. Claudia as a character assumes this role, in order to denounce white society for its encroachment on black ideals and to denounce black community for perpetuating false myths. The omniscient narrator, for her part, underscores the peripheral existence, in which Pecola is less than invisible, repugnant to society and to herself. As Claudia tells the story of Pecola, the other narrator (perhaps the mature Claudia, who takes liberties to fill in gaps) connects the story with its pre-history. The bias and displaced anger of the past meet in a narrative present to challenge, and to rectify, the distorted view of identity. By the end, Pecola has taken refuge on the outskirts of town, having been raped a second time by her father and silenced—and made to disappear—by the circumstances of her life. In her isolation, she does speak, through dialogues with her alter ego, a fantasy friend, to whom she confides that her problem is that others are jealous of her bright blue eyes, signs, of course, of the culture that dismisses her. The text makes it impossible to ignore Pecola, and those like her, but unfortunately writing cannot deliver the miracle needed to restore what has been lost. The protagonist's solitude represents the death of the sacrificial victim common to tragic drama, but rather than a movement toward harmony *The Bluest Eye* captures the persistence of injustice. There

is a paradoxical contrast between the growth of Claudia MacTeer's critical perception (and social conscience) and the stasis into which Pecola Breedlove—always childlike, always the lowest of the low—is cast. The Spanish picaresque authors prod their protagonist's out of the margins in order to mock them, but they bring the underclass into the fictions, into the forbidden center. In her tragic portrait, Morrison redefines the role of the scapegoat by inscribing her into the narrative, into another's story. Through this act of inscription, she combats oblivion and argues persuasively for the value of every life.

Representative of the progression briefly traced here, the discursive design and the rhetoric of silence of *The Bluest Eye* have points of contact with Spanish Golden Age fiction. Early modern picaresque narrative is characterized by counterargument, by a figurative writing-over of the discourse. The texts contain their own mechanism again antisocial behavior through a type of self-censorship. The narrator/protagonist rebels, while the implied author suppresses the rebellion through literary determinism, that is, by conforming to the socially acceptable. The first-person narration can be demystified—deconstructed—through focus on the dialectical relation between the narrator and the author, between the narrator and the author, between the nominal agent of the discourse and a textual, and extratextual, nemesis. The disjunction between the character's stance and the author's is patent in the female variations of the picaresque, where the social antagonism acquires sexual shades. The picaresque tradition extends far beyond Spain, and, in general, with a major change wrought over time: the antisocial perspective gains clout, and authors seem ever more inclined to join forces with their protagonists against the establishment. The construct of the implied author still applies, but the ironies of discourse now tend to work in favor of the marginalized figures. The voice is somehow "tampered with," but in a system of unity rather than of opposition. Moreover, female variations of the picaresque come to be written by women and informed by contemporary feminism. A lesson of feminism has been to call attention to silences—to silenced women and to the meaningful silences of female characters—and to develop strategies for breaking the silence.

While irony cannot be quantified, I would resume the argument that I have made as follows:

1. The first-person narration of the picaresque is a double, or dialogical, discourse.
2. The self-defense of the *pícaro* becomes an inverted indictment, devised by an implied author.
3. The early modern Spanish picaresque projects a two-against-one scheme, with the implied author and society aligned against the

marginalized individual.

4. The satirical thrust of the picaresque is reciprocal. The satire directed toward the *pícaro* incorporates a satiric vision of society at large, as well.
5. Despite the defeat of the protagonists' social pretensions, the plight of the *pícaros* is made manifest by the literary analogue. The various sources of authority overpower the individual in the texts, as in the real world.
6. Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is a transitional narrative, a product of Enlightenment society, which strives for the rehabilitation of errant citizens.
7. With time comes a shift in the two-against-one scheme, caused by a modified attitude toward the antihero or antiheroine, whose civil disobedience now has the sympathy of the implied author.
8. Twentieth-century feminism has an impact on the novel, and texts reflect the union of feminism and the discursive model of the picaresque.
9. Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* serves as an example of *symbolic irony*, in which the implied author converts the antiheroine into a new breed of heroine.
10. Erica Jong's *Fanny* exemplifies *feminist/ideological irony*, in which an archaic form is the vehicle for social commentary and for the cause of feminism.
11. In the *tragic irony* of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist is silent and alone, represented and redeemed by the discourse of others. The scapegoat gains identity by losing her identity and being figuratively resurrected. The narrative accomplishes the poststructuralist goal of transposing center and margin, while at the same time reminding the reader that, sadly, words cannot compensate for the errors of the past, and art is not life.

The picaresque is an intricate and protean form. Its ironies ricochet and, like the protagonists, frequently reinvent themselves. The early Spanish texts initiate a formula that is both decisive and flexible, adaptable to diverse times, places, and sensibilities. In the last analysis, the picaresque is about authority. The fact that the narratives can revere authority and turn it inside-out is perhaps the supreme irony.

Notes

¹The term *implied author* first appears in Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, and variously makes its way into the discourse of narratology. The implied author is an abstraction, intended to signal the difference between the historical author and the markers of the author's "presence" in a given text. Booth is also the author of a masterful study of irony, *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

²My goal here is not to set forth an anatomy of irony, but rather to suggest that the discursive patterns of the early modern Spanish picaresque narratives lend themselves to significant, and ironic, variations.

³For a general commentary on the concept of textuality in the Hispanic canon, see Elias Rivers's *Quixotic Scriptures*.

⁴For Mikhail Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogism, or double discourse, see *The Dialogic Imagination*.

⁵The critical tradition of *Guzmán de Alfarache* has proven ironic in its own right. One group of critics (among them, Enrique Moreno Báez, Alexander A. Parker, Francisco Rico, Michel Cavillac, and Monique Michaud) focuses on the moral purpose of the narrative, while another (including J. A. van Praag, Benito Brancaforte, Joan Arias, Judith Whitenack, and Carlos Antonio Rodríguez Matos) takes a more cynical view of the novel and, most notably, of the professed conversion of the *pícaro*. A similar phenomenon affects *Buscón* criticism, which tends to counterbalance morality (Parker et al.) and baroque language (Fernando Lázaro Carreter et al.). See Dunn and Wicks for overviews of the picaresque.

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