

Vidriera's Blather

GEORGE A. SHIPLEY

El apotegma es fruto baladí y pasajero, cosquillea a flor de piel; pasada la primera impresión deja escasa huella en el ánimo; nace brillantemente, y, con no menor prontitud, muere; son como flores que, arrancadas de sus tallos—la ocasión, la oportunidad y el momento—, pierden la viveza de sus colores y se marchitan con presteza. *No achaquemos al autor de ellas este desencanto, sino a la misma índole del género*, alado y fugacísimo; que idos los motivos ocasionales de la gracia, vase ésta con ellos, dejando en lugar suyo, al parecer, *huecas palabras y frases vacías de alma*.¹



he narrator of “El licenciado Vidriera” slights his subject, whose name is Tomás, and favors the latter’s second self, whom he makes the title character and focus of his story. The psychotic Vidriera is created by accident (as the product of a vindictive and poisonous conspiracy against Tomás) and exists briefly. He bears only a superficial relation and resemblance to the should-be protagonist, Tomás, and he vacates the latter’s mind after a time without leaving behind so much as a

¹ Amezúa 158; emphasis added.

memory trace. Vidriera leaves indelible impressions, however, on his public and on real readers of the story whose attention (through his narrator's commission) he appropriates. Consequently, for real readers and Spanish-speakers generally, Vidriera has turned out to be more memorable than any other of Miguel de Cervantes' hundreds of creatures, excepting only Don Quixote, his lady, and his squire. Vidriera lives on in popular imagination, and shares quarters with those other unforgettable figments among the select imaginary beings conceded lodging in the Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary.² The near effacement of the exemplary character Tomás by his mindless shadow is a second, pernicious if inadvertent, conspiracy and an unconscionable abuse, and something needs to be done to dissolve it.

"El licenciado Vidriera" is an eccentric story in several respects on several narrative planes: that of the crowd that taunts an invalid for two years, that of the narrator and his implied readers, who recollect and treasure the taunting, and that of real readers who applaud the product of the narrator's primitive craft work. The narrator skews the history of the appropriate protagonist (Tomás, self-surnamed Rodaja) away from his brilliant youth in order to focus narrowly on an anomalous psychotic episode during which the suffering Tomás is called Vidriera and wins fame for speaking witty vacuities. Similarly the narrator slights the final

² "Licenciado vidriera: persona excesivamente delicada y tímida." It is a nice irony that the Spanish language has transformed "el licenciado Vidriera," who is famous for his glib characterizations of social types, into one more such type ("persona nimiamente delicada y tímida"). "We" have imposed this label not on the individual named Tomás—whose authentic identity does not matter to "us" and "our" agent, the narrator—but rather on the attitude, the humor, that arrests and rewards "our" attention while Tomás is out of his mind. The name inducted into the Academia's *Diccionario de la lengua española* is the crowd's name for the character (rather than his parents' name for him or his own name), and the definition too is supplied by the crowd and does not suit Tomás. (I add quotation marks to pronouns here and occasionally below to distinguish us who are real readers and the real author from the "us" created by the text, with the hope of inhibiting our careless identification with that "us," the imagined crowd and narrator and the latter's imagined readers.)

phase of his subject's life that culminates and concludes when Tomás (now self-pseudo-named Rueda), having disowned Vidriera, achieves fame abroad for his prudence and valor.

The narrator's bias replicates that of the community that was entertained by Vidriera's lunacies. Real readers in the main have not objected to the narrator's eccentric focus nor have many questioned the quality of the evidence he presents as wisdom. As a result we have made Vidriera, rather than Tomás, famous, for his mindless rant, often confusing it with sagacity. But the narrator—as his author hopes we will see—is an unreliable guide and interpreter: he is semi-skilled in his craft, he is short-sighted, and he undertakes no critique of the twisted lore that his community holds to be common sense. Vidriera's fame results from the facility with which he decants rancid wines of received opinion and pours them, without thinking, into pithy *odres nuevos*. When it is all said and done, Tomás recants all that Vidriera said and was, but the narrator and the crowd and many real readers neglect to ponder the implications of Tomás's total dis-authorization of Vidriera's famous sayings.

Attentive study of what Vidriera says—or more precisely what the narrator says he said—and the circumstances of the saying shows that most of what the one said and the other writes is only blather. That is to say, it is foolish talk, nonsense. The bits that are better than blather are intermixed with blather and so covered by it—battered with blather, one can say—that considerable patience is required to find them and sort them out. It calls for a kind of patience that the crowd and the story's narrator lack. For that reason the crowd's enthusiastic response to Vidriera and the narrator's zealous preservation and codification of what might better have gone unreported are not performances that real readers ought to emulate. Instead we had better read the author's signals that indicate that Tomás, and not the madman, is the tale's exemplary character. And we had better seek to account in some other way, without implicating Cervantes, for the authority that a psychotic's foolishness enjoys in and beyond the fiction.³

³ In a previous article, "Garbage," I lay out and treat more fully the claims of this and the preceding two paragraphs.

Taxonomy.

Many of Vidriera's discharges reward study, but few merit readers' sympathetic consideration and imaginative consent. These are the few comments that describe or illuminate the core institutions of his community and perhaps Cervantes' readers' society or our own with better than platitudinous discernment. These few are not highlighted or set apart invitingly from the many others that with them constitute the series. Neither the narrator nor anyone in the crowd takes special note of them. They are preceded and followed by the familiar stuff of satire that makes up a monotonous bulk which commentators (and, I conjecture, a high proportion of readers) often slight or browse only lightly in their assessments of this text. The potentially arresting comments appear in the middle and towards the end of the series, after readers' expectations have relaxed and settled in adjustment to the flow of largely predictable banter exchanged by Vidriera and voices in the crowd. By and large their give and take does not awaken the reader's critical faculties, does not invite the reader to pause, reflect, and weigh the speakers' claims. Reading the two thirds of this story that is Vidriera's rant soon becomes the literary equivalent of an impromptu and aimless stroll through the busy center of an ugly city in the company of an ill-humored crank. I suspect, with E. C. Riley (189), that many readers leave the tour and the text before completing it or else duck out from time to time to clear their heads and breathe cleaner air, rejoining the loudmouth of common opinion and his avid entourage now and then to relish a favorite few durable barbs, perhaps these:

Otro le preguntó que qué le parecía de las alcahuetas. Respondió que no lo eran las apartadas, sino las vecinas. {11}⁴

“Tratémonos bien, señor Vidriera, pues ya sabéis vos que soy hombre de altas y profundas letras.” Respondiole Vidriera: “Ya yo sé que sois un Tántalo en ellas, porque se van por altas y no las alcanzáis de profundas.” {52}

⁴ Numbers enclosed in braces { } refer to the list of “Vidriera's Reflections” in the Appendix.

Preguntóle uno que cuál había sido el más dichoso del mundo. Respondió que *Nemo, porque Nemo novit patrem; Nemo sine crimine vivit; Nemo sua sorte contentus; Nemo ascendit in coelum.* {69}

De las damas que llaman *cortesanas* decía que todas, o las más, tenían más de cortesés que de sanas. {88}

before drifting away from the text finally, much as the crowd disperses when Vidriera's show ends its run and the madman regains his mental health and loses his popular appeal.

Before we discover the singularity of a few of Vidriera's sayings and define the most relevant qualities of his discourse in general, some dominant characteristics of his group of sayings call for recognition. They call to mind further questions for study, such as the following: What aesthetic justification has all this blather? Can Vidriera's eruptions be regarded as something better than blather or as blather and something better? How and to what end does a competent author construct and make oddly fascinating a story composed mainly of blather? "El licenciado Vidriera," we must concede, is not an idle sketch, a casual jotting, marginal among its author's papers, put out of mind when he turned his attention to more central concerns. It is instead a text placed fifth among twelve stories in a showcase anthology assembled by an exceptionally skilled imaginer during his creative maturity. Indeed it comes into being part of the way through a run of successful creation and publication seldom matched in literary history. In the extraordinary continuous process of imagining and representing that extends from the composition of Part I of *Don Quijote* to its Part II and beyond that to the days just before his death, Cervantes showed, together with remarkable self-awareness, an indefatigable genius for working and reworking and energizing the most diverse possibilities offered by prose fiction, poetry, and drama and popular forms.

The biographical and artistic contexts established by those years of exceptional creation and the resulting books, and specifically the *Novelas ejemplares* that encase "El licenciado Vidriera," taken together with the technical mastery and versatility exhibited

in the eleven stories that frame this one, add up to an overwhelmingly persuasive argument in favor of the likelihood that this story's peculiarities (most remarkably Vidriera's utterances) are working parts of a text that is no less finished than the first story, "La gitanilla," and the last, "Coloquio de los perros," and the rest of its exemplary company. It is reasonable to surmise that "Vidriera's" oddities of composition and content are cooperating functional contributors in the text rather than signs of their author's inability to do here again what he was able to do from start to finish on so many other occasions over the last two decades of his life. From *Don Quijote* to *Persiles y Sigismunda*, with as much self-assurance as inventiveness, Cervantes wrote well-crafted fictions exploring the possibilities, including the extreme limits, of the novel literary form the very name of which—*novela*—suggests its heavy investment in the untried, in novelties of form and substance, in unpracticed ways of representing usual and unusual experience.

Vidriera's sayings are difficult to order and organize for discussion, even difficult to count. Armand Singer's attempt at classification is the most comprehensive and detailed so far published, but his generous and good-humored effort is finally unproductive (slipping from categorization into the morass of biographical fallacy). Singer counts seventy-five items, distinguishing two kinds, the "apothegmatic" (numbering forty-eight) and the "non-apothegmatic" (twenty-seven), and orders them into ranks (Puns; Humorous Remarks; Eulogies; Didactic and Philosophical Remarks; Caustic, Cynical Remarks) that are "somewhat arbitrary": "evidently, some of the replies fit several categories" (22, 20). He undertakes a subject catalog as well, conceding that "the categories suggested and the order of presentation are, of course, almost entirely lacking in the original" (19). Singer sorts the parts in general groups, one dealing with "Philosophy of Life," and the other listing thirty-five "Professions and Occupations" (19–20). His order neither responds to nor reveals functional patterns and order in the text, and so it stands as an intelligent and instructive effort with an implied caveat: we had better look for the sense of this tale in other directions.

Jorge Urrutia observes in a more recent and briefer effort that

“Cervantes parece tender a reunir [los apotegmas] en pequeñas agrupaciones y, muchas veces, se engarzan con habilidad” (293). He identifies twenty-six groups, conceding that “es verdad que no todos los apotegmas pueden enlazarse integrándose en grupos” (294). In Urrutia’s opinion these groups correspond somehow to the enumerations (twenty by his count) included in the previous section of the story (Tomás’s European travels) and to Cervantes’ intention to “equilibrar la construcción, insistiendo en la idea central de conseguir la unidad de la variedad” (297). Urrutia does not mention the narrator’s part in this balancing act nor inquire into the functions and effects of groupings and correspondences. I shall return to the matter of groupings. However I cannot improve on the efforts of Singer and Urrutia that together suggest that thematic and topical categorization of Vidriera’s utterances is unlikely, taken by itself, to prove fruitful.

Not even efforts to count the pieces of evidence yield a stable sum and basis for agreement among investigators. If Singer totals seventy-five items, E. C. Riley’s more recent reckoning of the objects of Vidriera’s “aphoristic comments” is fifty-nine “persons, professions and topics” (190). Wrinkled note cards remind me that more than two decades ago I figured the number was fifty-four; recently I recounted and tallied eighty-six discrete discharges of Vidriera’s wit. Now I put the number at ninety-seven (listed in the Appendix). The total could be pegged at 110 or a few more. The sum depends of course on what one chooses to count: whether shots fired, targets struck, or the themes and topics that draw fire. I have chosen to count the shots and to study their expressive and communicative characteristics. But first I concede two points (the second of them with pleasure). First, some discharges on my list are formally simple single shots, while others are complex, and another counter might divide several of the latter kind (including {39–41} and {76})—scattered buckshot from single explosions—into their separable parts and count each and achieve a larger sum. Second, in any case, after the counting and sorting is accomplished, more interesting matters of function, content, and context command attention.

A customary way of beginning discussion of the Vidriera portion of this story is to collect many of the fool’s targets in an ample

paragraph or a page-filling chain that suggests their abundance and diversity as well as their loose serial organization. Here is a portion of Joaquín Casaldüero's inventory: "Vemos desfilar al poeta, al pintor, al librero, los azotados, el mozo de sillas de mano, el mozo de mulas, los marineros, carceleros y arrieros, el boticario y el médico. Se habla de la envidia, los pretendientes, la justicia, los títulos, las letras. Aparecen los sastres, los zapateros, los cambistas, los genoveses, la madre con la hija tan fea como enojada, los pasteleros, los titiriteros y comediantes" (139). After these examples trail many more. E. C. Riley makes the point concisely, mentioning one after another twenty-two kinds and topics treated by Vidriera (189). Florencio Sevilla Arroyo and Antonio Rey Hazas in their well-annotated edition enumerate thirty-eight satirized social and professional groups (lv). A shortcoming of this tactic is that the momentum it achieves through staccato accumulation of rich images carries interpreters and their readers too far, suggesting that the narrator's abundant display of types is more comprehensive than it truly is. Casaldüero, who identifies the narrator with his author, tells us that Cervantes included comments about "todos los oficios" (140); Riley is closer to the mark: "Vidriera makes pungent remarks about all sorts of people and professions" (189); Sevilla Arroyo and Rey Hazas totalize: Vidriera's censure "afecta a toda la sociedad española en su conjunto" (lvi), his dicta "conforman una visión crítica global de la sociedad española" (xliii). These claims must be pared down if they are to square with the text.

We shall see that while Miguel de Cervantes implicates all Spanish society in his fictional exposé, his character Vidriera and the cooperating crowd, and especially the narrator, do not. They show partiality in the targets they choose and the objects they exempt from attack. There are stimulating and constraining forces at work in the speaker and his audience. They are moved by prejudgments and self-censorship that ought not be imputed to their author, whose social vision and criticism are broader and deeper than the crowd's and fundamentally incommensurate with them.

When the narrator intrudes into his anthology of "The Best of Vidriera" to tell us that "las nuevas de su locura y de sus respues-

tas y dichos se extendió por toda Castilla" (56), we understand that he refers to the large towns and cities of Castile, from Salamanca to Valladolid and beyond. This is an urban story. It is set in Salamanca and mainly in Valladolid; the wider world is mapped by references to the "famosas ciudades" (50) of Italy, Flanders, France, and America. Tomás Rodaja studies in the university town where the Church's bishops and the Crown's ministers and bureaucrats train for the exercise of power. Vidriera later rails from the center of a circle of bystanders close by the corridors of imperial and ecclesiastical government and authority; and Rueda offers his competent professional advice to a throng gathered around him in the very "patio de los Consejos" (73). Valladolid is the Court and the seat of the Ministries of the realm and empire as well as a tribunal of the Inquisition, and it is the city of residence of many of the grandest titled families as well as the stage for their showy retinues, their favorites, the ambitious, and those swarming sycophants whom Vidriera and his readers have in mind when he demurs "que yo no soy bueno para palacio, porque tengo vergüenza y no sé lisonjear" (12).⁵

The crowd attracted to hear Vidriera's linguistic inventions, conceptual twists, Latinisms from classical and Biblical texts, and barbs launched at poets, scribes, actors, and so many others, is partial in the several senses of that word, as would be the readers the narrator has in mind for his compendium. Those readers, like the crowd, would be an unrepresentative ("partial") delegation drawn largely from the educated and semi-educated, leisurely and idling classes, an unproductive elite rather than a sample reflecting the bulk of the untutored population. They would be fond of ("partial to") the studied and exclusive ways—sparkling, playful, biting—in which the cleverest among them use words. Armed with awareness of their social advantages and customary privileges, but feeling the malaise of an unsettled nation and empire in crisis, they would be partial in the additional sense of decidedly prejudiced, biased, and partisan in favor of their own

⁵ Allusions to Madrid, the court after 1606, are mixed into the representation of Valladolid, the court from 1601 to 1606, suggesting that Cervantes perhaps wrote the story in Valladolid and revised it after the Court's move.

ways, suspicious of others, and resentful of challenges. Their prejudices and anxieties, and there are many of them, are addressed in Vidriera's sayings. Their values and concerns can be appraised in what they criticize and what goes without saying.

Only one rural type comes under scrutiny, and he is scorned as a boastful oaf, no better than the *converso* with whom he is covered in ridicule ({9}). Only once do foreigners appear: Genoese bankers, quickly distanced by xenophobic paranoid suspicion ({65}).⁶ Manual laborers—muleteers, carters, sailors—who sweat at transporting goods to, from, and about the city for the comfort and sustenance of the urbane are typed as thugs, ignorant, thieving, lazy, and faithless ({35–41}). “Los marineros son gente gentil, inurbana” and a sailor’s only god is his sea-chest and his mess ({40}); mule-drivers, whom the first readers of this story would assume are Moriscos, are uncouth and unbelieving: “a trueco de no perder la jornada, perderán el alma; ...sus maitines, levantarse a dar sus piensos; y sus misas, no oír ninguna” ({41}). For the rest, the horizon of the crowd’s reference scarcely extends beyond the city’s outskirts.

Within the city the satirical tableau is crowded with the representation of twenty-five common occupations, trades, and offices, all of them judged unworthy in some respect, many of them subjected to repeated attack. Ten professions and avocations of the educated elite fare no better. Because they are many and familiar objects of demeaning commentary, these may appear to represent all kinds and to survey the community generally, but they do not achieve that much coverage. Instead they mainly expose “our” inferiors: the low classes who work with animals and with their hands; craftsmen suspected of deceit; neighborhood businessmen of doubtful probity; petty officials sullied by association with corrupt institutions; entertainers, gamblers, and women. Practitioners of certain arts and professions fare no better. The apparently well-educated are poseurs; lawyers and judges are subverters of justice and the rule of law; medicine is the killing profession; men of the cloth (who are scarcely represented) are

⁶ On the Genoese in Spanish life and literature in Cervantes’ time, see Fuchs 287–89.

distinguished from the laity chiefly by their monopolistic control of comfortable privileges.

Where are the bishops, the *cabildos*, the cardinals, the Dominicans and other powerful orders and the high Inquisitors; where the twisted, ignorant, superstitious priests of *Lazarillo's Church*? Where the *grandees* and high titles, the ministers of state and the Councils, the governors, captains general, viceroys, the *corregidores*? The Inquisition's oversight of right ways of believing is invoked only once, slyly, in a trivializing denunciation of puppeteers whose alleged excesses call to mind Maese Pedro's farce more readily than the deadly serious proceedings of Valladolid's tribunal:

En resolución, decía que se maravillaba de cómo quien podía no les ponía perpetuo silencio en sus retablos, o los desterraba del reino. {61-63, here 63}

Rarely does Vidriera fire off a shot aimed to wound the loftiest authorities of Church and State. One such exceptional moment is nearly hidden within an extended passage that mocks posturing, incompetent poets and leads on to parody of tired Petrarchan love conceits. Inserted into this inoffensive amusement are a hundred words of higher temperature and deep scorn, seemingly directed against gossips and ignorant defamers of true poets. But the aim is higher, and the words include a daring coda appended to a declaration of admiration of true poets and the spiritual refreshment of their art. By means of the indirection of metonymy ("doseles," "sitiales") Vidriera subjects the most eminent religious and secular powers to censure without drawing untoward attention to the attack:

¿Y qué [diré] de los que murmuran de algunos ilustres y excelentes sujetos, donde resplandece la verdadera luz de la poesía; que, tomándola por alivio y entretenimiento de sus muchas y graves ocupaciones, muestran la divinidad de sus ingenios y la alteza de sus conceptos, a despecho y pesar *del circunspecto ignorante* que juzga de lo que no sabe y aborrece lo que no entiende, y *del que quiere que se estime y tenga en precio la*

necedad que se sienta debajo de doseles y la ignorancia que se arrima a los sitiales? ({26–27}, emphasis added)

Ought we judge these remarks and the very few others that point with comparable audacity at the corruption of the powerful (notably {91–93})⁷ as breaks in the consistency of Vidriera's characterization? Are they lucid and reasonable beyond their speaker's diminished capacity, as well as less popular or folkloric and commonplace than his other criticisms? In other words, does Vidriera serve as his author's mouthpiece on these few occasions? An explanation internal to the story and consistent with it is available to readers and it is sufficient to account for the apparent exceptions to Vidriera's anodyne criticism—anodyne, that is to say, for his audience. Throughout his torment Vidriera says what the crowd wants said. He says it cleverly and for that reason, and not because of any originality in his claims, he acquires a following. He is the loudspeaker of the community's resentments. Would not his audience resent especially the conspicuous real excesses of their haughty superiors, but could they find words to voice these common grievances? Vidriera is their favorite fool because he can respond to every question "con propiedad y agudeza" (54), occasionally even saying things that are nearly unspeakable. Abuses perceived and felt by many but spoken only at home, sotto voce and inexpertly, achieve public and memorable form when Vidriera applies enough verbal spin to them to fit them for incorporation into his show. Is it not especially for denouncing the powerful that we need gifted fools and grant the best of them licences to speak what we dare not say?

But rarely does Vidriera exert himself against his society's con-

⁷ Marcel Bataillon (790) remarks that Cervantes questions in an Erasmusian way, but softly: some questions "prefería no hacer en voz muy alta." Concerning the criticism conveyed in items {91–93} Bataillon notes that "aparece cargada de ironía bastante temible." In his note 68 Bataillon links a passage from Plato's *Phaedo* to two letters by Erasmus, one of which notes that "non omnes episcopi sunt que mitras gerunt." Compare this and Vidriera's comparable {92} with the youthful Tomás Rodajas's misplaced confidence in the meritocratic operation of the Church's apparatus: "yo he oído decir que de los hombres se hacen los obispos" (43).

trolling authorities. Mostly he attacks easy targets, inferiors and outcasts, with worn notions superficially refurbished:

Pasando un día por la casa llana y venta común vio que estaban a la puerta della muchas de sus moradoras, y dijo que eran bagajes del ejército de Satanás que estaban alojados en el mesón del Infierno. {4}

Una vez, cuando no era de vidrio, caminé una jornada en una mula de alquiler tal, que le conté ciento y veinte y una tachas, todas capitales y enemigas del género humano. {36}

Topó una vez a una tendera que llevaba delante de sí una hija suya muy fea, pero muy llena de dijes, de galas y de perlas, y díjole a la madre: —Muy bien habéis hecho en empedralla, porque se pueda pasear. {59}

Again we have no reason to look beyond the text in the direction of the story's author to account for this insipidness. Indeed it is odd as well as unnecessary to ascribe these vulgar notions to the person of an author who commands every resource necessary for indicting the procedures of the Inquisition and the sloth of the Titled, and for dignifying whores and common laborers, when and however doing so serves his purposes, as he had demonstrated in *Don Quijote*, I, and would show again in Part II and in others of the *Novelas ejemplares*. It is the imaginary speaker's position in his discursive network (rather than the author's in his own) that determines the inclusions as well as the exclusions in his speech, and Vidriera is doubly hobbled. He must satisfy the fancy of the sadistic patron who acquired him and "gustó de su locura" and placed him under guard so that all the court might enjoy the sport of provoking him (57). And he must assuage the wrath of the crowd that will abuse him again, as they did initially, if he fails to prolong the stand-off that he achieves by saying the right things (55, 63). And all the while he must satisfy the whims of his superior and the encircling bystanders, he is incapable of speaking his own mind and exercising his own judgment.

Not for a moment does the demented Vidriera enjoy free

speech; but neither is the crowd free, for they are not less entangled in the discursive web than is their captive. The guard who supervises Vidriera and restrains the crowd represents the imposition of his master's governing power and authority. The guard's mediation and double-directed control of both the entertainer and his persecutors is a lesson for all of them to accept. The magnitude and long reach of the nobleman's willful ways were shown even earlier, when first he got wind of Vidriera's eccentricity. The eminent gentleman immediately fancied the freak ("quiso enviar por él") and he got what he wanted, ordered by mail, wrapped in a basket and delivered to Court through the agency of a lesser gentleman who was willing or constrained to do his bidding: "encargóselo a un caballero amigo suyo que estaba en Salamanca que se lo enviase." And a fine piece of goods was delivered: "desembanastáronle en la casa del señor que había enviado por él, de quien fue muy bien recibido" (56–57). If the cream of the nobility mobilize and deploy their resources in this way to gratify their mean whims, and this *príncipe* underwrites the fool's act and its production costs for two years, we must not be surprised that such manipulative self-indulgence teaches onlookers a cautionary lesson. The eminent nobleman's high-handed caprice is unexceptional; the narrator records it without surprise or criticism. The crowd of citizens and the narrator, who are entertained but also intimidated by the prince's mistreatment of his toy, know and accept their proper place. As a practical matter, they know better than to draw Vidriera out and applaud him and dare to record his views concerning the excesses of the best of their betters.

Status and its attendant authority are observed and enforced scrupulously throughout this imagined society, according to the evidence of Vidriera's well-received sayings. What nowadays some call family values are administered paternalistically and enforced by corporal punishment, rationing, and the meting out of humiliation to the husband and father or the wife and mother who offends propriety ({2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 59}). The narrator finds no room in his anthology for words or examples of forgiveness, understanding, encouragement, protection, loyalty, or trust of spouse or offspring. Spare the rod and spoil the child in this Court, and know that neighbors will gossip and justice will be

applied in the end ({8, 32}). Whatever rebelliousness a father's canings fail to subdue will be arrested by public flogging.

The patriarchy of which the family, under the firm rule of the paterfamilias, is the model and basic institution is served by other social organizations and mechanisms of control for coercing and maintaining seemly behavior in public. When institutions (schools {10, 51–52}, the law and its officers {49–50, 77–83}, and the Church {9, 91–93}) fail, which happens all the time, “our” suspicions smell out those who are at fault and “we” shame them more or less emphatically (and there are too many examples of shaming to list here). Mistrust is ever on alert; thanks to “our” common understanding that others’ appearances are deceptive, suspicion is a normal, naturalized response to many kinds who live among “us.” Their ostentation and extravagance, pretenses, deceits, and inbred hypocrisy are fecund generators of “our” opprobrium, manifested in several dozen items, including:

El juez nos puede torcer o dilatar la justicia; el letrado sustentar por su interés nuestra injusta demanda; el mercader, chuparnos la hacienda; finalmente, todas las personas con quien de necesidad tratamos nos pueden hacer algún daño; pero quitarnos la vida sin quedar sujetos al temor del castigo, ninguno. Sólo los médicos nos pueden matar y nos matan sin temor y a pie quedo, sin desenvainar otra espada que la de un *récipe*. {45}

En la rueda de la mucha gente que, como se ha dicho, siempre le estaba oyendo, estaba un conocido suyo en hábito de letrado, al cual otro le llamó *Señor Licenciado*; y sabiendo Vidriera que el tal a quien llamaron licenciado no tenía ni aun título de bachiller, le dijo: —Guardaos, compadre, no encuentren con vuestro título los freiles de la redención de cautivos, que os le llevarán por mostrenco. {51}

Ugly words about ugly people earn the crowd's applause and approval from the narrator, who regards them as exemplary: “En resolución, él decía tales cosas que...ninguno pudiera creer sino que era uno de los más cuerdos del mundo” (73). Before we vent

anger and nourish illusions of righteousness towards these disagreeable people, their scribe, and their dystopian community, let us back off a step from their company and bring to mind that these are in fact not ugly people, they are no more than ugly words. Words used by imaginary people for the regulation of their affairs in an imagined society. Vidriera excepted, the participants (in a crowd that implicitly excludes the unshod poor and the unshod pious) wear shoes, and they must know from experience—we imagine—that their neighborhood shoemaker does not fit the mold defined in their witticism (56). They know too that their neighborhood druggist is no poisoner (42–43), that many clerics are charitable, and that there live among them some good poets. They whip their offspring infrequently, to impress the flesh, not to mortify; they are only moderately amused to hear about men who dye their beards.

Nevertheless we note that the narrator's florilegium is unrelievedly negative. Vidriera's sayings are punishing, prying, anxious with suspicion and the assumption of others' weakness and iniquity. We find in them no empathy, no curiosity, no social glue, nothing to bind a *yo* to a *tú*, some of us to others, our kind to other kinds. At the least we must grant that the narrator (who assembles the text for his readers' entertainment) is misanthropic. If we imagine that he is giving us a representative sample of Vidriera's two years of back and forth with the crowd, then we must grant also that there is a consistency of values and tone linking the narrator to his community. It is logical enough, then, to reason that the narrator expects his readers to be the prolongation across space and time of the original crowd, drawn to this stuff as he and the crowd were in their time. The further projection of this thinking into the world of real readers is worrisome. In our time we have made this ugly representation of man's misbehavior towards man and woman (for the women in Vidriera's part of Tomás's story don't matter except as objects of use) one of our favorite reads. What does the popularity of this story say about us who are responsible for transmitting it today, through our editions, our scholarship, our assigned readings and course papers, and in our conversational references to it, punctuated with laughter?

This way of surveying attitudes verbalized by Vidriera and his

crowd towards the objects of their abuse brings us closer to the texture of Cervantes' imagined society than does thematic taxonomy. It is an insufficient method, however, for it falsifies the response that the text invites and typically elicits. "El licenciado Vidriera" does not cause real readers to feel complicit with the crowd nor to feel critical of them; it makes most of us chuckle a bit or at least smile from time to time. Subtract Vidriera's humorous wittiness—such as it is—from the text and we have a dreary catalog of livelihoods and associated faults, devoid of novelty as well as all particularity, and an assortment of cynical attitudes, no more novel than the topics and disfigured by misogyny and religious and ethnic biases, and made strange by passing time.⁸ How does a madman's unselfconscious wit accomplish the transformation of so much dross into the fool's gold for which there is an inexhaustible market of readers?

Vidriera's humor—it will be conceded—is bland when compared with more extreme forms of satire, either Francisco de Quevedo's Menippean nightmares (conservative and reactionary) or the permutations of Spain's previous carnivalized literary fools (conflicted, compensatory, critical of authority, if ineffectually so).⁹ The wit working in Vidriera's sayings serves none the less adequately as leavening, spice and sweetening to render his distasteful speech palatable. Just how laughter is elicited and channeled in Vidriera's two-thirds of this text, by whom and for whom and to what ends, must be figured into the explanation of how this story, overcoming much petty unpleasantness, has attracted and pleased so many readers. The devices of humor determine the tone of satire and extend or restrict the radius of its appeal, stok-

⁸ As to the plausibility of Vidriera's representation of the author's and first readers' world, the narrator's report is so impoverished in particulars of scene and incident as to fail miserably in comparison with the pages of, for example, Juan Rufo, whose *Seiscientos apotegmas* contains a thicker world of imagery and information about diverse individuals, social attitudes and actions and characteristic foibles of the influential, the ambitious, and the pretentious.

⁹ On Francisco de Quevedo's *Sueños*, consult James Crosby's edition, notes, and bibliography; on Spain's literary fools, Francisco Márquez Villanueva's several studies are our indispensable guides. The carnivalization of literature and the Menippean strain of pre-novel fiction are discussed by Bakhtin.

ing and damping the righteous ire of readers concerned about the hypocrisy of this kind, the shamelessness of that ilk, the ineptitude of that other sort, and so on.

Coming to terms with Vidriera's discourse.

Commentators have made use of a number of conventional generic and formal terms for characterizing Vidriera's talk. It will prove helpful to discard several of these and to recognize the appropriateness of one common term that is not commonly applied to Vidriera's way of speaking. Neither the narrator nor Vidriera recounts anecdotes; the narrator recollects few particular incidents ({51, 59}) and his protagonist, a few more ({36, 46, 50, 64, 75}), and the few that are recollected are scarcely particularized. Nor do they generate apothegms, which one expects to find instructive as well as witty, comparable to maxims. Neither do they strive (unless we admit doubtful exceptions such as item {35}) for the aphorism's depth and stylistic distinction in the expression of truths or principles. None of the sayings is so neatly or brilliantly phrased as to be termed an epigram. All of these high-culture forms, Greek in origin and learned in transmission, are too decorous to apply to Vidriera's banter with the crowd. But there does exist a low register of terms for describing these exchanges adequately. Mockery, ridicule, taunting, twitting, derision, contempt, and scorn name attitudes and resources universally distributed in popular discourse. They carry no implications of superior style, careful formulation, or expressive innovation.¹⁰ They are in this respect less richly formalized than the learned kinds. But there does exist also a conventional form, universal and immensely adaptable, that serves as an effective vehicle for these base sorts of

¹⁰ "These [terms]...concern the efforts of one to find amusement or delight at the expense of another; they vary from mere mischief to sheer malice" (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1117). "Ridicule refers to the attempt to arouse laughter or merriment at another's expense by making fun of or belittling him. *Mock* implies contempt through caricature. *Taunt* suggests reproach through sarcasm. *Twit* applies to an effort to ridicule by calling attention to something embarrassing. *Deride* implies scorn and contempt in demeaning another. *Gibe* refers to light taunting of someone over something trivial or humorous." Each of these terms is appropriate for naming parts of Vidriera's usage.

belittlement. It is the form favored by Vidriera, according to the recollection of his narrator. Our splendidly-educated and well-traveled protagonist, while bereft of reason, cleaves to the low road that depresses discourse to inflict injury rather than pursue the high way that is said to conduce to improvement.

The fundamental formal unit into which Vidriera fits all manner of imprecation is the jest. The great majority of Vidriera's utterances as well as the narrator's summary versions of others can be described as jests in the common dictionary senses of the term and also within the special meanings assigned to the word by Sigmund Freud.¹¹ Jest is undertaken to amuse and to provoke laughter; it can seem playful but it can reach so far as to scoff and taunt. The word as employed by Freud in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, what is more, defines a fundamental form of verbal construction that employs characteristic techniques for predictable purposes. Modified somewhat for application to this unusual text, Freud's method of analysis of the jest's way of working with words and of the jest's association with tendentious meanings will provide readers of "El licenciado Vidriera" keys for understanding the disconcerting fascination of Cervantes' story.

Before proceeding to study some jests, let us recall the typical role and function of the jester. Generally and in the present instance, the jester (most often a male) is not esteemed for his powers of analysis, his information or thoroughness, or for the novelty of his vision but for the felicity of his expression and the audacity with which he says what others see and know but cannot say. Whether self-appointed or delegated to the role, the jester speaks of what is so but has been silenced or censored. That is what we look to the jester to parade before his public for their recognition,

¹¹The relevant senses of the noun included in the *American Heritage Dictionary* are: something said or done to provoke amusement and laughter; a jeering remark; a taunt. As for the verb, it is: to act or speak playfully; make sport; to joke; to make witty or amusing remarks; to utter scoffs or jeers; to gibe. One sees in this range from playfulness to jeering the variable social significance and volatility of jesting, the gradations of offensiveness for the objects and of partisan piling-on for bystanders, and the potential for tendentiousness in playful speech. Vidriera exercises all of the options jesting provides. The roughly equivalent Spanish term is *burla*.

amusement, spite, vindication, or consolation. The jester speaks for those who know better than to speak, who must guard their words and gestures; he speaks with an enviable degree of immunity from punishment by his audience, including his superiors, the authorities, the powerful. On the other hand, those who are exposed by the jester lose for a time whatever favor or exemption they ordinarily enjoy. Exposing to ridicule those whom ordinarily we are constrained to tolerate or treat with attenuated or covert scorn is what earns the jester his "right," such as it is, his licence or "freedom" to take "liberties" with language.

His twisted excesses entertain and give pleasure to his audience. And such are the liberties that an effective jester can take, despite censors and ordinary self-censorship, that his speech and its popular reception also help to educate and arm the very powers—the king, princes, bishops—under whose authority most others are constrained not to voice some of what causes outrage. The jester, in other words, speaks our mind, and his excesses, which paradoxically we can call the jester's free speech, function as both an escape valve and a mechanism of control that discourages more direct unruliness. He speaks for us, but nothing that is spoken dissolves the constraints that gag us who applaud the jester's aperçus, nor does the jester undertake to loosen our gags. Vidriera, we remember, is escorted around town by a guard appointed by a prince who fetched the freak from Salamanca for his pleasure. The guard protects Vidriera not for the sake of truth-telling but to stabilize and prolong the gratifying impasse between Vidriera and his taunters that serves the prince's interests and mollifies the crowd. Symbolic violence (words) directed laterally against many sorts of "them" substitutes in place of contumacious direct action (sticks and stones) that in other circumstances might be deployed vertically against the powerful. The latter maintain their authority and rule over both us (the crowd and jester) and the motley "them," all of whom (them and us) together constitute the indispensable governed who serve willy-nilly the pleasure of the governors. After all, it must be remembered, the powerful, if they are to body forth their superiority satisfactorily, will make more use of the services of tailors, shoemakers, manual laborers, druggists, notaries and even poets than we ordinary folk do.

Vidriera's abusive liberties are of little concern to the authorities, whose firm upper hand is maintained at little cost to them by an investment in divisiveness that is confined to ridiculous words that do not destabilize the status quo. It is therapeutic expression for the crowd and prophylactic for their governors.

The prince who is pleased to pay the jester's keep and who also pays his guard pays no attention to the reasonable plea of the recovered and lucid Tomás Rueda. In a Court teeming with *letrados* (administrators and functionaries of the empire), Rueda is worse than superfluous. By virtue of his talent, training, ambition, charm, and restored clear thinking, he has made himself a living threat to his patron. He has become an exemplar of social cooperation and an advocate of the rule of law who cannot be accommodated anywhere near the center, and so he is soon dismissed and forgotten.¹²

Jestwork.

As adults we forego a pleasure we experienced as infants: that of playing innocently with language as we acquire mastery of it. Our first toying with rhyme and rhythm was idle and functional pleasure at the same time. In our adult lives, when childishness

¹² The gravest social problem experienced by Spaniards from the fifteenth century through the lifetime of Miguel de Cervantes is the mistreatment of the New Christian descendants of Spain's Jews and Muslims. Américo Castro, Marcel Bataillon, Stephen Gilman, Francisco Márquez Villanueva, and other scholars in their wake have brought back to light the coincidental centrality and marginality, the eminence and ostracism, of the talented and detested descendants of Spain's Jews. Tomás, who silences his origins and values learning, and aspires to rise and be honored, and puts his trust in God and the law, and is rejected at the center and shunted to the margin, is an embodiment of the virtues and frustrations of this caste. (His insane opposite number Vidriera is the disembodied voice of his community's unreasonable prejudices.)

Tomás Rueda returns to Court, he proclaims, "para abogar y ganar la vida" (74), but the likelihood that he might realize his potential in his chosen profession is no greater than it had been, according to Sebastián de Horozco, for another accomplished aspirant a generation earlier. Horozco reminds that unfortunate fellow of the stain that disqualifies him from the practice of law: "E aunque tengáis aparejo / para muy bien depender, / dexad a un xpiano viejo / abogar y dar consejo / pues vos no lo podéis ser" (Márquez, "Sebastián de Horozco" 411).

is discouraged, we reclaim some of this pleasure in several ways, some of us more effectively than others. Often we jest, meaning that we play with words or concepts in ways that are justified, often just barely, by the sense that emerges along with the play. The sense made in jest need not be meaningful or intrinsically interesting:

Otro le preguntó qué remedio tendría para salir con una comisión que había dos años que la pretendía. Y díjole: —Parte a caballo y a la mira de quien la lleva, y acompañaile hasta salir de la ciudad, y así saldrás con ella. ({48})

And also we joke. A joke can be said to differ from a jest in that, while here again our pleasure derives principally from the element of play with language, a thought of some substance lies at the center “to give respectability to the whole enterprise by falsely claiming credit for the pleasure” (Wollheim 262):

Acuérdaseme que...a un médico destos de segunda clase le despidió un enfermo por curarse con otro, y el primero, allí a cuatro días, acertó a pasar por la botica donde receptaba el segundo, y preguntó al boticario que cómo le iba al enfermo que él había dejado, y que si le había receptado alguna purga el otro médico. El boticario le respondió que allí tenía una receta de purga que el día siguiente había de tomar el enfermo. Dijo que se la mostrase, y vio que al fin della estaba escrito: *Sumat dilúculo*, y dijo: “Todo lo que lleva esta purga me contenta, si no es este dilúculo, porque es húmido demasiadamente.”¹³ ({46}; see also {24, 28, 50, 75})

Some jokes are trivial and appear innocent; many others are tendentious, and some disguise a repressed purpose, either ob-

¹³ Changes in cultural context obscure many of Vidriera's jests and jokes, which now require editors' elucidation. *Sumat dilúculo*, “To be taken at dawn,” is misconstrued by the ignorant doctor to convey “*dilu-culo* (donde el primer término significa ‘lavar, limpiar’)” (Sevilla Arroyo 93 n. 123).

scene or hostile.¹⁴ Jokes, and especially tendentious jokes, require more work than jests on the part of their teller and their receivers as well. The teller must "make a joke," whereas a jest more simply and directly "comes to" one, it "occurs" to the jester, it is uncovered where it lies waiting in language. And the making of a joke remains incomplete until a hearer is induced to contribute its capstone, which is laughter, participating and associating thereby with the maker in the production of pleasure. The amount of pleasure realized by the joke-amplified-by-laughter will vary according to the ingenuity of the verbal and conceptual play and also the significance, for the maker and for those who laugh, of the associated thought.¹⁵ In the medical joke just quoted the play is confined

¹⁴ Drawing more fully on Freud's study of jokework, I have examined one such joke that is both aggressive and sexual, Sancho Panza's story of Lope Ruiz and Torralba (*Don Quijote*, I, 20), in "Sancho's Jokework."

¹⁵ Jokes and jests are socially constructed and exclusive. The laughter they provoke betokens understanding and agreement that may not extend much beyond the scene and moment of the joke's realization. Most of Vidriera's jokes and jests would have earned only qualified approval or none at all from Cervantes' first circle of adequate readers.

Items {2} and {3}, we imagine, had one intention and effect when they were uttered and a closely related intention and effect when they were narrated: they generated laughter at the expense of the *ropera* and her husband. When these jests were first read by real readers, I surmise, they would have preserved that charge for some, but it is likely that they were received differently by others of Cervantes' readers, those closest in response to his ideal readers. The same items (and many other jests) when they are read today are garbled in transmission to us, so that we must depend on expert commentators to raise them above apparent or trivial nonsense. Today's readers are led by our understanding of the situation (specifically the crowd's on-going provocation of Vidriera) to recognize that these items are meant to produce laughter that will fracture the crowd into an "us" and a "them," isolating those laughed at. For readers today many jests are at best pallid; we are induced to participate not by Vidriera's jestwork but by recognition that jestwork is being accomplished by the fool and certified by its reproduction in the text. We require footnotes elucidating the Latin, its maliciousness, and the husband's reaction to put us on equal footing with the jest-maker and the allies his jest secures for him and to partake in the superiority (ethnic and religious) that justifies whatever laughter we muster. Our laughter is our willful, contrived, intellectual, imitative response to the situation that calls on us either to laugh knowingly or to accept exclusion and inferiority faintly comparable to that inflicted on the butts of the jests. We are embarrassed to miss the point and thereby to forfeit membership in the approving crowd, and

to the Latin formula and its misinterpretation, the thought is the familiar charge that doctors are dangerously ignorant, the tendentiousness of the thought is accentuated by the obscenity that exposes the butt's stupidity. In sum, an amusing, scarcely significant, witticism that draws a snigger.

The other jokes numbered within braces following the previous quotation likewise are, like Vidriera's jests, familiar and conventional; their targets were secured beforehand in folklore and learned wit. Vidriera makes nothing personal and little that is new out of his inheritance; he simply refurbishes a few jokes drawn from his cultural legacy. They earn the crowd's approval and real readers' knowing chuckles, but no more than that. The expression of hostility and the liberation of pleasure in these instances are actualizations of an inexhaustible potential that is best understood as begotten, not made, being of one substance with language, by which all culture is made. Such jokes are moments of confirmation that have been prized by jesters and their audiences since doctors, judges, gray-beards, and all such types first walked among us.¹⁶

Miguel de Cervantes is an accomplished maker of jokes; Vidriera is not. Among the items the narrator collects for his readers, few show unusual ingenuity and significance enough to pass review as jokes. And those few are unremarkable with respect to their play with language and concepts or the justifying thoughts, or both. The great majority of Vidriera's sayings are not jokes at all but jests of generally moderate degrees of invention. Few of them call for and few have received close study.¹⁷ After we have

so we acquit ourselves with a chuckle.

¹⁶ The contrast of Vidriera's best efforts with Sancho's joking goat story (mentioned in note 14) is instructive. Sancho claims merely to be passing on a folk tale to Don Quixote, but he transforms the received motifs and structures, making the familiar matter deeply his own and expressive of his resentment toward his lord, mentor, and friend who has exposed him to memorable days and nights of abuse. No one will learn anything comparably significant about Vidriera's personal aspirations and frustrations by close study of his jokes.

¹⁷ I have the impression that the first dozen items, and especially {2} and {9}, have received as much attention as all the rest together. Does the enthusiasm of readers wane after the first few or do readers earn diminished interest on their investment in study after a promising start, or both? El Saffar mentions but one and quotes none of Vidriera's jokes and jests; Casaldueiro mentions three;

reviewed more evidence, we shall find it necessary to confront again a critical problem, already noted, that is becoming revealed as characteristic of this tale. It is, namely, the need to square the mediocrity of Vidriera's witticisms with real readers' enthusiastic reception of this text. How can a few common jokes and many less crafted jests, clumsily cobbled into an anthology, constitute the greater portion of one of our favorite stories? Can this collapse into mediocrity be accounted for internally and be seen to be a functional feature of the story rather than a dismaying lapse on the part of its author?

It is disarmingly easy to account for this conspicuous but merely apparent blemish and to accept it (like Dulcinea's mole) as an unusually prominent beauty mark. We begin by accepting the sobering but indisputable fact that while many people are nimble with words and can jest without effort, it requires a rare wit to make good jokes. Vidriera—we must bear always in mind—has lost control of his wits and with them his capacity to make up words “on his own” to fit the moment and suit his receivers.¹⁸ Only after and because of the Hieronymite friar's charitable intervention near the story's end will Tomás recover his power to reason, and then he will disown publicly the products of his diseased mind, which are the jests we are examining. In the meantime, which is the two years and a bit more of his dementia, Vidriera is confined to refashioning scraps of wit that lie in language and memory, his and his community's, awaiting reformulation. These he regenerates on demand “espontáneamente con grandísima agudeza de ingenio,” responding “a toda pregunta con propiedad y agudeza” (53–54), and without thinking. He indeed does react spontaneously, but does he also act appropriately and speak imaginatively? No, it is the unreliable narrator, describing a patient bereft of reason, together with the amazed academics of Salamanca who hold these admiring, mistaken opinions.

Forcione by my count includes fifteen items in his discussion.

¹⁸ “[Tomás] mostraba tener turbados todos los sentidos; y aunque le hicieron los remedios posibles, sólo le sanaron la enfermedad del cuerpo, pero no de lo del entendimiento, porque quedó sano, y loco de la más extraña locura que entre las locuras hasta entonces se había visto” (53). On *entendimiento* as a key term in this text see my “Garbage,” 20–22.

To accommodate these unusual circumstances I shall hope to benefit in the next several pages from applying to this text one of Sigmund Freud's analytical schemes, necessarily modified. Freud asks his readers to think of the maker of a joke as the "first person" and the requisite receiver as the "third person." The joke, perfected and amplified by the receiver's laughter, is directed against a butt, the isolated and diminished "second person." Viewing "El licenciado Vidriera" in this frame, we see and now we can name one of its peculiar features: during the two thirds of the text that concern us here there is in effect no "first person" present to undertake the jokework. The joke-maker's position in the discourse is occupied by a "nobody," a mindless eccentric whom the crowd previously had taken to treating as a "second person," the butt of its physical abuse and trash talk. Deprived of personality, this goat becomes nevertheless a "somebody special" by denying his flesh and claiming for himself, and confirming, an ability to reflect the interests of the crowd he attracts. Incapable of speaking his own mind, he is mindful of the crowd's hostility, which he deflects onto a host of "surrogoats," targets of opportunity in the crowd and the surrounding community. In this way the unthinking crowd and their favorite fool together become cooperating "third persons" who jibe and sneer at conventional, ready-made butts. No "first person" participates in the proceedings or makes anything, creates anything novel, out of the pre-cast materials (the "second persons" of many kinds) that all of them bear in mind.

While Vidriera talks to the crowd and the narrator recollects and records, outside their circle and from the elevation of our world the real author of this spectacle calls upon his readers to join him in overhearing these proceedings without augmenting the number of "third persons" by joining in complicity with the foolish crowd.

What Vidriera accomplishes in his daily dodge and feint we can best call jestwork. It is a line of work suited to the talents of one who is gifted with a retentive memory and possesses facile verbal competence and is irresponsible. No more is required of such a person than that he play aloud with words and thoughts drawn from the community's stores. For Freud, whose interest lay in uncovering the tendentiousness of jokework, the jest was a

lesser form that offered less reward to analytical attention than the joke. Similar in its technique and purpose but lacking the significance and ingenuity of the best-made jokes, jests, including Vidriera's jests, even so are not innocent. They are in fact charged with partiality and loaded with social meaning that illuminates the community that lends them their language. And so, what the following, adjusted model of analysis can account for is how Vidriera's jesting language, being not his but everybody's, exposes the pathology of everyday life in a disordered Court and the society it misgoverns.

In the way that Freud acknowledged innocent jokes but preferred to study tendentious ones, we shall see that relatively innocent or "minimal" jests appear in the narrator's anthology, where they are outnumbered by jests of greater volatility and greater interest, "lively" jests. Let us imagine their range of expressive variation by locating Vidriera's sayings at appropriate points along a continuum running from quasi-infantile idle play with language, as innocent as it can be, through a range of jests of increasing complication and energy reaching to jokes that conceivably might demonstrate an extreme psychopathology. Now, viewing our evidence on that scale, we see that Vidriera has approached the lost innocence of childish play only once (48, quoted above), and even then, while the wordplay is simple and the sense absurd, there is attached an underlying thought, by no means trivial, that ridicules the wasteful ambition of the Court's office-seekers.¹⁹ As for the other end of our hypothetical continuum, we have noted already that Vidriera is incapable of approaching the creative extreme of tendentious jokework. The great majority of his sayings, we can safely claim, are located in the broad middle

¹⁹ A relatively simple jest, we see here, can mask a tendentious thought. Receivers are "bribed," Freud suggests, with superficial pleasure that makes an underlying, unvoiced idea acceptable. The jest above has given receivers "fore-pleasure" while acting as a "façade" beneath which another pleasure is produced by the lifting of an inhibition (168–69). No writer has shown better awareness of witty undercover subversion than Cervantes, who names it proverbially in the second paragraph of his "Prólogo" to *Don Quijote*, Part I, in the course of a declaration of his readers' freedom of conscience: "y sabes lo que comúnmente se dice, que debajo de mi manto al Rey mato."

expanse of jest, which admits considerable variability in pleasure and energy ranging, as we shall see, from “minimal jests” through “lively jests” to notably “tendentious jests.”²⁰

Jest fooling.

Vidriera’s jests can be distinguished from jokes. Jokes are constructed by a first person maker to engage a third person receiver in sharing criticism of a second person butt. Jests, in a manner of speaking, are company performances, effected by plurals. The third persons plural (the crowd, the receivers), not constrained by dependence on a joke-maker (a teller at the controls), prevail upon a first person nonentity to represent them (and not himself), using their common language. The efforts of this nullity (his jests), regulated by the inarticulate many, confirm their superiority over second persons seriatim (the diverse “others” who are the objects of their scorn). In their jests the third persons plural and the sharp-tongued mouthpiece delegated to speak their mind are minimally inventive. The third persons and their delegate recast yesterday’s accepted truths into forms fit for use today, reaffirming, re-validating, celebrating together the acuity and enduring applicability of their forefathers’ wisdom.

If one should venture to liken jokes to construction projects in the mind where intricate objects are engineered that hold interest for the psychoanalyst, jests, in contrast, could be said to resemble the less supervised routine activities in a city park or square where the social psychologist might go to observe all sorts of lolling, posturing, courting, and leering.²¹ The equivalent of lolling is

²⁰ In addition to jesting, Vidriera engages on a few occasions in preachment: about doctors ({44}), about actors ({65}) and impresarios ({67}), about notaries ({78-79}); these, excepting the first, are laced with irony and inverted meaning, but they are not jests. Likewise Vidriera sometimes voices opinions in other forms that include little or no jestwork ({18, 30, 37, 43, 61, 67, 71, 82}). A few other times the Salamanca graduate’s memory supplies material from classical and Biblical sources, appropriated ironically ({2, 69, 91}) or played straight ({20-22, 44}).

²¹ In a concluding study of “El licenciado Vidriera” I shall examine some psycho-social and social-historical meanings of this tale. Meanwhile I recall that in his prolog presentation of the *novelas* their author makes memorable reference to the symbolic significance of both the square and the park. “Mi intento ha sido

accomplished by minimal jests, those in which moderate play with language (*eran/feran, ángeles/angelitos, dichosos-dichosísimos-si...no mocosos* in the first item below) is barely justified by a thought that holds no intrinsic interest:

De los maestros de escuela decía que eran dichosos, pues trataban siempre con ángeles, y que fueran dichosísimos si los angelitos no fueran mocosos. {10}

Ningún camino hay malo como se acabe, si no es el que va a la horca. {13}

Oyó Vidriera que dijo un hombre a otro que así como había entrado en Valladolid, había caído su mujer muy enferma, porque la había probado la tierra. A lo cual dijo Vidriera: —Mejor fuera que se la hubiera comido, si acaso es celosa. {86}

Wrested from their contexts, these and other minimal jests ({1, 14, 17–19, 23, 26–27, 29, 35, 38, 47–49, 62, 67, 70, 84–85 95–97}) do not demand to be pondered. They are moments of inconsequential play that provoke a fleeting smile, slight satisfaction, and little reflection. In some cases, however, the placement of insipid jests in relation to other items in a series enhances their significance. Items {17–19}, to choose an instance that is noteworthy despite the meager interest of its members, set the subject for a chain of

poner en la plaza de nuestra república una mesa de trucos, donde cada uno pueda llegar a entretenerse.” Then the prologuist ponders the life-restoring refreshment that imaginative literature provides the weary soul, “el afligido espíritu” (an idea represented also in Vidriera’s item {26}), and he likens his stories to parks: “Para este efeto se plantan las alamedas, se buscan las fuentes, se allanan las cuestas y se cultivan, con curiosidad, los jardines” (1: 52). In a passage of “El licenciado Vidriera” where some readers feel the presence of the author in his persecuted character’s words, Vidriera draws in some of these same prolog images to dignify the profession of actors and theater directors, saying of the latter: “son necesarios en la república, como lo son las florestas, las alamedas y las vistas de recreación, y como lo son las cosas que honestamente recrean” ({66–67}). This association of literary creation and its publication with spiritual consolation and cultivated natural forms reappears elsewhere in the page-poet’s well-known rhapsody to the performance artist Preciosa in praise of poetry (“las fuentes la entretienen, los prados la consuelan, los árboles la desenojan, las flores la alegran” [“La gitanilla” 1: 91]).

twelve items ({17–28}) that treat poets and poetry. No one of the group is memorable singly, though {24} and {28} remain amusing, and {25–27} rage against more than their ostensive objects. But the thematic kinship of the dozen items draws the attention of commentators to all the parts. Reasoning outside the story, some readers have been tempted to link this conspicuous cluster to the author's known love of poetry and poets, but logically and practically this is an inappropriate procedure.²² It is better critical practice once again to look to account for this textual feature internally, recognizing the modest but real benefit that the grouping of minimally attractive items holds for the narrator. We see here working for the fictional author (the compiler-editor-narrator of Vidriera's sayings) what G. T. Fechner called a "principle of aesthetic assistance or intensification," in which items "that in themselves produce little effect converge" and produce "a much greater outcome of pleasure than corresponds to the pleasure-value of the separate determinants" (Freud 165).²³ The aggregation of notes struck one after another in the same key produces a chordal effect capable of attracting more attention to the group than each discrete tone merits.

The same technique of topical aggregation enables the narrator to enhance the expressiveness of other minimal jests by grouping tired forms of resentment to strike cooperatively at the same objects of scorn. This occurs in the treatment of *mozos de mulas* in items {35–38}, *diestros* ({70–71}), and gamblers ({95–97}); three trivial jests about country and city life ({84–86}) are lifted slightly above their singular pettiness when they appear together as a

²² Vidriera's extreme, polarized pronouncements are substantially and temperamentally inconsistent with views and feelings about poetry that Cervantes and his more sympathetic creatures express on other occasions. It is improbable that the author would have a mindless rant speak for him on this or any other significant subject. I touch on this in "Garbage" 19.

²³ Indeed Fechner (whose *Vorschule der Ästhetik* in two volumes was published in 1876) maintains that a convergence of this kind might result in pleasure even where the individual determinants were too weak to achieve any on their own. Freud entertains the principle but refrains from applying it, believing that "the topic of jokes does not...give us much opportunity of confirming (its) correctness." Here and at a few other points our narrator's anthology of jests supplies that opportunity.

small cluster. This serial association of topically-related jests occasionally makes possible a secondary and more significant unburdening than could be obtained from the minimally significant parts. This is exemplified in the series on poets and poetry, and again in the instructive series {35–38} in which the common focus on *mozos de mulas* provides a cover under which Vidriera fires a bolt of resentment upward against the social causes of which the delinquent and disreputable mule-boys are an undesirable effect.

The subversion is centered in item {35}, but it depends for clarification on an apparently innocent aside moments later in {38}. The exchange begins as repartee when a *mozo de mulas* claims that his kind are exempt from criticism, “porque somos gente de bien y necesaria en la república.” Vidriera meets and deflects this claim with two of his own, the first one abstract and general, the second, quoted now, a pointed and predictable counterattack: “mozos sois vosotros de la más ruin canalla que sustenta la tierra.” The phrase is a double-directed rebuke. The easiest meaning to take, because it is consistent with popular prejudice, asserts that “your sort are among the world’s worst rabble.” The more appropriate reading, logically and grammatically, depends for its subversive and rebelliously aggressive sense on Vidriera’s immediately preceding aphorism which holds that “la honra del amo descubre la del criado.” This claim (which, being reversible in meaning, is ambiguous and therefore dependent on the context of saying) governs a following imperative phrase that has the effect of redirecting criticism from the rabble to their exploiters:

[A] —La honra del amo descubre la del criado. [B] Según esto, mira a quién sirves y verás cuán honrado eres: [C] mozos sois vosotros de la más ruin canalla que sustenta la tierra. {35}

Now the barely disguised explosive sense is clear to see: (A) as the master’s honor reveals the servant’s and vice versa; (B) look therefore at your masters to see just how (dis)honorable you are: (C) you are the most disreputable sort of servants, being servants of the most disreputable kinds of masters. The villainy of the *mozos de mulas*, in other words, has its source, its cause, and its reflection in their masters’ dishonor. And who are the masters who demean

these servants? Vidriera answers the question moments later in {38}: “sus amos (que así llaman ellos [los mozos] a los que llevan en sus mulas),” and he specifies typical kinds of customers and their treatment. They are foreigners, students, regular clergymen, and soldiers; and they are robbed, cheated, and cursed. In other words the masters are the prosperous parasites, the pompous and pious, the ostentatious, and the comfortable, all of them resting on their asses and sustained in their privileges by the labor of a despised and despising underclass whose equals they are in (dis)-honor.²⁴

In a technically similar way, the series of items on poetry and poets focuses attention on a topic that it treats repeatedly, but for the most part without depth or novelty. Bit by trivial bit the facile criticism of bad and pretentious poets erects a banal screen, that finally is adequate for masking in items {25–27} covert attacks as angry as the one just exposed in {35}. The discharges on this occasion (as we saw briefly above) are trained against the destructive ignorance of those who presume to discredit authentic wisdom and genuine imaginative creation. Vidriera’s criticism is justified on the surface as defense of fine poetry and poets, but it is redirected finally and more meaningfully against higher congregations of backbiters. The most eminent circles of the realm and their attendant sycophants are labeled ignorant and foolish in {27}, with an audacity that would be intolerable if it were expressed clearly in simpler syntax and detached from the pseudo-subject of poetry. Items {26–27} are joined with {25} in a single sentence,

²⁴ Audacious jests are apt to be ambiguous, for their protection. R. M. Price (83) construes the object of “mira a quién sirves” in {35} to be mules: the mule-boys are dishonored by serving their asses. There are two reasons for discounting this reading: Vidriera explains that he has in mind the mule-boys’ own definition of *amos*, by which they mean the clients they transport on their mules; and the topic sentence in {35} (“la honra del amo descubre la del criado”) unmasks the sullied honor of the wealthy and favored who are themselves, rather than the menials they exploit, “la más ruin canalla que sustenta la tierra.” Beneath its façade the jest displaces dishonor from the low and ignorant, who are ugly victims, onto the powerful, disreputable victimizers.

The topic sentence of {35} defines one of the most active themes of *Don Quixote*, Part II, one which is abundantly represented in life under the authority of the powerful and perverted duke and duchess.

grammatically and conceptually the most complex recorded by the narrator. Its complexity requires and rewards a more patient reading than is invited by most of Vidriera's jests. The apparent subject continues to be the poetasters and ignorant critics featured in {23-24} and the immediately preceding items:

Pues, ¿qué es verlos censurar los unos a los otros? ¿Qué diré del ladrar que hacen los cachorros y modernos a los mastinazos antiguos y graves? {25}

¿Y qué de los que murmuran de algunos ilustres y excelentes sujetos donde resplandece la verdadera luz de la poesía que, tomándola por alivio y entretenimiento de sus muchas y graves ocupaciones, muestran la divinidad de sus ingenios y la alteza de sus conceptos, a despecho y pesar del circunspecto ignorante que juzga de lo que no sabe y aborrece lo que no entiende...? {26}

y del que quiere que se estime y tenga en precio la necedad que se sienta debajo de doseles y la ignorancia que se arrima a los sitiales? {27}

Inevitably readers will associate the censorious barking gossips of {25} with two more famous wags whose criticisms also are witty, superficial, and hypocritical. The matter that deserves closer attention, however, is found in item {27}, where attention veers away from rhymesters and rises to the throne rooms of princelings. "Ignorance is the envy of foolishness," Vidriera asserts abstractly, but he means to denounce ignorant aspirants to power and favor at Court, their foolish princes, and the wider circle of ignoramuses who look on and regard such ignorance and foolishness as estimable. We may call Vidriera's technique here metonymic outrage and note that the effect it achieves is the besmirching of everything it touches: the seats of authority ("doseles," "sitiales"), those who sit there, those seeking comfortable seats, and those on-lookers who fail to see that it is all a dance of "necedad" with "ignorancia." Both the noble elite and the ecclesiastical authorities of the realm come under attack no less than the toadies whom the

worthies encourage to approach and court them and in so doing demean them. (It appears now that the metonymic aphorism of item {35}, “la honra del amo descubre la del criado,” applies here no less aptly than elsewhere.)

The principle of aesthetic intensification has worked again to coordinate and fortify insipid observations about poetry and poets to produce a moderate gratification. This fore-pleasure erects an acceptable façade of entertainment behind which a greater, illicit pleasure is realized, through the lifting of inhibitions that ordinarily suppress resentment against the high and mighty. The hostility that Vidriera discharges against authority, we must remember, is nothing personal. It belongs to the crowd, who impose on their sharp-tongued fool and then applaud him for realizing, better than they themselves can, the potential of their language to voice pieces of their mind. Vidriera lost his wits—more exactly, Tomás was drugged and then robbed of them—and along with his wits his discretion, but he gained for his self-defense a measure of civil immunity, the fool’s licence that the crowd issues for its own pleasure, pressuring him day after day to show how much of the wit and malice embedded in their language he can formulate in public and for his public “con propiedad y agudeza.”

Lively jests

Freud first drew a distinction as to purpose between innocent and tendentious jokes. Later on, while studying the mechanics of both, he revised his view and withdrew the distinction. An innocent joke, he ventured initially, is an end in itself; the other kind serves an aim. The difference is registered in receivers’ responses: only tendentious jokes “run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to listen to them” (106–07). On reflection, however, Freud conceded that jokes “are in fact never non-tendentious” (162). Jokework always promotes the joke’s thought, augmenting it (by means of the receiver’s laughing approval) in opposition to the inhibiting power of critical judgment. Somewhat similarly Freud proposed to distinguish jokes from jests and claimed that the latter are non-tendentious, serving “solely the aim of producing pleasure” (162). But at the same time he affirmed that the techniques of jests and jokes and their purpose, the easing of inhi-

bitions, were the same. What is more, he sketched a survey of the genesis and development of the joke ("it begins as play...") that resembles the continuum I proposed above. Infantile play is retained in adult life in jests (playful but nearly nonsensical); "next" comes "the joke proper" (which Freud, rehabilitating for a moment his discarded distinction, calls "non-tendentious"); then "and finally" comes the tendentious joke, which may afford fore-pleasure for the liberation of suppressed thoughts (168–69).²⁵ Whether one prefers this developmental scheme or my purely descriptive continuum, the boundaries of meaning of the key terms (jest and joke, tendentious and non-) are indeterminate, and convenient theoretical distinctions sometimes prove practically inapplicable. Freud is either unaware of this slipperiness or, much more likely, unconcerned, and certainly he is undeterred by it. He proceeds with his analysis on the working assumptions that jokes are tendentious (in that they strengthen thoughts against criticism) and that jokes share the techniques and the purpose of jests (which is, again, to liberate pleasure).²⁶

At one extreme, the childish one, jests make little sense and mainly play with language. Towards the other extreme (that is, when their verbal or conceptual play is associated with more significant meaning) they often prove to be biased. We have seen instances of this already and soon we shall find more. We have observed too that it also happens that even pallid jests can cooperate

²⁵ Freud's developmental model illustrates a human "impulse to perfection" that he himself denied elsewhere but that Kenneth Burke (catching Freud in a contradiction) regards as inherent in language: "There is a principle of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with his nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle" (17). Burke's perspective locates the principles of the joke not in the remote past "but in the possibilities of perfection which reside in the form as such" (390–91). The tendentious joke, this suggests, is the formal perfection of principles present and incompletely realized in pleasure-producing infantile play with language, and in jests and jokes of greater and lesser technical complication, significance, and capacity to produce pleasure against internal and circumstantial resistance.

²⁶ Freud's assumptions are embraced and applied rigorously albeit briefly (394–97) by Maurice Molho, for whom Vidriera's jests are "la máscara de una obsesiva tendencia hostil." "Al coro que rodea a Vidriera le toca el papel del tercero que aplaude al chiste tendencioso por el placer del que a su vez se beneficia, satisfaciendo sus propias tendencias hostiles."

to intensify their pleasure-causing effect, and can serve as screens for covert combat against repressive criticism. There is no remaining reason to doubt that jests, which share their mechanics and purpose with jokes, also can be tendentious.²⁷

Minimal jests can be innocent, but some of Vidriera's are not. They are opinionated if not inventive in their ridicule of posturing poetasters, disreputable menials, and other butts. Lively jests work in the same way, but they play more elaborately with words and concepts and involve meanings that are more arresting and affecting. No firm line separates the first kind from the more lively second kind, or this middle group from the most tendentious. We can liken their variable and progressive degrees of transgression to the combativeness of the intrepid frontiersmen of Spain's founding story who, as they advanced from the secured cradle of Old Castile across an unmapped border into the hazardous Extremadura, perforce came to develop respect for stealth and augmented armament the further south they probed. So our cradle play with language becomes more crafted and offensive jestwork when it must confront strong opposition.

Some jests that appropriately can be called lively are scarcely more elaborate than items we have examined above.²⁸ They re-

²⁷ Everyone who borrows from Freud's study of jokes finds good reason to mention it; translator's prefatory caution concerning the "terminological difficulty which runs through the whole work" (xxx). The difficulty is only partly due to the lack of full correspondence between English and German terms, joke and *Witz*, jest and *Scherz*. Freud allows that "all the technical methods of jokes are already employed...in jests; moreover linguistic usage draws no consistent line between a jest and a joke. What distinguishes a jest from a joke is that the meaning of the sentence which escapes criticism [in a jest] need not be valuable or new or even good; it need merely be *permissible* to say the thing in this way" (159). Freud's reasoning and many case examples in Cervantes' text suggest that the more "valuable" or "good" the meaning (understood: "valuable" or "good," and "permissible" in the jester's and his receivers' estimation), the more likely it is to be tendentious (*tendenziös* 'partisan,' 'biased,' 'prejudiced').

²⁸ For reasons that vary from case to case I would claim that the following items are lively but not far removed from borderline minimal jests: {40, 42, 45, 53, 56, 60, 65, 72, 83}. Formally they are minimal, the justifying sense that enlivens them is prejudicial. In each case but {40} and {65} the bias clearly is ethnic, directed against professions and occupations commonly associated with descendants of Jews. Item {40} claims that sailors are unbelieving heathens. Item {65}

main technically simple, they provoke chuckles, but they also bite. They appropriate more hurtful prejudice from the sociolinguistic stores that Vidriera exploits, as they explore and map transgressions in the no-man's-land where they confront and disarm enemies, shaming, humiliating, and mistreating them. Today's readers will concede, I believe, that the following items—their playfulness together with their justifying sense—are more likely than the preceding, minimal jests to arrest the reader's progress:

Díjole un muchacho: —Señor licenciado Vidriera, yo me quiero desgarrar de mi padre porque me azota muchas veces. Y respondióle: —Advierte, niño, que los azotes que los padres dan a los hijos honran y los del verdugo afrentan. {8}

Otro le preguntó que qué le parecía de las alcahuetas. Respondió que no lo eran las apartadas, sino las vecinas.²⁹ {11}

Hallóse allí uno destos que llevan sillas de manos, y díjole: —De nosotros, Licenciado, ¿no tenéis que decir? —No— respondió Vidriera—, sino que sabe cada uno de vosotros más pecados que un confesor; mas es con esta diferencia: que el confesor los sabe para tenerlos secretos, y vosotros, para publicarlos por las tabernas. {34}

—Vidriera, esta noche se murió en la cárcel un banco ['cambiador'] que estaba condenado [a] ahorcar. A lo cual respondió: —Él hizo bien a darse prisa a morir antes que el verdugo se sentara sobre él. {57}

In these lively jests the punning and allied pleasure-generat-

mocks actors by ascribing to them qualities associated with gypsies; to call them "perpetuos gitanos" is to damn them with doubtful praise.

²⁹ Vidriera shares this way of thinking about women with that other neurotic obsessive Carrizales in Cervantes' *entremés* "El viejo celoso": "Donde [las mujeres] se estropean, y adonde ellas se dañan, es en casa de las vecinas y de las amigas. Más maldades encubre una mala amiga que la capa de la noche; más conciertos se hacen en su casa y más se concluyen que en una semblea ['asamblea']" (263–64).

ing linguistic adornments among the signifiers are linked to highly seductive social and sensual themes. Carousing, sex, money-making, and resisting authority are judged inordinately gratifying, and therefore they are countered with gossip, shaming, and legal and confessional coercion. Misogyny and patriarchal sexual politics justify the puns in {11}; sexuality and its control energize other jests, some of which would implode for want of interest as well as sense if the regulation of women were removed as their justification ({4, 5, 6, 7, 33, 68, 75, 76, 88}). Punishment, especially when it is corporal, public, and legal, provides titillating justification for several jests ({8, 31, 32, 57, 82}). When it is wrapped in relatively rich wordplay, as in {8} and {57} above, the product is an uncanny effect, a chuckle wrapped in a shudder.³⁰

It may be, as Freud maintained, that the receiver's pleasure is chiefly the offspring of play with language, and that the associated idea often is no more than the justification that adult society requires to cover and legitimize these relapses into childishness. Certainly one learns nothing about shoemakers, courtesans, saints, gamblers, and others from Vidriera's witticisms about them. His jests strike their targets, or rather the crowd and the narrator feel they have hit home, but they do not penetrate. Precisely because the jester and his audience are unobservant and unthinking but highly appreciative of received opinion, their jests say more about the crowd and the forebears who taught them their language, and the cultural transmission of their insecurities, than is taught about the others whom they view with loathing or at best dislike. Not caring to see into others, the crowd judge according to appearances and put a premium on propriety, while at the same time they distrust the semblances presented by others. They are pretentiously sensitive to the pretensions of others; their hand-me-down wisdom displays confidence that others' displays

³⁰ This is especially the case in {57}, if R. M. Price is right when he explains that "the hangman would sit on the shoulders of the condemned as they hung, to finish them off quickly, or to entertain the mob" (134 n. 43). This grizzly vision of justice on the gibbet, yoked to reactionary resentment of the money-handling professions together with the anti-Semitic resonances of banking, raise this jest to a level of aggressiveness that qualifies it for inclusion in the most tendentious category of jests.

are deceitful. In their jests anxiety and suspicion abound, reinforced by their conviction that semblances deceive. Everywhere they see hypocrisy, extravagance, ostentation, pretense, and deceit, which are the fecund generators of a third of their jests (items {15, 23, 24, 28, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 70, 72–75, 76, 91–92, 95, 97}). They expose pandemic thievery, trickery, duplicity, cheating, lies, and other malfeasance (items {30, 37, 38, 42, 43, 60} and others). The ignorant betray their ignorance (items {12, 23–28, 46, 51, 54, 59, 70–71, 83, 96}); hypocrites are everywhere.

Tendentious jests.

Which jests among the many, on account of their especially sharp tendentiousness, constitute a third group? Again there is no line of demarcation segregating these from the kinds examined above. Mechanically they are similar; they are similar in purpose; however a few jests are remarkable for their antipathy and sting.

Pasando una vez por la ropería de Salamanca, le dijo una ropera: —En mi ánima, señor Licenciado, que me pesa de su desgracia; pero ¿qué haré, que no puedo llorar?

Él se volvió a ella, y muy mesurado le dijo: —*Filiae Hierusalem, plorate super vos et super filios vestros.*

Entendió el marido de la ropera la malicia del dicho y díjole: —Hermano licenciado Vidriera—que así decía él que se llamaba—, más tenéis de bellaco que de loco.

—No se me da un ardite—respondió él—, como no tenga nada de necio. {2–3}

This memorable exchange is Vidriera's meanest. The narrator recalls with evident satisfaction the disdainful gesture of his fool who, "muy mesurado," rejects with an insult the compassionate comment of a bystander. Vidriera spits out the most apposite verse that could dwell in the memory of Bible-quoting, Jew-bating Christians. Adding gratuitous insult to unprovoked injury, he parries the effort of the shamed husband who "entendió...la malicia" and rashly attempted to defend his family interests.³¹ This poor

³¹ "Entendió...la malicia" because he, unlike his wife, was able to understand

fellow suffers a new humiliation to add to the affront inflicted on his wife and children. Vidriera, his narrator, and his readers know perfectly well where this exchange is taking place and everyone knows perfectly well what kind of person lives and works in the *ropería*, and no one feels a need or desire to match compassion with compassion for those degraded neighbors, whose plight is more disgraceful than a fool's and must be endured by them amid public insults forever.

The exact measurement of insult is an undertaking for the foolhardy. These are matters of reader response to the interaction of playful language with emotionally charged thoughts which furthermore may mask more transgressive meanings. No doubt responses to items {2-3} varied among Cervantes' first readers and certainly they vary today. In other instances too there may not be general agreement as to whether and why jests belong in this third, extreme group.³² Do the associated thoughts in these cases justify the jests' playfulness or do they instead overwhelm it, creating witticisms that are repugnant rather than piquant? In the case of the *ropera* and her kin, the narrator and the husband hold totally contradictory feelings and values. The former recollects a typical and passing encounter and judges it amusing; the latter suffers mortification. Jesters, we are reminded, do not strive to be fair; their objective is to free laughs from language and thoughts from suppression. Here Vidriera's double-directed repartee shames a family and an outcast, but provides the crowd a couple of good laughs that the narrator anticipates will be echoed by his readers.

Vidriera's Latin (King 102). The fool is doubly mean to insult the woman in terms she cannot, but some of the crowd can, grasp; she is both ignorant, being a woman, and accused, being a *conversa*.

³² Readers may want to add to the group I propose. To my mind item {35}, discussed above, can be said to attain this degree of tendentiousness when, under cover, it raises the charge of dishonor against the indolent exploiters of their menials. And when again behind a façade Vidriera labels the most eminent in the realm and their sycophants comparably ignorant and foolish (item {27}), that too exemplifies what intensity of attack an apparently trivial jest can achieve. The next few items studied below construct their nasty discharges openly, not subverting censure and prejudice (as items {27} and {35} do) but exploiting it for the injury of the targeted classes.

What can we hazard to affirm about the first real readers of these jests and their responses?³³ First of all it is certain that they would have felt more at home that we do reading the narrator's language. They would have situated themselves with little effort in the imagined society that hounds Vidriera and vilifies so many others. While they would have been at home there, not all would have been at ease there; some readers would have received the story with uncomplicated satisfaction, while others would have summoned in response more empathy for both Vidriera and his butts than the narrator musters and encourages. In their own Valladolid and every other city, Cervantes' readers lived semi-segregated from culturally selected others, real-world counterparts of the story's castes and classes. Some at least who were of the dominant caste of Old Christians (or pretended to that distinction), while passing through the quarters of the others, would have considered themselves entitled (or required for their honor's sake) to claim certain liberties when dealing with their inferiors. Perhaps they did not often proclaim aloud all that came to mind, for few would have shared our fool's gift for speaking nastily "con propiedad." But in real cities as in the story, the commanding caste would have derived no advantage from leaving their inherited and acquired resentments at home when they ventured into the *ropería* and the others' other spaces, perhaps to do business in their shops. And the superiors resented no less the encroachment of the others when the latter crowded into the space of their betters to exercise their callings, perhaps to purchase respectability with a show of money and to pass for the other kind. How else than by recognizing the comparability of such inimical social relations in the story world and in the world of its first readers

³³ The calculation of responses could be complicated beyond the possibility of satisfactory reckoning if we chose to chart the range of likely modern readings of this and other jests and compared them with our best estimates concerning the range of responses of the first readers. Certainly plausible conjecture is involved in any such measurements; I proceed knowing that our understanding of Cervantes' Spain, including his readers' habits, is incomplete, but that—thanks to Américo Castro and the first generation of his collaborators and students—we know more about what united and divided Spaniards, and why, than was known by previous modern readers. In consequence we have recovered innumerable obscured meanings in this text and others.

shall we comprehend the meaning of Vidriera's shameless defamation of the *ropera*? And how else can we understand the mistreatment of her husband and their children, who likewise are innocent except for the stain of their remote Jewishness that remains, more than a century after the conversion of their real forebears, a blemish not yet remote enough to preserve them from gratuitous humiliation?

A third of Vidriera's jests are responses directed back to his interrogators in brief mimetic representations of coarse repartee (rude back-talk, impudent contradictions, insolent retorts). Eight of these (items {1-3, 5-9}), including three of the most tendentious ({2-3, 9}) are concentrated at the beginning of the series, where their recourse to direct address stimulates readers' visual and auditory imagination of the scene and the actors. The repartee extends for only a few lines, a few moments, which is long enough to suggest the haphazard, typical, and inconsequential nature of the encounters—except for those shamed—and to establish the assured, often confrontational, tone that leaves no room in the record for doubt and reasoned dialog. A few instances of jesting repartee are minimally meaningful, the majority are lively, and several are highly charged. In these last instances, mimesis (albeit primitive) preserves the heat of the insult, conveying effrontery that narrative summary does not capture. The insolent retorts that Vidriera launches at the *ropera* and her husband amount to enactments, in verbal equivalents of whip lashes, of the dominators' indisputable superiority. The same device of presentation is favored by the narrator on additional occasions when the butts to be kicked reveal characteristics or exercise occupations associated with the New Christians. (What a terrible oxymoron "New Christian" was in 1600, a century after the last conversions, coerced and not, and how easily and thoroughly we are refamiliarizing the term, desensitizing ourselves again to its uncharitable nonsense.) In addition to items {2-3}, these anti-Semitic jests making use of repartee include {9} (a clod-buster and a New Christian, a justly famous jest discussed in my "Garbage," 17), and items {42} (a druggist), {53-55} (a tailor), {57} (a banker), {59} (a *tendera* presented as a vulgar Jewish mother), {72} (a hypocritical Portuguese bluebeard), and {77-81} (*escribanos*).

Tendentious jests can achieve heightened offensiveness through cooperation, in further confirmation of the principal of aesthetic intensification observed above. Three jests directed at a *sastre* illustrate how sequencing can recharge depleted materials. This short series {53–55} begins with what appears at a glance to be a moderately entertaining jest energized by the device of repartee. Vidriera provokes the exchange with his customary pose of assurance (“sin duda”) to which he yokes a slur disguised as a sign of respect (“señor maeso”).

Estando una vez arrimado a la tienda de un sastre, viole que estaba mano sobre mano, y díjole: —Sin duda, señor maeso, que estáis en camino de salvación.

—¿En qué lo veis? —preguntó el sastre.

—¿En qué lo veo? —respondió Vidriera—. Véolo en que pues no tenéis que hacer, no tendréis ocasión de mentir. {53}

The unoccupied tailor, surprised at ease outside his shop, has made himself vulnerable to the eyes of the community (“viole,” “veis,” “veo,” “véolo”) by his inattention to appearances, and Vidriera and the narrator seize the occasion to toy with him. Having observed the master craftsman in an imprudent display of self-satisfaction (“mano sobre mano”), they read hostile meanings, the first of them flippant and irreverent, the second mean and malevolent, into what they see: (a) the tailor’s uncustomary calm and folded hands signify that he is on the verge of repentance or rapture or death; (b) his lifelong occupation is a pretense unstitched before our eyes: for a tailor *hacer* means *mentir*.³⁴

The third jest again subsumes this tailor into the accursed category from which “apenas...uno” is exempted, and plays absurdly

³⁴ The tailor is damned if he does and damned if he does not make the clothing required by a society organized on the principle that you are what you wear. Tomás R. (that is, the Tomás known for some years as Rodaja and later as Rueda) is a living contradiction of the pernicious notion that appearances define essences; he changes his clothes and his social role seven times in this short story, appearing at first to be a *labrador*, and then successively a student, a traveler, a student again, an unshod *loca*, a lawyer, and a soldier. The narrator calls attention to his clothes eight times.

with metonymic double meanings. It goes this way: “cosa maravillosa es que casi en todos los de este oficio apenas se hallará uno que haga un vestido justo, habiendo tantos que los hagan pecadores” {55}. Tailors and their goods are comparable in their badness; the sins of the former, who are unrighteous, are manifest in the latter, which are unfit. The social equation *hacer es mentir* is rewritten *hacer es pecar*. Tailors reap what they sew, by their garments you shall know them.

The middle and connecting item in this trio is a marvel of concision and mean-mindedness. It is a quintessential *converso* jest with meaning intense and eruptive enough to infect the previous and following items:

Desdichado del sastre que no miente y cose las fiestas. {54}

Only when we understand that the jest secures this tailor and all tailors in a double bind, hard pressed between the proscriptions of the Old Law and the social requirements of the New, can we retrieve its meaning. Unhappy the judaizing *converso*, it warns with black sarcasm, who neglects to live the lie about his faith and therefore, doubtless having observed the Sabbath of his ancestors rather than that of his Christian neighbors, is so heedless as to sew on Sundays, proclaiming thereby the truth of his falsity and denouncing himself to all the world. For his failure to lie the infidel will be punished.

The three jests together represent tailors as a class of self-condemning automatons: habitual, hopeless, obsessive, liars. All they do is lie, all they make is lies; everything they do and make is sinful: *hacer es mentir es pecar*. They give themselves away whether they work (which is to *mentir, pecar*) on holy days or simply pause to rest outside their shops with crossed hands. And shoemakers are no better than tailors. With diseased but comparably irrefutable (because irrational) logic the narrator inserts next into the series a denunciation of *zapateros*, whose deficiencies (professional, ethnic, religious) are consistent with the foregoing: they too are inveterate liars and cheats ({56}).

One additional class of inferiors is treated with wit and scorn comparable to these in expressive development and intensity. The

mistreatment of *arrieros* in a text of the early seventeenth century reminds us that Christian prejudice—or more exactly the uncharitable policies and practice of secular and religious authorities together—was in these same years about to achieve perfection in the treatment—the expulsion—of Spain's Moriscos. Vidriera is his community's mouthpiece and therefore it is appropriate that he should utter (and the narrator should treasure) the following inanity in his litany of charges against this and that:

Los arrieros son gente que ha hecho divorcio con las sábanas y se ha casado con las enjalmas; son tan diligentes y presurosos, que a trueco de no perder la jornada, perderán el alma; su música es la del mortero; su salsa, la hambre; sus maitines, levantarse a dar sus piensos; y sus misas, no oír ninguna. {41}

Vidriera does not happen upon Morisco mule-drivers in the street nor is he asked about them. Rather his immediately preceding rant against *mozos de mulas* (who are more likely Moriscos than not) stimulates his hypersensitized faculty of resentment to a temperature that requires no further real objects for fuel. Effortlessly associating related mental categories, he effects an easy transition from one kind of undesirable to three other kinds: “Éstos, y los marineros y carreteros y arrieros tienen un modo de vivir extraordinario y sólo para ellos....” He endows the latter two groups with characteristics that common prejudice ascribed to Moriscos. *Arrieros* are permanently estranged from cleanliness, godliness, good taste, refinement, and their own souls; they are mated for life to dirt, to their animals and gear and fodder, primitive (phallic) rhythms, money-grubbing, and godlessness. Outwardly they resemble the seemingly repulsive but improbably virtuous mule-driver that we meet in *Don Quijote*, I, 16, the one who sleeps on straw and the pack saddles and blankets of his mules and contracts to *refocilarse* with the sweaty and foul-smelling serving girl Maritornes. But that *arriero* from Arévalo will not be contained within the stereotype that satisfies Vidriera's crowd. He steps out into history (Cide Hamete's and the world there represented) and becomes a worthy if humble actor, and he achieves the endearing human complication we find everywhere among the minor and

inferior characters of Cervantes' grand novel but nowhere around Vidriera or in his characterizations of his neighbors.³⁵

Finally, three other jests pose once again, in exceptionally interesting forms, the question of aesthetic propriety raised earlier. Is their inclusion plausible and permissible within the creative assumptions on which this tale is based? These are the jests treating religious themes, items {91-93}, that appear together near the end of the long series. A first characteristic to note about them is that, while they are particularly interesting for modern interpreters of the text, they do not hold special favor with its narrator. He treats them in no distinctive way and without comment. Their placement gives them no special weight; they are nearly afterthoughts. A minimal jest treating a favorite but tired butt of criticism, pernicious gossipers, precedes them, and they are followed by another minimal jest on the same subject. Furthermore the ten items immediately previous are lame enough to induce in the reader a state of critical relaxation sufficient to blunt the effect of surprise that {91-93} likely would produce were we to encounter these three early in the series or were they given bolder relief in some other way.³⁶

³⁵ The mule-driver of *Don Quijote* is richly particularized in his cameo appearance: he is one of the "ricos harrieros de Arévalo" and even, it is said, a relative of Cide Hamete Benengeli. Twice he feeds and cares for his animals; twice his mule-blanket bed is mentioned; he is as horny as the serving girl is randy. But when push comes to shove in the midnight confusion, the mule-driver's heroic intervention provides readers a perspectivistic delight: he sees that his struggling consort cannot break free of Don Quixote's grasp and, now called "el bueno del arriero," he intercedes to save her from a singularly unusual date rape. Moments later, seeing Sancho sock Maritornes and then grope her ("se abrazó con Maritornes"), the *arriero* shows his mettle a second time, rushing to rescue her ("acudió a dalle el socorro necesario"). At dawn, while Don Quixote, Sancho, the innkeeper, and the *cuadrillero* are crowning the night's foolishness by uttering hundreds of Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Creeds while crossing themselves fervently, all of it to ensure the efficacy of the healing balm they are concocting, the mule-driver literally tends to his own business, "sosegadamente andaba entendiendo en el beneficio de sus machos." Vidriera's and his crowd's conventional wisdom with respect to "Christian" superiority over Moriscos (and fallen women as well) is turned upside down in the inn of Juan Palomeque.

³⁶ Even knowledgeable readers, when they are not sufficiently alert to the

The surprise is that these jests contain charged if parabolic attacks on the corruption of the Church. One can imagine real contexts in which they would have exuded such an odor of heterodoxy as to attract attention of a sort that no author of the time could have desired. Might it be that their placement, in addition to suggesting the narrator's indifference to their special interest, also is evidence of their author's desire to disguise them, offering them to readers at closing time at a discount among a cluster of jests that are inoffensive?

The religious jests are modulated in comprehensiveness, rising from the specific to the general to the abstractly and metaphorically all-encompassing. Each says one thing and means another, the inversions masking the unspeakable beneath apparent pieties. The first is an instance of repartee of an unusual kind: a voice in the crowd initiates the play by uttering a biting, if uncomplicated, anti-clerical jest. It is an absurd but purposive and meaningful misinterpretation of the evidence presented to their eyes, and Vidriera seems to lash out at the critic and to side with the good father:

Pasando acaso un religioso muy gordo por donde él estaba, dijo uno de sus oyentes: —De [h]ético no se puede mover el padre.

Enojose Vidriera, y dijo: —Nadie se olvide de lo que dice el Espíritu Santo: *Nolite tangere christos meos.* {91}

Vidriera's choleric tone tells us what we need to know about both the cleric and the critical bystander. Clearly the former is disabled not by consumption but by over-consumption, and his critic's comment is sarcastic, not compassionate. There, he means to charge, waddles a hypocrite who is being consumed by a profession of self-indulgence. Our fool pretends to rebuke the rebuker and to defend the good father by invoking the Vulgate angrily in

allusive codes of Cervantes' conflictive society, will miss significant discharges muffled in the text's layered ironies. Jorge García López maintains that "tres figuras se salvan de esta crítica: los actores, los clérigos y los escribanos, aunque estos últimos en forma harto equívoca" (266).

defense of the sanctified. However, behind the façade of his mock anger and Biblical authority (recollected verbatim from the Old Testament), the fool speaks with a forked tongue: it is the fat passerby (rather than his critic) who transgresses God's law, and he condemns him self with the testimony of his gross girth and halting gait. The Salamanca-educated fool has put into play a creative misreading of Scripture, for "cristos meos" refers not to the followers of Jesus but to the anointed and oppressed leaders of Israel whom the Old Testament God pledged to support in adversity. One look at the "religioso muy gordo" persuades his rebuker and Vidriera as well that he bears no resemblance to either the suffering Israelites or Christ's followers.³⁷ The narrator, as we have seen repeatedly, shows no interest in the particular and distinguishing characteristics of individuals who appear in the crowd; the fat cleric makes it into the narrator's anthology because he represents a category as common and risible as the ignorant doctor, the thieving tailor, and the rest.

Vidriera staged that show of anger, pretending to defend a common sort of clergyman while beneath his façade he attacked it. Immediately thereafter we see him feign again, affirming the exceptional goodness of churchmen generally while covertly he ridicules one of the Church's institutionalized and unassailable abuses:

³⁷ Vidriera draws his admonition from 1 Chronicles 16.22 (and not from the parallel Psalm 105.15, which does not include "cristos meos"), in a psalm of thanksgiving that recalls how mindful the Lord God was of his covenant with Israel when they "were few in number and of little account," "wandering from nation to nation." He protected them from oppressors, warning: "Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm" 'Nolite tangere christos meos: et in prophetis meis nolite malignari' (1 Paralipomenon 16.22). It seems more than doubtful that those anointed wanderers, suffering privations amid enemies, were too fat to walk easily. It is possible but not certain that Vidriera means to suggest that this undisciplined *religioso* is a Judeo-Christian unfaithful to both Laws. Such an aspersion is consistent with popular prejudice and reactionary opinion in Cervantes' real world and would protect Vidriera and the laughing crowd in their parallel world from Inquisitorial scrutiny. What better justification of the Church's anxieties could there be than revelation that its dissolute clergy are lapsed New Christians? That is precisely the charge on which Archbishop Silíceo based his notorious and successful attack on the *cabildo* of the cathedral of Toledo (Sicroff, Chapter 3; Shipley, "Lazarillo").

Y subiéndose más en cólera, dijo que mirasen en ello, y verían que de muchos santos que de pocos años a esta parte había canonizado la Iglesia y puesto en el número de los bienaventurados, ninguno se llamaba el capitán don Fulano, ni el secretario don Tal de don Tales, ni el Conde, Marqués o Duque de tal parte, sino fray Diego, fray Jacinto, fray Raimundo, todos frailes y religiosos. {92}

If the multitude of saints canonized recently have been drawn exclusively from the regular clergy and never from the officer corps or the administrators of the empire or the titled, are not clerics therefore manifestly more saintly than others and ought they not therefore be spared gossip and wisecracks? But when *miramos en ello*, we see that the fool's unspeakable meaning is an inversion of this: indeed men of the cloth are "bienaventurados" both before and after election to sainthood, for they (a minuscule minority of the population) control the mechanisms and privileges of their institution and favor their own, to the exclusion of the military, the administrators, the gentry, ...and of course all the resentful crowd whose rancor Vidriera is articulating.

...porque las religiones son los Aranjueces del cielo, cuyos frutos, de ordinario, se ponen en la mesa de Dios. {93}

The third jest's metaphoric system is straightforward or not, depending on whether its receivers isolate these words from the series and read them as a vapid tribute to religious orders, or instead link this item to the preceding two jibes and beyond those to ninety other comments that have nothing good to say about the fundamental institutions, professions, and occupations of the speaker's society. Beginning with a conjunction, it follows and extends and embroiders the thought and the tone of {91-92}, and so a lightly disguised and very caustic reading is the controlling one. The religious life modeled here is at the antipodes of the *imitatio Christi* and the privations endured by the wandering Israelites who were Jehovah's *cristos meos*. The regular clergy have removed from our troubled world into divine preserves, their orders, and in those "Aranjueces" they are groomed and culti-

vated as finely as if they were plump produce in the Royal gardens, readied at harvest time for the pleasure of grandees and hierarchs. The God of the Covenant and the Father of the suffering Christ is imagined sharing the sybaritic taste and fare of the most fortunate banqueters here below, and the image of His copious table is not likely to encourage meditation on his Son's last supper.

Read together, backwards or forwards, these jests play to the disaffection of all those compelled to accept the effrontery of the comfortably pious in a fallen world, the spiteful world represented in nearly all of Vidriera's witticisms. It requires no great stretch of imagination, under the influence of {91}, to associate one fat monk with the debauchery of many and then to associate those many with the totality of the self-promoting, saint-selecting clergy ({92}), and then to affiliate the good life of the fat and lax religious with the comparable privileges and excesses of the fruit-sucking aristocracy and, above all, their monarch and their indulgent God ({93}).

Modern readers are likely to dissociate themselves from the social sense of the majority of Vidriera's jests, which are so many flashes of rank prejudice against this and that. We would prefer to suppose that Cervantes rejected them as well and sought to align his readers at his side, withdrawn from Vidriera's crowd and looking down on them. Our preference is well served by an interpretation such as the present one that insists that Vidriera is not wise but witless and that he is coerced into satisfying the crowd's demands that he regurgitate mouthfuls of common nonsense. The narrator applauds these and preserves them for the gratification of his readers; real readers have good reason not to join this crowd. Does this interpretation fail, now that we discover a small number of anti-clerical jests that many modern readers will find palatable or acceptable historically or ideologically and that we may suppose Cervantes and his ideal readers also would have relished?

It does not fail. It is common in literature, especially in the novel, for an author's views to come into alignment sporadically with opinions and passions of characters whose values may be antithetical to the values that sustain the fiction in which the coin-

cidence is produced. The principle at work in such moments works also in the ideological sphere of our own world with such frequency that it has been given an aphoristic name: the enemy of my enemy—it is said in and beyond politics—is my friend. This alignment of contraries is sustained brilliantly for the whole length of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, where, I conjecture, Miguel de Cervantes saw and learned how extraordinarily productive it can be for authors who must find ways of saying the unspeakable.³⁸ In the present case a reader has no need to embrace Vidriera, his crowd, and the narrator, in order to subscribe to at least a few of their reproaches, which were shared by many of Cervantes' contemporaries but were seldom voiced in fictional versions of Spain or in the real one. Arguably these complaints retain some validity; at least they have been thought and spoken often in later circumstances by many who, unlike Vidriera, did have their wits about them.

Rather than posit that an elderly and infirm Cervantes suffered a partial breakdown of imagination in this tale, or that he confused Vidriera's voice with his own, or that he simply made the story a store house for his own favorite sayings, let us consider a simpler and more elegant hypothesis, one that is consistent with the whole of this text and with our understanding of its author's adeptness at questioning authority. If Cervantes' objective included drawing attention through ridicule to abuses that innumerable critics in and outside the Church had combated and denounced

³⁸ Lázaro, the narrator of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, exposes the decadence of his society's institutions through the representation of typical masters, relationships, and forms of degradation. He does this as a ploy to save his skin, arguing to his powerful first reader that he is no more degraded than those who are responsible for directing his perverted career. The anonymous author of *Lazarillo* makes his narrator (who entertains readers while infecting them with his diseased opinions and values) the most persuasive evidence of the corruptness of the world, while also contradicting his character by exemplifying in his art positive values—including courage and disinterested critical analysis—that are incompatible with his creature's bottomless cynicism. (I have argued for this understanding of *Lazarillo* in "Making" and elsewhere.) Similarly Miguel de Cervantes makes use of a demented but admired spokesman to celebrate the social consensus apparently while subverting in effect attitudes and values that no healthy society could endorse.

in one form or another for over one hundred years, and if those abuses had continued while the critical voices had been silenced by death, censure and suppression, what better way was there than the following for the author to raise his own voice without losing it? Why not portray the Church's abuses as so institutionalized, so commonly practiced, and so generally recognized and deeply resented, that even a fool deprived of reason could see them and know how to speak of them by simply applying his quick wit, "con propiedad y agudeza," to the community's store of accepted "common sense"? The crowd's reaction to his subversion of the clergy—which includes not a word of protest, but rather expresses wholesale approval in the form of insistence that Vidriera keep talking—is the surest guarantee (and the safest for the author) that on this occasion once again the fool has spoken the people's truth. Here, in his denunciation of the Church's dereliction, the witless Vidriera is in the oddest way imaginable truly the *vox populi*.

So there is at this late point in the narrator's anthology of put-downs no violation of the assumptions on which the previous items operate. These jests, like most of the previous ninety, are conventional, unreasoned, moderately witty re-workings of common opinion. Are these items inconsistent with the diminished capacity of the psychotic Vidriera to criticize constituted authority, or inconsistent with the criteria that guide the narrator in choosing and ordering the sayings, or inconsistent with the popular prejudices that the crowd presses their fool to confirm? We see that the answer to these questions is no. Is it plausible and consistent with Vidriera's character that he, who has spouted so many obnoxious, divisive, and hurtful prejudices, now could voice criticism of the kind that had been censored vigorously since the time of his author's childhood? Yes, it is plausible and in keeping with all that has gone before; with these highly tendentious anti-clerical jests we reach a point of consistency and coincidence *de facto* between the festering disaffection of the populace and the exasperation of post-Erasmian moral critics and others who held on, in the ways they could, to the century-long tradition of denunciation of clerical abuses and to reformers' hopes for salvaging the Church's spiritual mission.

Vacuous discourse.

The early history of the tale's protagonist is marked by fortuitous and fortunate meetings at junctures that are turning points in the youth's life course. The first is set outside Salamanca, where Tomás is befriended by gentlemen students who sponsor his studies and reward his loyalty. The second occurs eight years later, on the way from Málaga back to Salamanca, when Tomás happens into the company of Captain Valdivia, his—from that moment—life-long friend. The third of these crucial encounters is a calamitous crisis precipitated by a fraternity fling gone bad. Students drunk with desire pressure a curious but sober Tomás to come along with them on visits to a courtesan who is more *cortés* than *sana*, a veritable *vagina dentata*. “Si no era por fuerza y llevado de otros, *no quería entrar en su casa*” (52), but from this coerced engagement (which leads directly to a conspiracy to force his will, and his poisoning and affliction, and the onset of his mental infirmity) to his providential recovery years later and his leave-taking from Court, Tomás's (now Vidriera's) relation to those around him is represented in a succession of images of enclosure, forcible containment and encirclement.

An emblem: Vidriera encircled.

Initially “*tuviéronle encerrado sus amigos mucho tiempo.*” When they release him to “roam free” ‘*andar libre*’ about Salamanca, he is besieged by youngsters—“*cercáronle luego los muchachos*”—who amuse themselves by abusing him (54). Swinging his stick provides Vidriera no defense, but his words stop the idling and curious adults, who restrain the young and are themselves entertained by Vidriera's symbolic redirection of their abuse outward from his body to their circle and on to diverse others. Henceforth the witty fool survives in the eye of a “*rueda de la mucha gente que...siempre le estaba oyendo*” (64). When finally his independent reason is restored, Tomás (now self-surnamed *Rueda*) attracts an enormous crowd of “*más de doscientas personas de todas suertes*” who escort him to the *patio* of the palace of the Royal Councils, the political hub of the kingdom and empire, “*donde le acabaron de circundar cuantos en él estaban*” (73–74). At the center of this confused assembly of impertinent youngsters,

importunate adults, faceless bureaucrats, and ministers of the realm, “viéndose con tanta turba a la redonda” (74), Tomás expresses himself for the first time in several years truly “con propiedad y agudeza.” What then ought to have been his moment of apotheosis is instead a bitter-sweet anagnorisis (the passage from insanity to understanding accompanied by a radical reversal of the action) linked to the story’s upsetting peripety (the protagonist’s failure, for want of more foolish talk, the failure of the community, for want of more understanding, and the resultant rejection of the hero).³⁹

The emblematic image of “Vidriera Encircled” insinuated in the reader’s imagination by iteration in these and other forms is both ambivalent and ambiguous, in keeping with other textual evidence and with this text’s reception as well. The protagonist is celebrated and the protagonist is persecuted. He wins acclaim and an eternal reward and he is essentially overlooked and forgotten, then and now. His audiences applaud their entertainer’s every word and the same circle are intolerant idlers whose hostilities and anxieties require his constant appeasement and displacement: “Se andaban tras él, sin hacerle mal y sin dejarle sosegar” (63). Vidriera appears to draw the circle around him and to direct proceedings from its center, but he is a reluctant performer and a captive as well as eccentric, desultory, and reactionary.

Emblematically, figuratively, and in their ideological stance, the crowd that gather around Vidriera stand with their backs to the world. They face and view nothing more on their horizon than their selfsame band and the polished (if distorting) reflector of their images, which are principally the prejudices they bring with them to the gathering. They are a self-regarding circle narrowly drawn around a cipher, a nonentity whose social worth, he proclaims (53), results from his being a nobody, a disembodied voice. The young Tomás Rodaja was engaging by nature and expansively curious; he supplemented his studies with a far-ranging tour of

³⁹ The added emphasis in the preceding paragraph is mine. Images of circularity abound in several of the *Novelas ejemplares*, notably in “La gitanilla,” where they contribute to the affirmative characterization of the protagonist, who closely resembles Tomás in virtue, competence, and youthful accomplishment.

European circumference in order to experience what lay far beyond the horizon. He admired the other and incorporated the best of it into his being: "Todo lo miró, y notó y puso en su punto" (49). The crowd's curiosity, on the other hand, is satisfied by its exclusive concentration on their fool's sleights of tongue with the familiar stuff of their collective, inherited memory. The experience they fancy is the playful, unproblematic, gratifying confirmation of their expectations, which they choose to confuse with common sense. In the interim of Tomás's insanity, the crowd and their narrator construe a psychotic's unthinking to be the production of truth: "Ninguno pudiera creer sino que era uno de los más cuerdos del mundo" (73).

And what horizon can the besieged Vidriera see from his foreshortened (disad)vantage point but "la *rueda* de la mucha gente que, como se ha dicho, siempre le estaba oyendo" (64), a clannish circle that becomes a *turba*, pressing close, blocking off broader perspectives and longer views? Responding to their threats, Vidriera charms his followers with wordplay confirming their received and unquestioned certitudes. This is the nuclear relationship of the *loco cuerdo* and his public that, regarded as an emblem, reproduces and symbolizes their stultifying short-sightedness and narrow-mindedness. Their horizon of expectations is hedged by thoughtless prejudice, exhibited in their mean treatment of Vidriera and documented abundantly in the view of the world that they construct together from memory, depending on the language of their forefathers, while their backs are turned to the real.

Fossilized language.

Most of what Vidriera says is what Tomás learned while coming of age in the spacious wider circle of his youth, education, and travels. Some bits derive from his studies; more result from having observed the world around him with the ranging curiosity and retentive memory so often mentioned in the text's first pages. When his reason is poisoned and he loses the ability to discriminate, what he retains—what Vidriera *is*—is a fund of memories, the sum of his acquired culture, from which he draws in response to the demands of drastically altered circumstances. What the reactionary Vidriera emits is calcified, fossilized thinking, pack-

aged to provide the kind of pleasure that children draw from playing with words, to which is added the additional pleasure that comes from asserting superiority over others, plus the vengeful pleasure of unmasking and name-calling, and finally the kind of cleansing that is achieved by projecting one's dirt onto unclean inferiors. Such is the satisfaction generated by the interplay of Vidriera's memory images and verbal facility with the crowd's unquestioning confidence in received ideas and in the signifying power of their words.⁴⁰

Vidriera's derivative lore and the primitive mode of understanding (prejudgment, prejudice) that it represents epitomize what today sometimes is called the dominant discourse of his community and other times is called empty discourse.⁴¹ A preferable term in this instance, where authorized language is drained of personal experience but is infused with affect and abuse, would be vacuous discourse, which attaches appropriate negative overtones to Vidriera's inane truth claims and the small-mindedness of those whose idle moments are spent denigrating and belittling others with categorical determinations. Thinking held in thrall by symbols and values transmitted in popular and traditional culture, and from which the operation of *entendimiento* has been removed, is diseased and woefully contagious. It tends to organize the world by means of an operation that Erik Erikson terms pseudo-speciation, or the imagining of false categories of dehumanized others, which is carried to an extreme in this text. In close proximity to the narrator and his crowd there circulate so many kinds who cannot be tolerated that the community is reduced to an anxiety-driven clan. Its members scan their social circle in their

⁴⁰ Kenneth Burke invites readers to realize "just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems.... To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality" (5).

⁴¹ In "A Checklist of Lacanian Terminology," Henry Sullivan explains that "the psychotic speaks an empty discourse, commanded by the repetitions and dead mechanisms of the Other" (188).

idle time (the time they spend with Vidriera) searching out tell-tale signs of the forms of deceit that they hold to be essential features of the outcasts and signs of their perverse effects on "us." They attempt to exclude from their midst as many kinds of those others as they remember how to name, but those disqualified encroach from the shadows, encircle the camp and conspire to sully "us." "We" defend our interests by casting aspersions on them and then rest assured, briefly.⁴²

Argument employs words to win the other over, and at its best and most honest argumentation assumes the form of a dialog and a symmetrical shape: each party entertains the reasoning of the other. Jests, in contrast, solidify opposition to others and recruit a host of us to overwhelm them (Freud 163). Jests shun symmetry, circumvent argument, and entertain only one side at the other's expense. Vidriera's continuous jesting affords no opportunity for dialog with the others and recognizes no need for dialog with his public, who are won over from the start by his representations of their convictions. The very first item in the narrator's long series, his recollection of a simple encounter of Vidriera with some youngsters, is typical of this procedure in its technique and dynamics. Hounded, the solitary and apparently defenseless invalid upsets and reverses the initial asymmetry (of many against one) by deploying words to attract a crowd of supporters to his side, thereby isolating and neutralizing the outmaneuvered pests.

⁴² "Any dominant pseudo-species also harbors its own negative identity, and therefore the possibility exists for the moralistic treatment of others as embodiments of unacceptable ego tendencies" (Roazen 161). "The pseudospecies, then, is one of the more sinister aspects of all group identity" (Erikson, *Identity* 42; and concerning literary creation as a critique and corrective see 297-98). "All moral rules for the restriction of active hatred give the clearest evidence to this day that they were originally framed for a small society of fellow clansmen. In so far as we are all able to feel that we are members of one people, we allow ourselves to disregard most of these restrictions in relation to a foreign people. Nevertheless, within our own circle we have made some advances in the control of hostile impulses. . . . Brutal hostility, forbidden by law, has been replaced by verbal invective" (Freud 122). Obligated to renounce hostile deeds, we have—adds Freud—"developed a new technique of invective, which aims at enlisting [third persons] against our enemy. By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him—to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laughter."

There is no attempt to dialogue; the animalized youngsters do not grasp Vidriera's learned allusion and he expends no effort to explain it. He speaks not to them but to the phalanx of adults he has summoned, whose laughter belittles the youngsters and signals the superiority of the jester and his understanding public. In this way Vidriera, who knows the rules and masters the ways of abusive rhetoric, fashions the new asymmetry of ridicule that he maintains for years by deploying similarly the abundant divisive resources of language against the many kinds of others predefined and prejudged by the forefathers of his linguistic community.⁴³

Monologic dialogue.

Young Tomás Rodaja, gifted, confident, and ambitious, expects to make something of himself, he says, for "yo he oído decir que de los hombres se hacen los obispos." These words are his first borrowing from popular lore and they are exceptional and also mistaken in their optimistic assessment of social mobility.⁴⁴ They do not provide a better prescription for getting along in the world than the several scores of negative sayings uttered while Vidriera, about a decade later, speaks his mind. Tomás's illusions concerning the permeability of social hierarchies are corrected then by Vidriera's anti-clerical jests ({91-93} and {27}), for the community in its wisdom knows perfectly well that it is those who already are bishops and their associates in secular power who determine who

⁴³ Here and later the crowd and guard muzzle youngsters, not in order to teach them good manners or moral delicacy, but to forestall disturbances that might interrupt the entertainment. Vidriera obliges the elders with additional jibes aimed at the young (items {8}, {10}, {32}).

⁴⁴ Another bromide accepted by the inexperienced Tomás is comparably vapid, "las luengas peregrinaciones hacen a los hombres discretos" (46), the vacuousness of which is illustrated in the experience of Felipo de Carrizales ("El celoso extremeño"), the aimless wandering of the Spanish lads in "La señora Cornelia," and the well-traveled "dama de todo rumbo y manejo" (52). Nor does Berganza's glib and dim discernment lend authority to his similar notion, "el andar tierras y comunicar con diversas gentes hace a los hombres discretos" (2: 332). It would appear wiser but less memorable to claim that "los hombres discretos hacen luengas peregrinaciones" and to draw examples from *Persiles y Sigismunda*.

will rise and join them in exercising authority. One such eminence, "un gran personaje de la Corte" (56) who ordered the curious madman brought to Valladolid for his amusement and for crowd control, shows no interest at all in sponsoring the brilliant Tomás R. either before or after his term of irresponsibility in office. Nevertheless, in a peculiar fashion Tomás does live out his innocent forecast: as Vidriera in fact he attracts the attention of the powerful, who elevate and protect him. He is a voluble fool, but he is also (with the indulgence of secular authorities) a bishop of sorts, a suffragan bishop of fools, to whom he ministers for two years, until his integrity is restored and he is defrocked.

In an idiosyncratic way that may be without literary precedent and remains unusual, Vidriera's extended dialog with the crowd as well as its reconstruction by the narrator constitute a monolog. I mean of course a monolog within the particular sense of that word proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin. But this new and helpful meaning of the term must be modified in an essential respect if it is to bear on "El licenciado Vidriera." Monologic texts, which are diverse in kind and vast in number, are those (the theorist explains) in which all of the voices and consciousnesses in play are governed by a single version of truth, which is that imposed by the author. The truths of others are spoken in vain, they cannot compete alongside the author's, they are refuted. The novel (*Don Quixote*, Dostoevsky's and others) contests this overriding control with a distinctive kind of discourse that in Bakhtin's terminology is polyphonic. This novelistic multi-voiced dialog is resistant to authorial dominance; it is unruly and subversive of settled authority. Its author grants creatures their own intentions, each of them attends to the words of the others, their author mediates among them without subsuming them within a presiding authorial voice. In short, polyphony, a dialog among voices and autonomous awarenesses, is the discourse of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dorotea and Ricote and many of their acquaintances, and their narrators.

There is nothing unruly about Vidriera and his crowd. The multitude flock to a predictable harangue and accept without argument its few, simple rules of utterance formation and its repertory of familiar topics. Their arrangement is stabilized by a guard

who discourages interruptions, excesses, and deviation from arrangements that are conventional in form and content. The crowd have but one expectation, which is to listen not to Vidriera (a *portavoz* without personality) but to the notions, which are not his, that issue agreeably decorated from his mouth but have their source elsewhere. The participants in this discourse are many in number but—excepting those few who attempt to talk back and are silenced—they are passive listeners who think alike, share awareness and embrace one battery of values. Each of many questions is matched to a readily accepted answer; there are no disputes and there is no resistance to the common sense.

Tomás's understanding of the world is more complete and complex. He finds that right choices often require negotiation, compromise, and reasoned dialog with himself and others. And so, like us, he hesitates on occasion for good reason (45, 51) and even stammers tongue-tied (53). Vidriera is never speechless, never in doubt, never at a loss for words. His assured give-and-take more closely resembles an extended catechism than the winnowing of truth claims. His discourse is an inverted and redoubled catechism in which the presiding bishop, an acclaimed know-it-all, performs admirably as both catechist and catechumen, sometimes proposing questions and always drawing appropriate conclusions from memory, while the congregation look on and are reassured by his flawless rehearsal of social doctrines. The authority of the doctrine is never questioned.

It is safe to say therefore that the two thirds of "El licenciado Vidriera" that matter most to its narrator and his readers are a monolog, despite a few conventional surface attributes (i.e., questions and responses) of dialog. A significant oddity distinguishes this monolog from those Bakhtin mentions, and suggests the need for an adjustment to the theoretical claim that will ready it to illuminate this text. What is now clear and also at odds with the monologs Bakhtin has in mind is that the truths that Vidriera asserts and that the crowd, being of one mind with him, share without contradiction, or monologically, are not imposed by the author. Nor is Vidriera's narrator the fount of authority or even its arbiter. All the while Vidriera is unreasoning and unreasonable, his narrator too is sufficiently addled in judgment as to accept as

evidence of wisdom innumerable prejudiced and hurtful lunacies, and even to crown the speaker "uno de los más cuerdos del mundo."

I have reasoned above and in a previous study that it is not reasonable to refer Vidriera's *sinrazones* to his author, Miguel de Cervantes. But if it is not the author who is to be held responsible, nor his narrator, nor the latter's favorite character, who or what can be the source of Vidriera's authority and his foolishness? Kateřina Clark and Michael Holquist help us identify and discard some common possibilities and narrow the search to just one which, once named, we know to be the original and persistent cause of all this mischief. "Monologic belief systems," they explain in concluding their study of Bakhtin's thought, "invariably hold that a single truth is contained in a single institution, such as the state, or in a single object, such as an idol or text, or in a single identity, such as God, the ego conceived as an absolute subject, or the artist-genius who produces unique texts" (348). Vidriera's claims derive their authority from no god, state ideology, idol or writ; the pathetic psychotic bears no resemblance to an absolute subject; his artistry is facile and shallow, and it is doubtful that there is a unique thought or a single sign of genius to be found in all the record of two years' talk.

There does remain to be recognized, however, a single institution from which his sayings emanate, a powerful institution that contains him and his crowd inescapably. That institution is language, more particularly the symbolic code or system of signifiers that Vidriera and the crowd share. Their attention is centered around, if not sharply focused on, the uninspected givens in that language, the sedimented residue of their forefathers' reactions to social circumstances in times past, that the idling crowd no less than Vidriera (although with less facility and felicity) depend upon and employ "espontáneamente" (53) (i. e., without reasoning) in order to interpret new circumstances in tried and true ways.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ If not a social catechism, Vidriera's monologic dialogue with his followers could be termed a secular litany. Or a self-effacing pledge of allegiance in which the impersonalized first person "credo" voices what all believers agree to believe.

Elias Rivers has discovered beneath the rigidity of Don Quixote's high-flying rhetoric and flexibility of Sancho Panza's illiterate style a common malady that, we now can see, infects Vidriera and his crowd as well. Don Quixote, with his "prolonged hypotaxis of Ciceronian prose," and Sancho with the "paratactic brevity of proverbs," constitute a neat contrasting pair, but one can say of both of them—and now we can expand the radius of Rivers' observation to encompass a second pair, our facile fool and his interrogators—that they suffer protracted "mental helplessness in the grips of a language that does [their] thinking for them, regardless of [their] physical circumstances." Verbal associations, whether derived from Classical rhetoric or proverbial lore or simply popular speech in all its prejudice-tainted materiality, have "come to control [their] discourse completely, regardless of the topic presumably under discussion" (123–24). We are attracted to Don Quixote nevertheless, because there is so much more to him than his recreation of his models, and Sancho is comparably admirable despite and not because of his strings of proverbs. Vidriera is a more extreme case, for he is not attractive or admirable "in himself." He lacks a self; there is nothing to him but his affliction, his resultant suffering (from insanity and from persecution) and his capacity to reflect others' thoughts. Tomás R., in marked contrast, is attractive and interesting but not to his narrator; Vidriera is not deeply interesting to us or to anyone close to him. No one engages him in conversation or gives his utterances a second thought.

The author's telling technical device.

The most striking formal feature of "El licenciado Vidriera" is the rupture of the spare and smoothly unfolding exemplary story of Tomás R. when it is shattered by the graceless gospel of Vidrie-

It amounts to a daily confirmatory public recital of cultural dogma, what some today call the Law of the Father. Vidriera, designated by accident to play the role of favored but submissive Son of the Father of language, lives a travesty of Tomás R.'s humanistic and cosmopolitan understanding of the rule and practice of law. In the hollowed-out shell of a trinity in which Vidriera occupies the place of dutiful and mortified Son of the remote Father, the Holy Ghost's function is covered by Word-of-Mouth.

ra.⁴⁶ This disconcerting non sequitur is our master clue, operating differently on two levels, for interpreting this puzzling text. Reading the story for the first time, we experience the clumsy articulation of the frame and core from the internal perspective that as ordinarily readers we accept and assume when we open our imaginations to receive the narrator's design. We perceive, following the account of Tomás's poisoning and sickness, an abrupt and radical change in the quality of his experience and coincidentally in the manner of its narration. The lucid and engaging Tomás is gone; Vidriera too all but disappears, once the narrator makes us aware of his eccentric dress and habits. He is unparticularized, indistinct, he does nothing interesting; only his words matter. The narrator's manner of telling now is minimalist, predictable, and automatic, as are the crowd's responses. What appear to be and indeed are indicators of the narrator's diminished attentiveness to his art, and the subordination of his voice to Vidriera's, confirm for us his new and primary role as amanuensis and promoter of the social dogmas and ethical biases for which Vidriera finds words "con propiedad y agudeza."

The splitting asunder of Tomás's story upon the impact of Vidriera's blather, then, is a telling technical flaw—the narrator's technical flaw—of the first magnitude, full of significance. It privileges the narrator's judgment of what really mattered in Tomás's

⁴⁶ The second-most striking feature is the abrupt ending of the story, which confirms in its way what will be said here below in my text concerning the narrator's indifference to his worthy subject Tomás and to the conventional goal of the story-teller, which is to say in an appropriate way as much and only so much as needs to be said. Evidence of this blend of indifference and mediocre craft work is revealed in the loose ends the narrator makes no attempt to tie up: disclosure of the parentage and birthplace of Tomás and his social condition; the amount of time and the means the Hieronymite employed in his cure; and the remainder of the time line: how long was it before Tomás left court, how long did he live in Flanders; how did he die, in what ways did he show the prudence and win the fame merely mentioned in the story's final sentence? Lesser matters invite attention: the part of the meddling *morisca*, the life and times of the dangerous *dama*, the identity of the honorable *caballeros estudiantes* and of the dishonorable *príncipe* who orders Vidriera brought to court. Had "Cervantes," rather than an un-discerning narrator, written the story, we'd know more about these matters. The author plants them in his text as seeds gone unwatered to give us evidence of what a poor tiller of novelistic soil his narrator is.

life over Tomás's own judgment, which is different and superior but silenced, and over the judgment of those in Flanders who accorded Tomás the honor he could not achieve in Spain, and over the judgment of the real reader, which is bribed into acquiescence by jests and also stunted for want of information about Tomás that the narrator withholds.

Considered from the complementary perspective of the disconcerted re-reader of the text, the author's reliance on a technically-challenged narrator amounts to a deliberate renunciation of the real author's own sophisticated competence as a teller. Miguel de Cervantes forswears high-style, continuous, and coherent narration on this occasion in favor of an unusual creative ploy that offers him a considerable advantage. By this means he manages to account from within the story for its most disturbing formal feature, which is thereby rendered plausible and functional. Masking his experimental genius while deploying it, the author imposes on a narrator of modest ability to do the dirty work of debasing himself and his crowd to the level of intellectual and moral mediocrity exhibited through Vidriera's language and its reception. That brings the backgrounded figure of Tomás R., and his career project, and his friends, into contrasting relief as demonstrably superior. The proportions of the text favor the foolish interlude by a factor of two to one over the sketchy history of Tomás, but the virtues of the eminently sane protagonist and his associates, and of the model of society and ethics implicit in the sketch of Tomás's upbringing and career, weigh even more one-sidedly in favor of the frame story over the narrator's core matter.

The narrator, Vidriera, and the crowd occupy the story's core, but they are a subset—the narrator's narrow-minded social set—of the story-world's imagined population. Taken together with their forefathers, they are sufficiently numerous and influential in the world to make a ponderous imprint on language and traditional lore. They loom large in the text as well, because of the myopia of their recording secretary. But we learn through evidence that matters less to the narrator than to us and to Cervantes that Vidriera's world also contains the well-intentioned and able Tomás, his supportive and beloved parents, generous gentlemen students who are not blinded by class and caste prejudice, and other admir-

ing and sympathetic associates, including the understanding and loyal Captain Valdivia, a truly charitable and expert speech therapist, and how many uncounted others, to weigh off against the core subset's dominant *turba*? The world sketched in the frame story seems to be as much richer in human resources and cooperative engagements as it is enormously larger than the circle at Court drawn narrowly around a fool.⁴⁷ In this way the frame serves its author as a technical means of correcting the narrator's shortsightedness and guiding readers towards a promontory from which, viewing more of Tomás's world than the Court circle alone, we can measure the latter's narrow diameter, test the crowd's truth claims, and free ourselves from entanglement with the taunting and prejudiced horde.

For the real author of the text, who regulates its effects from a powerful and knowing external perspective, the breakdown of the heroic tale into blather has an additional, altogether different, but complementary function. In clear and sufficient ways it marks off the grotesque interlude as a parody of the unwarranted authority of the discourse that Vidriera voices and to which the crowd and the narrator submit. The signs of parodic devaluation are unmistakable in the relation of superior to inferior depicted in the opposing characters of Tomás and Vidriera (thinking/unthinking, amiable/isolated, acting/reacting, growing/stagnating, dialogic/monologic), and by all that is heroic in the frame story in marked contrast with the putrescent social messages that constitute the core matter. Miguel de Cervantes, this opposition suggests, has staged for readers of "El licenciado Vidriera" a discursive clash between contrasting systems that are modeled in the words and ways of the alter egos of a single being. One is sane, the other maimed, one engaging, the other fearing to be touched, one endowed with abundant resources for achievement and service, the other an instrument of resentment and social fragmentation.

Put now in simple terms that follow from the above analysis,

⁴⁷ This said, it must be recognized and it cannot surprise that the coercive and abusive ways of the Court and its crowd extend far beyond the Court and are observed and registered by Tomás Rodaja and in the narrator's sketch; see especially 46.

the most significant (and necessarily discrediting) thing one must concede about the narrator is that he values Vidriera's vacuous words more than he esteems the exemplary life of the talented and appealing Tomás Rueda. The most significant thing we can say about Vidriera is that he is crazy and lacks judgment. The most significant thing to be said about his crowd is that they flock to receive his *locuras* with more enthusiasm and predisposition to believe than are awakened in them by gospel and the sensible final appeal of Tomás Rueda. The most significant thing to say about Tomás, on the other hand, is that his history as a whole, from his precocious diligence to his final valor and prudence, is a sustained practical demonstration of moral and social virtue. A treacherous conspiracy against him, a terrible infirmity that results from it, and an exorbitant war do not define or injure him essentially.

Readers in a stew.

It is futile to search for unity, order, cleverness, wisdom, and truth where they do not appear, in the narrator's work. Cervantes has set a wry test for readers of "El licenciado Vidriera," which is to recognize that the story's narrator is an anti-Cervantes, a teller of diminished capacity and poor judgment. Endowed with little of his maker's wit, curiosity, tolerance, and generosity, the narrator patches together, remembers, a monstrosity—a dwarfed history swollen grotesquely in its middle by faux wisdom—that calls to mind the freak that his author feared might result if his ambitious *Persiles* project were to go bad, "si ya por atrevido...sale con las manos en la cabeza" ("Prólogo al lector," 1: 53).

A different image of artistic ineptitude, inserted earlier in the same Prolog and contrasted there with a picture of authorial competence and self-assurance, fits the strange case of "El licenciado Vidriera" more exactly. "Será forzoso valerme por mi pico," the unsupported prologuist finds himself constrained to concede, "que aunque tartamudo, no lo será para decir verdades, que, dichas por señas, suelen ser entendidas. Y así te digo otra vez, lector amable, que destas novelas que te ofrezco, en ningún modo podrás hacer pepitoria, porque no tienen pies, ni cabeza, ni entrañas, ni cosa que les parezca" (1: 51).

Some commentators have been tempted to identify Vidriera and his sayings with Miguel de Cervantes and his thoughts. The Prolog words just cited, taken together with several echoes in the story text, invite us to recognize a different and more meaningful resemblance between the author and his creature. The “Cervantes” sketched in the Prolog and the story’s protagonist in comparable ways are left unassisted at critical junctures in their careers, where they deserve backing, and might have expected friends to help them reach their estimable goals and harvest honor. “Cervantes” complains that a (make-believe) engraver’s failure to copy a friend’s (nonexistent) portrait has frustrated both the author’s ambition and his public’s avid desire to learn about him; “yo he quedado en blanco y sin figura.” His protagonist’s comparable bad fortune is to have his story (including his fall into dementia and recovery, an important but small part of his life) told by a narrator who is distracted by superficialities and inattentive to what really matters. Both the author and his creature must accept disappointment, adjust to distressing circumstances, and fend for themselves; both prove capable of accommodating adversity and both persevere, affirm themselves and succeed.

Each of the two is afflicted with a speech impediment—one is “de pico tartamudo” and the other “de lengua turbada y tartamuda” (53)—and each must overcome a language impairment in his quest to achieve fame and honor as a truth-teller. The near miracle of an earth angel, in the form of the Hieronymite friar who happens to be a speech pathologist (73), is required to restore the protagonist’s *discurso* (speech and reason). For his part the Prolog’s “Cervantes” proclaims, but in a highly ironic statement embedded in a tissue of ironies, that his stuttering will not disrupt his truth-telling, since truths, even when “dichas por señas, suelen ser entendidas.”⁴⁸ The author claims to write exemplary stories

⁴⁸ The claim that significant truths are communicated easily even “por señas” is about as truthful here as when the same claim is made (also as part of a playful and insuperably ironic prolog) in the Archpriest of Hita’s hilarious parable, the *disputación* of the Greeks and the Romans. There the ignorant Romans, incapable of understanding the Greeks’ language, propose “que disputasen por señas, por señas de letrado” (Ruiz, 49d). Miguel de Cervantes, of course, is saying through the Prolog “Cervantes” that confidence in simple truths and simple signs and in

("tan honestos y tan medidos con la razón y discurso cristiano, que no podrán mover a mal pensamiento al descuidado o cuidadoso que [los] leyere"). The protagonist under discussion here lives out an exemplary history despite the interference of a whole crowd of *descuidados*. Both author and character weather adversity: the Prolog's "Cervantes" twice claims the virtue of patience, creates a portrait of himself in words more witty and telling than any that Juan de Jáuregui could have painted, and readies himself to defend his work (a dozen remarkable stories) from detractors, "el mal que han de decir de mí más de cuatro sotiles y almidonados"; within the imagined world his character endures both mistreatment and neglect and emerges whole from the trial. And both reaffirm finally and with unshakable confidence their resolve and ability to communicate significant thoughts to willing and reasoning receivers.⁴⁹ "Cervantes" against long odds makes his way across four centuries and into our grateful hands; his creature achieves reunion with his reasonable friend Valdivia far from home, and lives and dies an example of prudence and valor.

This cluster of resemblances impresses on us the fanciful and mutually-flattering likeness of "Cervantes" and Tomás R. and cautions us emphatically against the implausible identification of the author with the demented, nonsensical Vidriera.⁵⁰ If some readers do not perceive the resemblance of these two, the fault, like others reviewed above, can be ascribed to the story's narrator. It seems

the simplicity of communication—the certitude incarnated in the crowd and narrator of "El licenciado Vidriera"—is a sure sign of ignorance. Is there among the dozen *Novelas ejemplares* any that communicates truths (whether or not "dichas por señas") in a clearly understandable way?

⁴⁹ The prologuist: "Heles dado nombre de *ejemplares*, y si bien lo miras, no hay ninguna de quien no se pueda sacar algún ejemplo provechoso" (1: 52). Tomás: "veréis que el que os respondía bien, según dicen, de improviso os responderá mejor de pensado" (74).

⁵⁰ In other words, the "Cervantes" who complains in his Prolog that "yo he quedado en blanco y sin figura" remedies the lack twice over, first by composing the Prolog self-portrait of the author as old soldier that begins "Éste que veis aquí, de rostro aguileño, de cabello castaño, frente lisa y desembarazada, de alegres ojos y de nariz corva" (1: 51), and again in the idealized fictional sketch of a young soldier, a figure of the author's own honorable and oft-frustrated aspirations.

reasonable to imagine that Tomás, not Vidriera, would have emerged as one of his author's memorable creations, *eternizado*, had the author entrusted his history to a narrator of taste and judgment, who thought and wrote with more in mind than assembling, as if for a recipe book, a hodgepodge of ingredients appropriate only for concocting a *pepitoria*. And finally, as to the savor of the resulting stew, which is a veritable *olla podrida* of overcooked opinions: its piquancy does not mask the stale and bitter flavor of the coarse parts and rank leavings that contrast so remarkably with the hearty and tasteful fare that the Prolog's "Cervantes" promises and the author provides in Tomás's story and eleven other *novelas ejemplares*, "el sabroso y honesto fruto que se [puede] sacar, así de todas juntas, como de cada una de por sí" (1: 52).

Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese Studies
 University of Washington
 Seattle, WA 98195-4360
 gshipley@u.washington.edu

APPENDIX: VIDRIERA'S REFLECTIONS

Subject words are emphasized; trailing page numbers refer to the edition of Harry Sieber.

- {1} A unos *muchachos* porfiados, sucios, y atrevidos: "¿Soy yo...el monte Testacho?" 55
- {2} A una *ropera* que no puede llorar 55
- {3} Al *marido* de la *ropera* 55
- {4} Sobre las *prostitutas* de la casa llana 55
- {5} A uno a quien "su *mujer* se le había ido con otro" 55
- {6} Al mismo: "sería el hallarla un perpetuo y verdadero testigo de su deshonra" 55
- {7} A uno que quiere "tener paz con [su] *mujer*" 56
- {8} A un *muchacho* que se queja porque "mi *padre*...me azota muchas veces" 56

- {9} A un *labrador* y un *cristiano nuevo* “estando a la puerta de una iglesia” 56
- {10} “De los *maestros de escuela*” y sus “*angelitos*” 56
- {11} De “qué le parecía de las *alcahuetas*” 56
- {12} No tener vergüenza y saber lisonjear son cualidades del “*bueno para palacio*” 56
- {13} “Ningún *camino* es tan malo como se acabe, si no es el que va a la horca” 57
- {14} “De *salud* estoy neutral, porque están encontrados mis pulsos con mi cerebro.” 57
- {15} Sobre la costosa extravagancia de “la *caza de altanería*” 57
- {16} “La *caza de liebres* era gustosa, y más cuando se cazaba con galgos prestados” 57
- {17} Vidriera no es tan necio como el *poeta* malo ni tan venturoso como el bueno 57–58
- {18} Tiene en mucha estimación a la ciencia de *la poesía*, pero en ninguna a los *poetas* 58
- {19} Hay poquísimos *poetas* buenos; pero *la poesía* encierra las demás ciencias 58
- {20} Versos de Ovidio sobre los *poetas*: los antiguos vates eran venerados 58
- {21} La opinión de Platón y otro verso de Ovidio: los *poetas* son intérpretes de los dioses 58
- {22} Otro verso de Ovidio: los *poetas* son amados de los dioses 59
- {23} De los *poetas* malos, que son “la idiotez y la arrogancia del mundo” 59
- {24} Chiste de los aires que se pone el *poeta* malo al leer a otros un soneto suyo 59
- {25} Como los *poetas* ignorantes se censuran y ladran “a los mastinazos antiguos y graves” 59
- {26} Como los ignorantes murmuran de los *poetas* auténticos, “ilustres y excelentes sujetos” 59
- {27} De los ignorantes que “quiere[n] que se estime...la necedad” de los *poderosos* y sus *aduladores* 59–60
- {28} Chiste que satiriza los clichés con que los *poetas* petrarquistas pintan la belleza femenina 60
- {29} “Dijo que los buenos *pintores* imitan a naturaleza, pero que los malos la vomitaban” 60

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- {30} “Los melindres [de los *libreros*] cuando compran un privilegio de un libro” y cómo suelen estafar a los autores 60
- {31} Burla con que se asocia a unos *azotados* con el *público* que los mira pasar por la calle 60
- {32} Juego de palabras con “trasero” con que asocia a los *azotados* con los *muchachos* 60
- {33} Juego metonímico con que se asocian los *coches*, los *alcahuetes*, y las *alcahuetas* 60
- {34} A “los que llevan *sillas de manos*” los compara con los *confesores* 61
- {35} Contra los *mozos de mulas*, tan poco honrados como sus *amos* 61
- {36} Reminiscencia y juego de palabras de “una *mula de alquiler* de [muchas] tachas, todas capitales” 61
- {37} Contra los *mozos de mulas*, que son rufianes y ladrones 61
- {38} Como los *mozos de mulas* engañan a los que llevan en sus mulas 61
- {39} Juegos de palabra contra los *carreteros* 61
- {40} El típico modo de vivir de los perezosos *marineros* 61
- {41} El típico modo de vivir de los sucios y descreídos *arrieros* 62
- {42} Contra los *boticarios* 62
- {43} Otro contra los *boticarios* 62
- {44} Alaba (citando al Eclesiástico) a los buenos *médicos* y maldice a los malos 62
- {45} El juez, el letrado, el mercader nos hacen daño; “sólo los *médicos* nos pueden matar y nos matan” 63
- {46} Reminiscencia: anécdota chistosa contra la ignorancia de cierto *médico* 63
- {47} Dormir es el modo eficaz de controlar la *envidia* que uno tiene a otro 63
- {48} Juego de palabras: conseguir algo deseado es salir con ello 63
- {49} Contra la disposición violenta de cierto “*juez de comisión*” 63–64
- {50} Reminiscencia: anécdota chistosa de un *juez* que “dio una sentencia...exorbitante” 64
- {51} Burla de uno vestido “en habito de *letrado*” que no tenía “ni aun título de bachiller” 64
- {52} Burla: *uno que presume de “hombre de altas y profundas letras”*

- no es más que “un Tántalo en ellas” 64
- {53} Burla de un *sastre* desocupado y por lo tanto honesto por el momento 65
- {54} Dicho agudo: “desdichado del *sastre* que no miente y cose las fiestas” 65
- {55} Otro contra los *sastres*, que por pecadores no hacen “un vestido justo” 65
- {56} Contra los *zapateros* 65
- {57} Juego de palabras con un *cambiador* que murió en la cárcel 65
- {58} Juego de palabras con el cuento que piden unos *genoveses* 65
- {59} Anécdota del narrador: Vidriera insulta a una *tendera* y “una hija suya muy fea” 65–66
- {60} Juego de palabras: los *pasteleros* “jugaban a la dobladilla” porque doblaban el precio de los pasteles 66
- {61} Contra los *titiriteros*, por sus indecencias con la devoción y las figuras religiosas 66
- {62} Otro contra los *titiriteros* 66
- {63} Contra los *titiriteros*, que merecían ser desterrados o reducidos a “perpetuo silencio” 66
- {64} De cierto *comediante* que juraba “a fe de *hidalgo*” 66
- {65} En alabanza de los *actores*, hechos perpetuos gitanos para contentar a otros 66
- {66} Otro en alabanza de los *comediantes*, “que con su oficio no engañan a nadie” 66
- {67} En alabanza de los *autores* [directores de las compañías teatrales] 67
- {68} Agudeza: quien sirve a una *comediante* “en sola una sirve a muchas damas juntas” 67
- {69} Agudeza culta: *Nemo* es el más dichoso del mundo 67
- {70} Contra los *diestros*, maestros de su ciencia sin dominio práctico de su arte 67
- {71} Contra los *diestros*, por sus pretensiones científicas 67
- {72} Burla de un portugués de los “que se teñían las barbas” 68
- {73} Burla: insulta a otro que traía la *barba* mal teñida 68
- {74} Burla: insulta a otro semejante con un juego de palabras: “mentía por la mitad de la *barba*” 68
- {75} Anécdota chistosa de un *viejo* cano que se teñió la barba pero no consiguió engañar a su prometida 68–69

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- {76} Contra las *dueñas* 69
- {77} De los *escribanos*, que son “la gramática de los *murmuradores*” 69
- {78} Defiende a los *escribanos* de los que dicen mal de ellos 69
- {79} Los *escribanos* “han de ser libres,” y no esclavos, ni “bastardos, ni de...mala raza nacidos” 70
- {80} Irónico: “¿por qué se ha de suponer que” la mayoría de los *escribanos* son corruptos? 70
- {81} Entre los exagerados derechos y tuertos de los *escribanos*, habrá que buscar un término medio 70
- {82} Por qué los *alguaciles* tienen tantos enemigos 70
- {83} Contra los *procuradores* y *solicitadores*, tan negligentes e ignorantes como los *médicos* 70
- {84} Juego de palabras o concepto: la mejor *tierra* es “la temprana y agradecida” 70
- {85} Los méritos de *Madrid* y *Valladolid* contrastados 70
- {86} Burla de una mujer basada en un juego de palabras: probar la *tierra* 71
- {87} Burla que compara “las esperanzas y las suertes limitadas” “de los *músicos* y de los *correos* de a pie” 71
- {88} Burla de las *cortesanas* “que las más tenían más de cortesés que de sanas” 71
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- {93} Concepto: “las *religiones* son los *Aranjueces* del cielo” 72
- {94} Agudeza culta: “las lenguas de los *murmuradores* son como las plumas del águila” 72
- {95} Contra los *gariteros* y *tahures*, que son “públicos prevaricadores” 72
- {96} Alabanza irónica de la paciencia de cierto *jugador* colérico 72
- {97} Otra irónica, de “las conciencias de ciertos honrados *gariteros*” 72-73

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