



Garbage In, Garbage Out: “The Best of Vidriera”

GEORGE A. SHIPLEY

Those who function inadequately in any society are not those with certain fixed “abnormal” traits, but may well be those whose responses have received no support in the institutions of their culture. The weakness of these aberrants is in great measure illusory. It springs, not from the fact that they are lacking in necessary vigour, but that they are individuals whose native responses are not reaffirmed by society.

—Ruth Benedict (290)



It seems that the hardest lesson for readers to learn from Cervantes’ “El licenciado Vidriera” is that the protagonist of the story is not the suffering title character, but rather the healthy youth whose name is Tomás. From the age of eleven and for about eleven years he calls himself Tomás Rodaja; two years or more later he assumes the surname Rueda. Tomás is known as “hermano licenciado Vidriera” (55) for less than a tenth of his life, an anomalous tenth that no one could have anticipated, the tenth that we remember but he does not, the only

tenth during which Tomás does not learn, grow, engage others, and nourish friendships and mature.¹ The present study is respectfully dedicated to the memory of the sane and exemplary Tomás who dies famous in Flanders and forgotten in his homeland.

Studies of "El licenciado Vidriera" customarily begin by conceding that the tale is, while peculiarly attractive, an enduring source of perplexity for even its most experienced readers. This "is not the most satisfactory of the *Novelas ejemplares*," E. C. Riley observed in 1976, "yet it has enjoyed a certain popularity and more critical attention than many of Cervantes's *novelas*" (189). That popularity is more certain today and interpretive efforts in the last quarter-century of the millennium accumulated at an awesome pace and intensified, polarizing on several issues, and hardened with some frequency into charges against the tale's author, and against his protagonist, and against the tale itself.² Joining the

¹ Page references to "El licenciado Vidriera" within parentheses are to the edition of Harry Sieber, volume 2.

² "Nuestro afán de explicar parece insaciable en este caso" (Russell 241). For Ruth El Saffar the protagonist is "consumed" by ambition (51) and "obsessed by unexpressed impulses" (52); his "principal characteristic" is "fear of the other" (56, 51). "His is an unrelieved story of estrangement"; he is "shown only in roles of conflict with his environment" (60). Alban Forcione's protagonist is obsessive, antisocial, egocentric and hubristic, a fanatical student (236, 242, 273, 313) with an insatiable curiosity that he misdirects in pursuit of false knowledge (237, 273), the knowledge of evil (289), and consequently his learning perverts the aim of the university (275 n. 97). "His characteristic act is withdrawal" (273), he lives a solitary life in self-imposed isolation (243, 256 n. 66, 272), demonized by a "hysterical fear of death" (271, 274). Redondo's Tomás is alienated, insecure, a restless loner, melancholic and therefore predisposed to madness (34–35). Building recently on many of these claims, William Clamurro imputes to Tomás "sexual indifference," a "neurotic tendency towards avoidance," and "male frigidity," and judges that he is no less a "camp follower" than the prostitute who screwed him for frustrating her desire (126, 135, 139; "camp follower" is echoed by Aylward 194). While many find it distressing to criticize the author, El Saffar proposes that, aged and insecure, Cervantes lost control of aesthetic distance and, despairing, identified himself with his mad protagonist (50–52, 56, 61). Armand Singer viewed the tale as "slipshod" in planning ("Form and Substance" 14) and Friedrich Bouterwek thought it was executed in an "almost planless, extremely simple prose style" (Nerlich 19). Luis Rosales (along with all of the foregoing and others) confuses Cervantes' craft with his narrator's clumsiness and in conse-

fractious debate, I concede and even assert that "Vidriera" is a pebble among gemstones and demonstrably the least satisfying of Cervantes' collected stories. Furthermore, I propose to reveal and examine the source and cause of readers' dissatisfaction and much misdirected criticism, namely the story's narrator and his narration. It is time to expose the narrator's limitations and bias and to label clearly what he did and what he did not do, and to account for his grievous errors of commission and omission. In the full accounting readers find ourselves implicated. The narrator has led us astray, and we cannot complete an adequate study of this matter without facing a moral moment. Shall we continue to accede to the narrator's invitation to join him in the crowd that goads and applauds the unfortunate Vidriera, or shall we instead choose to side with the attractive and gifted protagonist, Tomás, and his author?³ What appears at first reading to be the story of an eccentric becomes, when seen rightly arranged, an inversion of that: it is an eccentric story. More precisely, "El licenciado Vidriera" is a tale of inverted, concentric, and persistently contagious eccentricity that its narrator so skews in his telling that the story's social and political implications are obscured and stand in need of the reordering that Miguel de Cervantes left as readers' work.

Thickening the plot.

Bibliographical data suggest that among the dozen *Novelas ejemplares* "El licenciado Vidriera" is the second most studied and possibly the second most frequently read.⁴ It also is the least

quence blunts incisive observations concerning this narrative and its narration (191–93); for Rosales the protagonist is unconnected, ungrateful, resentful, fearful of others, and suffers from an inferiority complex (206–07). I find insufficient textual evidence to sustain any of the above judgments.

³ I believe with Forcione that "the fundamental problem raised by the tale [is] to what extent is the protagonist identifiable with his author?" (276 n. 100). I mean by a moral moment that juncture where individuals, real or imagined, must choose, among two or more principled options, the right one, "the one we want to stand *as* principle" (Harpham 397). Tomás's several recorded choices are consistently and correctly principled, as we shall see.

⁴ The *MLA International Bibliography* gives useful if incomplete information concerning the relative frequency of publication on each of the *Novelas ejemplares*. "El licenciado Vidriera" has been studied at least 54 times since 1963 (46 times

absorbing of the tales, the least well told. Some interpreters have conceded as much, and most of these have coupled the concession with apologetic explanations of one kind or another, alleging causes outside the text in the author's biography, psychology, or literary and cultural history.⁵ This defective story (so long as we choose to view it as such) shares its remarkable blemish with a distinguished precursor work admired by Cervantes. "Vidriera" is, like *Lazarillo de Tormes*, one of those disconcerting and oxymoronic aesthetic objects (of which Spanish letters appear to have a disproportionate number) that most insult our critical categories: it is a "flawed masterpiece," a text at once objectionable and irresistible. Although it appears misshapen and will not reveal the "unity" scholars long have been accustomed to seek and treasure, "Vidriera" attracts more energetic attention than many better shaped texts. It has beguiled readers young and old, multitudes of them, and scholars, many scores of them, over many generations, and we have yet to recognize and name its guile.

As a first step in search of an improved understanding, let us recognize the insufficiency of the story. Then we shall look within the imagined world for its cause and consequences. There we shall

since Riley's comment and 20 times during the 1990s). The most studied tale is "El coloquio de los perros" (63), third is "La gitanilla" (42) and fourth "El celoso extremeño" (41). Trailing are "Rinconete y Cortadillo" (33), "La fuerza de la sangre" (23), "El casamiento engañoso" and "El amante liberal" (21 each), "La ilustre fregona" (19), "La española inglesa" (17), "Las dos doncellas" (6), and "La señora Cornelia" (5). "Casamiento" and "Coloquio" have been studied together 6 times.

⁵ Most recent work, including the present essay, depends upon and engages in dialogue with the studies of Agustín G. de Amezúa y Mayo, Joaquín Casaldue-ro, El Saffar, and Forcione. Often "Vidriera" is described as a frame story into which the author inscribes his own thinking (the sophisticated instance is Forcione 264). Marcel Bataillon terms the story a "sabroso anecdotario, suprema flor de la literatura de apotegmas puesta de moda por el erasmismo" (779), but Casaldue-ro claims that only one of Vidriera's *dichos* is elaborated into an anecdote and that in the whole corpus "no dice nada original" (140). It is a rare and bold reader who points out that the emperor wears no clothes; one such is Julio Rodríguez-Luis, who comments: "El peso del material aforístico, que no es a la postre tan original ni tan agudo como cabría esperar, desequilibra definitivamente la narración" (208) and "la acumulación de tanto ingenio llega a sonar cansada" (202; and see Singer, "Form and Substance" 23).

discover several interrelated orders of eccentricity and observe their linkage to outlying and ongoing eccentricities around us. I shall suggest that we remain in our time and our world, as Vidriera was in his, captives of his crowd and that we, unwary readers, are manipulated unwittingly by the crowd's scribe and publicist, the fictional narrator. It is in that sense and for that reason that I claim that "El licenciado Vidriera" is a tale of concentric, collective, and enduringly contagious eccentricity.

We begin by recollecting the story, the narrated events.

1.) The precocious eleven-year-old Tomás, who has adopted the surname Rodaja, charms two gentlemen students who take him as their servant to Salamanca, where he serves them loyally and becomes their companion. He earns their trust, they sponsor his studies; he is a brilliant student and furthermore he earns the esteem of all who come to know him. After eight years his friends reward Tomás's steadfast service and friendship with a grant sufficient to sustain him for three or four additional years of study and travel. (These nineteen years of accomplishments are compressed into 5.15% of the narrative, a bare 486 words among the text's 9400.)

2.) Tomás befriends a captain named Valdivia and accompanies him and his troops to Italy. After characteristically avid, perceptive, and intense study of that cultural scene, the youth accompanies his friend up the Spanish Road to Flanders. Then, fulfilled by this traveling fellowship, he returns to Spain and completes his studies and graduates with honors in Law. He is about twenty-two years old. (This phase of continental travels contributes four times as much as the first phase, or 21.81%, to the narrative.)

3.) Tomás's fraternity brothers induce him to come along with them to visit a lady who is no lady. He goes along but he declines to go in. The woman scorned conspires with another, a superstitious *morisca*, to force the will of Tomás with a potion, but he is poisoned instead.

After six months he recovers his health but not his mind. For two years he meanders about Salamanca and then Valladolid, the Court, under guard. Calling himself the Glass Graduate, he dresses oddly, he claims he is breakable, and he fends off throngs of aggressively curious idlers with an inexhaustible tirade of bro-

mides and jests. The crowd and the narrator deem these utterances witty and wise and better entertainment than merely stoning and poking the unreasoning buffoon. (The two years of Tomás's dementia contribute a disproportionate 66.59% to the narrative.⁶)

4.) A skilled and charitable Hieronymite friar interrupts and nurses the invalid back to mental health. Adopting a new surname, Rueda, and appropriately dressed for work, Tomás attempts to practice his profession at Court. He is admirably schooled in humane letters and the law, well and broadly educated by travel, and tested and proven by adversity. He remains witty with words, but now Tomás Rueda also is reasonable; he thinks before he speaks and therefore he is overqualified and unattractive. At the age of twenty-four he is forced to negotiate a mid-life crisis and undertake a hazardous passage; as there is no market for his mind, he will be a soldier. Rejoining his friend Captain Valdivia in Flanders, he excels in his alternative profession and leaves this world famous for his prudence and valor in soldiering. (The unnumbered years that run from the restoration of Tomás's reason and his rejection at Court to his honorable end contribute a slim 6.38% and conclude the narrative.)

That is Tomás's story, which is the account of a good life of accomplishment, accommodation, and perseverance culminating in a good death. But that is not the story that the fictional narrator of "El licenciado Vidriera" chooses to tell. Our narrator is scarcely interested in the loving and beloved son and the splendid student and engaging youth who "de todo género de gentes era estimado y querido" (44). The narrator concedes more attention, but not much more, to his protagonist's study abroad in the European theaters of the Spanish Empire, where he acquires a sound grasp of the geography, ethnography, politics, and artistic and religious culture of the lands and the great cities that he visits.

Neither is the narrator interested in detailing the fame that the resourceful and adaptable Tomás Rueda achieves at the end, once

⁶ The deviation from a conventional proportionality between the brief duration of the protagonist's madness and its exaggerated prominence in the narrative has distorted the perception of normally discerning readers; Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce characterizes this hiatus in Tomás's life as "este largo período de su vida" (*Novelas*, ed. Avalle-Arce 17).

again on the margin of the Empire. Where, and for how long, and just how did the lawyer-become-soldier exercise the prudence and demonstrate the valor that won him renown? Did Tomás end a foreshortened life abruptly in battle or did he achieve the fulfillment we wish for him? Did he ever reveal his family name and birthplace, honoring them with his fame, as he set out to do? Did he revisit his home and family, and did he perhaps marry there or in Flanders and have children? Or was Tomás deprived, first by social ostracism and then by narrative oversight, of the rewards and satisfactions enjoyed by so many others of Cervantes' protagonists who are less accomplished and no more deserving or engaging than he is: the charming but spoiled underachievers and college dropouts of "La ilustre fregona"⁷ and "La señora Cornelia," the developmentally challenged Rodolfo of "La fuerza de la sangre," the valiant but slow-maturing Ricardo of "El amante liberal" and don Juan de Cárcamo of "La gitanilla," to name a few.

Conventional matters of plotting and of representing the integrity of a protagonist's life do not distract the narrator of this story from pursuing his objective. He will produce an anthology, "The Best of Vidriera," for the entertainment of readers who he assumes share the values of the approving crowd and his own enthusiasm for Vidriera's quick wittiness that is all the better entertainment for being quick wickedness. The narrator focuses narrowly on this matter and imposes on his readers to focus also on a brief span in Tomás's life, an involuntary moratorium that is deeply inconsistent with the continuities (of aspiration, discipline, engagement, development, performance, and accomplishment) that give coherence and a heroic outline to the stretches of years extending backward and forward from the edges of his madness.

⁷ That other likable Tomás surnamed Avendaño, the restless scion of a noble and rich (and thereby honorable) family, also studied at Salamanca, entering at the age of 13 years and dropping out at 16; then he robbed his family servant and lied to his supportive parents in order to enjoy the company of another such, don Diego de Carriazo, and the "freedom" of the "academy of tuna fishing" (141). Tomás de Avendaño's lie is telling: he deceives by claiming that with "hidalga intención" he will take up arms and go to Flanders (146). Our Tomás seeks to honor his *padres* and *patria* (43); Avendaño irresponsibly dishonors his. Which of these two Tomases is more deserving of the protagonist's role in a *novela ejemplar*?

The narrator's concern for his protagonist scarcely extends beyond those two years during which Tomás is clearly and explicitly not himself; he is out of his mind: "sólo le sanaron la enfermedad del cuerpo, pero no de lo del entendimiento" (53).

Because of the fluid efficiency with which the narrator pushes through the preliminaries (youth, education, travel, betrayal) to reach the main events, and because of the single-mindedness with which he then sets down his litany of drolleries, one discharge after another until he has accumulated ninety-seven of them, the narrator's readers are left no room or reason to question their roles.⁸ Real readers too are offered an easy treat that requires little more thought than Vidriera (speaking "espontáneamente con grandísima agudeza de ingenio," 53) gave to its concoction. We need only accept a place in the crowd and attend again to "The Best of Vidriera," which a satisfied audience applauded then and we are invited to relish today.

Sampling the data.

Before we accept our assignment, at the very least we ought to sample our abundant data to learn what it is about Vidriera's verbalizing that makes it, in the judgment of the fictional narrator-editor-anthologizer, as suitable for his readers' attention as it had been gratifying for the multitude who crowded around to provoke the crazed Tomás and to be amused at his expense, "por oírle reñir y responder a todos" (55).

Once the narrator has dispensed with the preliminaries that detain him so briefly, he associates himself closely and uncritically with his subject, summarizing when not quoting his sayings, and interrupting the succession of observations only four times. After the first ten he informs readers that such witticisms circulated widely in retellings and came to the notice of "un príncipe o señor que estaba en la Corte" (56) also described as "un gran personaje

⁸Since the seventeenth century translators and creative writers have resisted the narrator's authority, rewriting Vidriera's *dichos* or even dropping them and correcting other perceived problems in Cervantes' text. Armand Singer notes that Azorín expands the treatment of Tomás's early life and also his final phase in Flanders, and "the apothegms that made up over half of the earlier book are simply omitted" ("Literary Progeny" 63–64, and 68, 70).

de la Corte," who summoned the jester and subsequently prized and protected his oddity, "gustó de su locura" (57). After thirty-seven discharges the narrator intervenes again to remind us that Vidriera went about town under guard, was given no respite and was threatened constantly by juveniles (63). After forty-one he reminds us that Vidriera was always hard pressed by a crowd of eager auditors (64). Finally, after the ninety-seven, the narrator records this startling summary judgment about his favorites and the innumerable others that go without recounting: while Vidriera looked crazy and had some crazy habits, whenever he spoke, anyone would judge him one of the sanest of the sane. The words invite quoting, for they say much about the narrator's sensitivity and perspicuity:

En resolución, él decía tales cosas, que si no fuera por los grandes gritos que daba cuando le tocaban o a él se arrimaban, por el hábito que traía, por la estrechez de su comida, por el modo con que bebía, por el no querer dormir sino al cielo abierto en el verano y el invierno en los pajares, como queda dicho, con que daba tan claras señales de su locura, ninguno pudiera creer sino que era uno de los más cuerdos del mundo. (73)

Two matters here call for comment. "Como queda dicho" reminds us that the narrator is repeating himself. At the beginning of the series, as here again, he defined the mad youth's craziness in terms of appearances that today might not draw more than a side-long glance on our college campuses and at summer arts fairs: he wears a loose gown tied at the waist with a cord and he goes about barefoot; he is a vegetarian, he drinks only fresh water, with his hands; fearful of falling objects, he walks in the middle of the street and he prefers to sleep outdoors, he fears thunderstorms as well, and he doesn't like people crowding him. Let us concede that his ways are strange, but understandably and acceptably so, given the mistreatment that precipitated his psychosis and the mistreatment he receives subsequently whenever he ventures forth: "Cercáronle luego los muchachos, pero él con la vara los detenía.... Los muchachos, que son la más traviesa generación del mundo, a

despecho de sus ruegos y voces, le comenzaron a tirar trapos, y aun piedras, por ver si era de vidrio, como él decía" (54). Perplexed friends keep him locked away; the prince tracks him with a guard, lest he be poked and pelted with garbage excessively; but his effective defense for two years is his way of speaking.⁹

It is not, says the narrator at the moment of summing up, that Vidriera was simply quick and witty, but that the narrator and anyone else would believe—closing their eyes to the evidence of his madness—that their fool was as sane a being as one could hope to find in the Court. Is there in all literature a more confused invocation than this of the Truth that "appearances deceive"? Cervantes, well out of sight overhead, but helping us along at this critical juncture, peppers his narrator's phrasing in these last two pages of the story with five uses of *cuerto(s)*, the only appearances of this word in the text. The iterations constitute a forceful clue about how we are to align the narrator and other characters in relation to each other and to their readers:

1. In the passage just quoted the narrator takes Vidriera to be mad but his dicta to be wise advice.

2. Immediately following the above the narrator rushes over Tomás's recovery (to which I shall return) to record the following assessment of his protagonist's changed behavior upon his return to Court: "con dar tantas *muestras de cuerdo* como las había dado de loco, podía usar su oficio y hacerse famoso por él" (73). The context makes clear that this is the judgment not of the narrator but of the good Hieronymite who effected the cure. It confirms for us that Tomás is whole again, sane in body and mind, and ready to re-engage the world.

3. Scarcely fifty words later the youngsters who had enjoyed tormenting the madman consider renewing their assault on the apparently transformed object of their curiosity: "¿Este no es el loco Vidriera? A fe que es él. *Ya viene cuerdo*. Pero también puede ser loco bien vestido como mal vestido: preguntémosle algo, y

⁹ "Es posible," says Consuelo García Gallarín persuasively, "que este distanciamiento, nunca aislamiento, se deba al espíritu hipersensible del protagonista ante el comportamiento del prójimo y a la tendencia intelectual de evitar contaminarse con la irracionalidad sentimental que el contacto provoca" (45).

salgamos desta confusión." The evidence, in their view, tends to confirm the Hieronymite's judgment and contradict the narrator's: "Ya viene cuerdo," 'he appears now to be sane.' "But if we are lucky," they mean to say, "he will turn out to be as mad now, despite appearances, as he was before." The snotnosed kids know, and the Hieronymite knows, and Tomás (now reborn and renamed Rueda) knows, what the narrator never learns: that Vidriera was out of his mind and his words were diseased.

4. The restored Tomás Rueda is himself again and not who he appeared to be for a time. He is unscarred by the interlude that fascinates the narrator; he has no memory of the unreason of his reason: "Por las cosas que *dicen que dije cuando loco*, podéis considerar las que diré y haré *cuerdo*."

5. For the love of God, Tomás pleads futilely, don't abandon me now that I am sane and able: "no hagáis que...lo que alcancé por loco, que es el sustento, lo pierda por *cuerdo*" This appeal and Tomás's assurance that from now on he will make sense—"os responderá mejor de pensado"—come as great disappointments to the crowd of more than two hundred persons of all sorts ("tanta turba a la redonda"), which soon dissolves.

We must be more attentive than the narrator if we are to draw the appropriate conclusion here. From these iterations of *cuerdo* and the characters' associated attitudes we see that Tomás, and the pursuing youngsters, and the charitable Hieronymite, and the crowd, indeed everyone but the narrator, acknowledge that Tomás was sane before and is sane again and that Vidriera was insane but left no mark on Rueda. Vidriera's in(s)anities (improvised, spontaneous, unreasonable) owe something (but not much) to his previous study but nothing at all to Tomás's admired and admirable *entendimiento*, which is disconnected for these two years. Within the imagined world only the narrator confuses Vidriera's blather with wisdom, and not even the narrator thinks to argue that the madman's words are practically applicable to solving the problems of his world.

Brief examination of a few of the narrator's treasured Vidriera memorabilia will enable us to characterize their kinds, their range of subjects, opinions, and tones, and their organization. For present purposes we will review the first ten exchanges that the

narrator-editor chose to include as representative of the uncounted number from which he culls ninety-seven favorites. These are notions that he invites us to accept as meaningful, worthy of recollection, formally admirable, entirely acceptable in tone and substance, and even exemplary.

1. Vidriera has good reason to scold the youngsters who pursue him about town, trashing and stoning him. He turns on them one day and calls them "porfiados como moscas, sucios como chinches, atrevidos como pulgas" (55), which in my opinion is not a clever or memorable put-down. He adds an allusive metaphor, recalled from his studies or his travels, that those street urchins could not understand and that requires a footnote in modern editions.¹⁰

2. He rebuffs a New Christian woman with the assertion that she and her kind, and her offspring, are more miserable and pitiable for their defects than he is for his.¹⁰

3. He then calls that woman's husband a fool (and perhaps hints that he is a cuckold as well) when he attempts to come to her defense.

4. Next ("Pasando un día por la casa llana") he denounces a houseful of prostitutes, calling them beasts of burden for Satan's army.

5. When he is asked ("Preguntóle uno que") how a husband should react whose wife had left him for another man, Vidriera recommends giving thanks to God for disposing of his enemy. Her reappearance, he adds, would be true and lasting evidence of the husband's dishonor.

6. How should a man treat his wife in order to maintain peace and quiet? Give her whatever she needs for ordering her household, but never let her order you.

¹⁰ "¿Soy yo, por ventura, el monte Testacho de Roma, para que me tiréis tantos tiestos y tejas?" Testacho, we are told, was a hill created artificially out of accumulated rubble.

¹⁰ Vidriera quotes inaccurately the Vulgate's Luke 23.28; perhaps he and his author have in mind also the following derived, popular, and relevant saying that appears still in the Royal Academy Dictionary, s.v. "judío": "'cegar como la judía de Zaragoza, llorando duelos ajenos.' expr. con que se moteja a los que sin obligación ni motivo justificado, se interesan demasiado por los asuntos ajenos."

7. A youngster asks how to gain his freedom from the father who often whips him. The reply: children are honored by their fathers' whippings, whereas public floggings bring dishonor.

8. Loudly and indeed wittily Vidriera hurls public insults at both a boastful Old Christian and a known New Christian as they file through the doorway into a church: "Esperad, domingo, a que pase el sábado."¹¹

9. How fortunate are schoolmasters, especially if their little angels are not snotty-nosed brats!

10. As for *alcahuetas*, procuresses, the ones to worry about are not those across town, but rather your next-door neighbor ladies.

The prince who heard reports of these sharp saws or others of similar kind judged that they deserved broadcasting at Court. What is your opinion of them, reader? Three of the ten (1, 7, 9) attack dirty, snotty-nosed youngsters who are regulated by good beatings and public scorn. Three (2, 3, 8) expose New Christians to ridicule and public humiliation. Five of the ten (2, 4, 5, 6, 10) denounce women (prostitutes, procuresses, shrews, housewives), imposing masculine authority on the home, the market, the neighborhood, all public space including the licenced houses of prostitution. And seven of the ten (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10) equate honor with favorable public opinion, and dishonor with besmirched reputation.

The above targets of Vidriera's wit and the crowd's scorn reappear along with dozens of others in the crowded catalog of ne'er-do-wells that the narrator flashes before our eyes for our edification and entertainment. Listing them would be tedious; this space is better devoted to taking note of some common characteristics and denominators of the group.¹² First of all I observe that, in

¹¹ The New Christian is slurred as a Judaizer and sullied with the name of the Jewish Sabbath. The peasant Domingo (whose name is a common one among shepherds, according to the well-travelled dog Berganza [309]), would be supposed to be an Old Christian, forced to wait, while one Sabbath passes, for the arrival of his own. His name also links this braggart to St. Dominick and the Dominican Order, zealous preachers and enforcers of orthodoxy through the Inquisition, which the Dominicans administer.

¹² Whether there are ninety-seven or more or less depends on one's counting method. My first ten are seven for Casaldueiro (138); Riley counts fifty-nine in all

the manner of 1–4, and 7–8 above, twenty-four entries in this compendium finger individuals in the crowd, isolating them from their neighbors and subsuming them into categories, professional or social, that define them beyond all doubt. These categories hold Vidriera's and the crowd's interest briefly (for a dozen words or so or up to a paragraph or two), the individuals do not. They are secured categorically and have no recourse to defense or discussion; their personality is effaced before it can register in the text. Occasionally, as in 5 and 6 above, the problem faced by an individual is said to be solvable by the application of a categorical remedy. Very often, in fact in fifty-eight instances (including item 10 above), categories of being—occupations and social ranks—are taken up and defined "purely," without reference to any individual, present or alluded, of the mentioned types. We learn what flatterers are like and shoemakers and puppeteers, swordsmen, duennas, and many others. "Todos los mozos de mulas tienen su punta de rufianes.... Éstos, y los marineros y carreteros y arrieros, tienen un modo de vivir extraordinario y sólo para ellos" (61), a way of life that Vidriera then specifies briefly for each of these kinds.

Some acrid discharges give off the smell of Quevedo's ink. As many as eighteen are more or less intensely crafted verbal conceits, often after the fashion of Quevedo's *conceptismo* and even on occasion anticipations of Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías*. But the group that (along with the categorical determinations just mentioned) seems to me especially to invite comment are the nine instances of what I shall call polarizing reduction. A short series of sayings treats poets and poetry, asserting that poets are either *necios* or *venturosos*; poetry is estimable, but poets are not; bad poets are infinite in number, the good are so few as to go unnumbered; a good poet deserves esteem, bad poets are "la idiotez y la arrogancia del mundo" (57–59). (At which extreme, one wonders, would Vidriera place the able poet Cervantes who—while judging two of his sonnets praiseworthy—viewed himself as "más versado

(190) and Armand Singer, seventy-five ("Form and Substance" 22). In a companion essay, to be titled "Vidriera's Blather," I list the exchanges and study their characteristics and functions and related critical problems.

en desdichas que en versos" [*Don Quijote*, I, 6] and lamented that he labored in vain "por parecer que tengo de poeta / la gracia que no quiso darme el cielo" [*Viaje del Parnaso*, I, 26–27].) Good painters imitate nature, bad ones vomit it (60). Ecclesiasticus and Vidriera praise good doctors; Vidriera echoes Quevedo in cursing the bad ones: "No hay gente más dañosa a la república" (62).

What kind of wisdom is this? Now and again we hear amid trivialities an echo of Erasmus (but no more than an echo: no positive models, no exhortations to walk the walk, to correct categorical wrongs and institutional deficiencies and individual cases of injustice). The denunciation of failures of so many kinds reminds some readers of philosophical cynicism; but the cynics were angry, Vidriera is not; they sought to disturb, he entertains; they searched for virtue, he meanders aimlessly. Occasional traces of Latin authorities recall Tomás's Salamanca schooling, but they are a few scraps torn from contexts for decorative or pedantic effect, and most are clichés.¹³ But the clear majority of items on this list are no more than mean-minded, if oft-repeated, bad-mouthing, scarcely elevated above coarse and shallow prejudice by sporadic infusions of verbal and conceptual wit. Once an attentive listener in the crowd complains that Vidriera has overlooked a target prominent on everyone's hit list: "¿Qué es esto, señor Licenciado, que os he oído decir mal de muchos oficios y jamás lo habéis dicho de los escribanos, habiendo tanto que decir?" (69). To which Vidriera replies: "Aunque de vidrio, no soy tan frágil que me deje ir con la corriente del vulgo, las más veces engañado." He is self-deluded. From the beginning of the series to its end and for the duration of his madness, Vidriera seldom resists going with the flow of common ridicule and vilification, which his enthusiastic following (among whom our narrator is prominently positioned) take to be common sense.

In defense of Vidriera.

¹³ See Forcione's learned study for a reading that affirms "Vidriera's" Erasmianism and Cynicism, and the character's "keen insight," and accepts the "aptness of nearly all his satirical pronouncements" (241), while noting the "incongruity of such ruthless stereotyping" (264) and its insensitivity to "human particularity" (267).

Vidiera is the aggrieved party, mistreated successively by the crowd that holds him at bay and by the narrator who recreates that original mistreatment and by the latter's readers who treasure his wit. I shall make two points in the protagonist's defense before turning to examine the intermediary who stands between the first persecutors and modern apologists, the thoroughly unreliable narrator. Then we shall search the text and its outskirts for more credible means of interpreting the history of Tomás, who was for the interim of his psychosis the focalizing reflector of his community's unworthy values and opinions.

We ought not forget that Vidriera lacks the faculty of reason. Following an unhappy accident (his poisoning) and while unreasoning and unreasonable, he becomes the involuntary and celebrated voice of his community. Oddly, he is during that time both *non compos mentis* and *primus inter pares*. The narrator makes us aware of the radical discontinuity in his protagonist's experience, but that same narrator and many citizens who ought to have known better discount the significance of this disconnect. Our significant stylistic clue (not unlike that other one, the narrator's topsy-turvy application of *cuerto* to describe nonsense) will be the narrator's confused use of the word *entendimiento*, in a phrase, his misunderstanding of understanding. It is a key word, of course, for describing Tomás's excellence, and in its essential sense (i.e., for naming that faculty of the soul that conceives of things and compares and judges them, and induces and deduces other things from those it knows)¹⁴ it is put to use at three key points in the narrative. The superb young university student Tomás Rodaja is characterized as having an *entendimiento* as exceptional as his *memoria*.¹⁵ At the other extreme of the text we learn that the

¹⁴ "Potencia del alma, en virtud de la cual concibe las cosas, las compara, las juzga, e induce y deduce otras de las que ya conoce" (DRAE, s.v. "entendimiento").

¹⁵ "Tenía tan felice memoria que era cosa de espanto; e ilustrábala tanto con su buen entendimiento, que no era menos famoso por él que por ella" (44). *Entendimiento* and *memoria* are the first and second of the three faculties of the soul and the third is *voluntad*. Tomás, according to the narrator's testimony, is comparably exemplary in all three. His will is a virtual Gibraltar: treachery, superstition, and poison combined did not "conquistar la roca de la voluntad de

Hieronymite who took charge of Vidriera's cure "le curó y sanó, y volvió a su *primer juicio, entendimiento y discurso*" (73), which is textual evidence as clear as a narrator could pen of the consistency of Tomás before and after, and the disruption of his identity and his reasoning during, the awful hiatus that fascinates the narrator. The third appearance of *entendimiento* buttresses the lesson of these two, for it appears at the boundary moment that marks the beginning of Tomás's separation from himself. It is accompanied in a single page by the fourth and fifth appearances of *entendimiento*, and the arresting iteration tells us more than the narrator and Salamanca's most learned on-lookers are able to grasp.

After six months the poisoned Tomás, reduced to skin and bones, rose from his bed, but "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). Tomás lost his mind; lack of *entendimiento* means crazy, as crazy as you will ever see. In the very next paragraph we learn that when this unfortunate is not on the floor howling, fainting, and pleading to be left alone, he rants something that catches the attention of the curious: "Decía que le hablasen desde lejos, y le preguntasen lo que quisiesen, porque a todo les respondería *con más entendimiento*, por ser hombre de vidrio y no de carne." For the sake of science ("Quisieron algunos experimentar si era verdad lo que decía") the dons of Salamanca ask him "many difficult things" which the madman answers "espontáneamente con grandísima agudeza de ingenio," to the amazement of even the learned professors of medicine and philosophy. Who would have thought that in such a sick soul "se encerrase tan grande *entendimiento* que respondiese a toda pregunta con propiedad y agudeza"?

And who would have thought that the author's point, so clearly made at this turning point through the clashing senses of a single essential word, would leave so many readers of this text in the same state of confusion as those first *letrados* and *profesores*? Tomás lost his ability to exercise reason, to judge, to compare, and to learn ("induci[r] y deduci[r] otras [cosas] de las que ya cono-

ce").¹⁶ He did not lose his memory and the wealth of assimilated culture stored there, which is his *entendimiento* in the subordinate and ordinary sense of *lo que ya tenía entendido*, the knowledge he had accumulated before he lost his mind. The curious and the learned are dazzled by his recall of the stuff he had stored away in years of memorizing and rote learning, together with all the other stuff he had seen and heard in daily living and in his travels: anecdotes, proverbs, witty *mots*, common sense, and how much else that until this moment—but no longer—his reasoning faculty had been able to weigh, sift, compare, organize, apply or discount, judge, keep in mind or push back out of the way into his preconscious. Now and for two years his judgment is impaired, but not his memory. Vidriera will be splendidly entertaining in the estimation of the many who prize his impromptu cleverness, ingenious wit, and ability to hit nails on the head. But he will not be equipped to engage again in a thoughtful exchange until the last recorded page of his history, for, as Avalle-Arce puts it, "de su antiguo ser lo único que permanece es su saber acumulado."¹⁷ Upon Tomás's recovery, when he draws a crowd one last time, he assures listeners that if he was good while improvising, he will be better now that he again is able to reason: "veréis que el que os respondía bien, según dicen, de improviso os responderá mejor de pensado" (74).

A perplexed throng encircles the newly recovered Tomás Rueda who "ya viene cuerdo" but who—many were hoping—still might turn out to be a "loco bien vestido" (73). Impertinent youngsters, a new generation of empiricists, propose the same experiment the educated elite of Salamanca had tried two years earlier: "preguntémosle algo, y salgamos desta confusión" (73). Rueda fails the test—by speaking reasonably—that Vidriera had passed with his unthinking nitwittedness. The crowd ("el antiguo

¹⁶ Robert Russell sees and puts it clearly: along with his "primera libertad y seguridad en el movimiento," Tomás loses for this while "la capacidad de asimilar nuevas experiencias"; "ya no puede asimilar, ya no puede crecer, ya no puede sentir. Sólo puede servir...de simple espejo" (246).

¹⁷ The acute observation continues: "Es éste [i.e., su saber acumulado], precisamente, el instrumento que utiliza en la segunda etapa de su vivir" during which "se halla carente de autoconocimiento" (*Deslindes* 63).

legislador que llaman vulgo," *Don Quijote*, I, Prologue) now renders its verdict by turning away from the young Solon, and along with them the narrator loses interest in his subject. One hundred words later Rueda dies in Flanders and is forgotten.

A second point in Vidriera's defense: as the tormented object of others' aggressive curiosity, he did not freely propose to entertain; he found himself at the center thanks to the pushing and prodding of the crowd that gathered about him in a daily siege soon encouraged by a prince and supervised by a hired guard.¹⁸ The crazed Tomás discovered out of fatigue and exasperation, barely in time to save his life from beatings and abuse, that when he summoned his wits and turned to face the crowd, he was able to quiet and control it with a counterattack made from the stuff that flowed without thinking from his "felice memoria" and poured undisciplined by reason from his mouth. Sticks and stones had hurt his bones, but with words they never beat him.¹⁹ The following two years and torrents of aggressive verbiage provide readers of this story as clear an illustration as literature offers of what Kenneth Burke calls "language as symbolic action," "language as equipment for living," language as "prophylactic": Vidriera is hard pressed, hemmed in, attacked, until he learns to respond with words that hold off the others. "Por estas y otras cosas que decía de todos los oficios, se andaban tras él, sin hacerle mal y sin dejarle sosegar" (63). This strategy masks the speaker from his persecutors, for he is not, after all, speaking his mind; he is protecting his injured inwardness from view and maintaining a life-preserving impasse (but no solution to this plight). His inquisitors are content to interrupt their hounding and instead to

¹⁸ Several readings affirm against the text that Vidriera enjoys freedom and specifically freedom of speech during this mortifying interval of madness and persecution. Frank Casa maintains that Vidriera "acquires with his madness the liberty and the ability to say what he pleases" (245). Avalue-Arce accepts Casa's claim that Vidriera was "absolutely free to say what he wished" and adds that, on returning to the world of action, Rueda "abandona la cómoda postura de la vida como espectáculo" (20). It appears to me that the more *cómoda postura* here is the crowd's and readers'. See also Forcione 241.

¹⁹ "Pide que le hablen desde lejos, como *arrojándole las palabras*, y su diálogo no tiene intimidad alguna, pues Vidriera no habla nunca de sí" (Rosales 207; his emphasis).

applaud Vidriera for reflections that are not his but theirs. The famous sayings of Vidriera are monstrous visions of their community that his neighbors imagine together while reason sleeps.

The narrator.

The narrator who conveys all this to us sides with the crowd and applauds what they celebrated and records it for the entertainment and edification of readers of their kind. He writes for readers who will share his fascination with the mad wise man Vidriera and who require no more than a profile sketch of the Tomás who disappoints him and the crowd by regaining his sanity. The narrator cannot escape some charges that cannot be lodged fairly against the protagonist: Tomás while he is Vidriera reacts without rhyme or reason to the haphazard provocations launched from the crowd; the narrator is free to order and analyze the barrage but fails to do so.²⁰ He chooses, organizes, and edits his selection of ninety-seven exchanges—selected how, from among how many hundreds?—in the most primitive fashion.²¹ In his work of re-

²⁰ The narrator is characterized implicitly for the most part, through the scope and focus of his narrative vision, his selection of evidence, and his tone and stylistic choices. As Patricio Lizama Améstica notes, “el narrador tiene una completa visión de la historia que cuenta” (78 and see his n. 9) and his appreciative account of Tomás’s studies and travels, though slight and elliptic, reflects his own values. El Saffar notes the “general favor” and “sympathy” with which the narrator views Tomás, but she judges the narrator insignificant in the development of the story (52–53) and even faults him for making “it appear that Tomás is both reasonable and admirable” (55). As for the narrator’s treatment of Vidriera, Lizama comments: “lo abandona. Lo deja solo...y se limita a registrar y reproducir lo que dice” (80). The narrator reaffirms a modest measure of support for Rueda, rendering sympathetically in direct address the rejected lawyer’s valedictory. On the narrator’s admiration of Rodaja and withdrawal of support from Vidriera, see also Russell 247.

²¹ Avalle-Arce suggests that Cervantes may have drawn Vidriera’s sayings from “alguna enciclopedia temática de la época” (*Novelas* 22; see also Aylward 200). If that is the case, our esteemed *manco* in composing “El licenciado Vidriera” acted in a way consistent with the advice of that friend (“gracioso y bien entendido”) who in the Prologue to Part I of *Don Quixote* advised the writing-blocked author of that document to “buscar un libro” and copy from it everything necessary and useful, “desde la A hasta la Z.” The theft may go unnoticed, the friend comments, and “quizá alguno habrá tan simple que crea que de todos os habéis aprovechado en la simple y sencilla historia vuestra....” The friend and

membering the anatomy of the body politic that Vidriera and his public interactively dismembered, the narrator imposes no order—thematic, topical, or formal—on the material he recollects. His artless work of composition reflects and indeed reproduces the original chaotic crowd scene with unwitting fidelity. Whatever comes back to the narrator's mind and flows from his pen at the moment of recollection replicates the disjointed sequence of provocations and verbal reflections that the narrator and crowd found entertaining and memorable back then.²² There are no faces in the crowd, there is no expression on Vidriera's face; there are no conversations or discussions or disputes; neither protagonist nor narrator ever needs to pause in order to insert an "olvidábaseme de decir" into an argument, for there are no arguments. In this remarkable record of two years that fills two thirds of the narrative, there is no teaching, there is no learning, there is no dialog; no one is affected for longer than a good laugh by anything said—excepting of course those in the crowd who are shamed by exposure and reduced to the unworthy categories that say all that needs to be said about them. The narrator, tacitly endorsing both the crowd's behavior and Vidriera's reactionary responses, neither recalls nor says anything constructive or consequential.²³

Vidriera and Cervantes teach, each in his own way, that witty formulations of accepted notions can pass for wisdom and that social authority adheres to bits and pieces of commonplace lore whenever and from wherever they are borrowed.

²² Indicators of the editor's minimalism include the frequent use of impersonal scenic crutches such as "preguntóle uno," "otro le preguntó," "otra vez le preguntaron," and variants, and reliance on the vaguest time markers: "un día," "otro día," "otra vez," "cuando esto decía," "pasó acaso una vez," and others. "El tiempo y el espacio realmente no existen en este segmento" (Russell 247).

²³ My reader may object that at least a few of Vidriera's saying appear to be appropriately discriminating and acceptable to modern tastes, or to the tastes we conjecture were Cervantes' own, or else are timeless. Of this kind are Vidriera's defenses of hard-working actors (66) and *autores* (67), and *escribanos* (69–70), and *religiosos*, including a very fat one (71) and all the sainted ones (72). Aylward accepts these at face value (194), but each of these instances is invaded by irony so energetic that it displaces the apparent sense and makes room for its opposite.

Vidriera is a fool, not a teacher, and with a fool's licence he can say in public what others think and feel in private and hold within themselves "under pressure," the volatile gasses of hate, prejudice, superstition, resentment, and

The narrator is unreliable according to all the tests narratologists apply to measure the credibility of narration and narrative.²⁴ “The main sources of unreliability,” says Rimmon-Kenan, who is here writing generally, “are the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme.” Our narrator’s knowledge and involvement are confined almost entirely to a small and uncharacteristic segment of his protagonist’s life, bits of which he recalls approvingly and without empathy for his subject. His interest does not extend to clarifying Tomás’s origins nor to conveying to his readers the basis of the fame the young man acquired in his exemplary life and death in Flanders.²⁵ The narrator’s value-scheme seems perfectly consistent in its ethical insensitivity with that of the crowd that both torments Vidriera and cheers his aggressive dismemberment of the community.

“A narrator’s moral values are considered questionable if they do not tally with those of the implied author.... However...the values (or ‘norms’) of the implied author are notoriously difficult to arrive at” (101). And is there in all fiction an author who did

floating anxiety, barely contained by their superiors’ authority. The fool is a useful escape valve and is appointed and maintained by the prince to be just that. Madly but inconsequentially he sprays out venom against targets of opportunity, both representative profiles isolated for a moment in the shifting crowd and other abstract categories of beings represented ridiculously in absentia. Vidriera is—in a manner of speaking—an autoloading and repeating loose cannon provisioned with an inexhaustible supply of powder, balls, and fodder. It ought to be noted, however, that while he appears to shoot willy-nilly in all directions, he does not aim at princes and bishops and he lands only glancing blows on the powerful. “[Cervantes] ne s’attaque à la noblesse qu’indirectement” (Redondo 41).

²⁴ An unreliable narrator, according to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (whose discussion is exemplary in its lucid efficiency), “is one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect” (100).

²⁵ María A. Cruz Cámara comments that “quien nos comunica la fama del personaje [Rueda] es alguien [el narrador] que no le ha ayudado en absoluto a lograr este objetivo” (21). She adds with comparable discernment that “el narrador le está negando a su personaje la fama que el mismo le atribuye, pues fama sin nombre no es fama,” and furthermore “le está adjudicando una fama que el personaje no desea.” Concerning Tomás’s intriguing and mysterious account of his origins, Lizama Améstica observes: “Como el protagonista se niega a señalar su origen, el narrador espera que quien cuenta la novela entregue algún indicio. Sin embargo, el narrador no dice nada, no agrega información” (76).

more than Miguel de Cervantes to interest his readers in the matter of narrators' reliability and to correct readers' "natural" (that is, naive, unaware) identification of narrators with their authors? The close association, in the present instance, of the narrator with the anxious and mean "rueda de la mucha gente que...siempre le estaba oyendo [a Vidriera]" (64) and also the narrator's indifference to organizing his recollections and fitting them "con propiedad y agudeza" (54) into the history of Tomás, distinguish him radically from his author.²⁶ Various factors, Rimmon-Kenan observes, "may indicate a gap between the norms of the implied author and those of the narrator: when the facts contradict the narrator's views...; when the outcome of the action proves the narrator wrong...; when the views of other characters consistently clash with the narrators...; and when the narrator's language contains internal contradictions." Each of these conditions is represented in "El licenciado Vidriera." We have seen how the narrator's contradictory use of *cuerto* and *entendimiento* points to his shallow understanding of the function of understanding. Do not the facts of Tomás's early life expose as prejudiced and myopic the narrator's discounting of all that happened before the mad Vidriera's mean raillery drew him into the circle of anxious citizens for whom he speaks? The end of the story is realized, in the narrator's view, when he and the crowd lose interest in the recovered Tomás Rueda; the outcome of the protagonist's history, however, is the achievement of a dignified and honorable end and fame. That end, the narrator must believe, will interest his readers no more than it interests him; it is merely the disappearance of

²⁶ Forcione touches tentatively and without conviction on a key part of this matter of reliability when he "senses that a reader's exclusion from the participating audience...*may* in fact be an effect that Cervantes carefully *attempted* to achieve." He adds: "I would *suggest* that the author knew quite well that his character was not speaking with his own authentic voice and that Cervantes was in fact presenting in his fool what he considered a diseased form of humor, a heartless humor" (269, italics added). The emphatic expansion and documentation of this reasonable claim, distinguishing Vidriera's words from the narrator's work, and the latter from the author's work, and further distinguishing Vidriera's audience (the crowd) from the narrator's (his readers), and the latter from the author's (which is us), is my undertaking here and in the companion study mentioned in a previous note.

another soldier lost in Flanders. The fame that Tomás earned—for prudence and valor!—on the edge of the Empire has no historian; it was and it remains today insignificant when measured against the fame achieved by the crazy Glass Graduate at Court.

Evidence of the clash, which Rimmon-Kenan mentions, between the narrator and other characters is exceptionally significant in the case of “El licenciado Vidriera.” To examine it we must proceed parabolically and allow a broad focus including all the text and more, for readers of Cervantes’ tale as well as characters within it will be implicated in this discussion.

Tomás and his friends.

The protagonist was Tomás for many years, then he was Vidriera for a short period, and then he was Tomás again for the remainder of his time. Vidriera lived isolated at the center of an impersonal and formless, daily-reconstituted *crowd* that taunted and pelted him until he learned to hold it off with words. He, no less than the *turba*, was controlled by a *guard* whose role it was to safeguard and thereby prolong the give-and-take; he was a *prince’s* object of amusement.²⁷ He was betrayed, albeit unwittingly, by the pack of *college buddies* who took him along to visited the vindictive *lady* who subverted him deliberately. He was poisoned by a superstitious, conniving *morisca*. So-called *friends*, uncomprehending, kept him locked up for a long time (54) before releasing him to wander unattended and attract pity and abuse but no treatment. The *doctors* and *professors* of Salamanca were amazed by the madman, but that was as far as their concern and competence extended. Friends in need are friends indeed. All of those just

²⁷ As he was controlled by the prince, so he was, Francisco J. Sánchez observes, an instrument of control for the prince; Vidriera is a public spectacle performing daily “mediado por el gusto y el poder señoriales” (138). This prince is a regent of a social system in crisis, intent on blocking challenges to its installed authority by those upwardly mobile who are motivated and empowered by values that Tomás incarnates: social ambition, hard work, education, the search for fair ways to live among others in a law-abiding society. Vidriera—the emasculated Tomás become a laughing stock—is useful for discrediting Rodaja’s project, for quieting doubts and discouraging dialog and for appeasing the crowd’s embittered uneasiness. García Gallarín takes note of this (especially at 48) in a brief but illuminating article.

mentioned fail the test of friendship. And so Vidriera is tracked and harassed by youngsters and badgered by the many who resemble a certain "muchacho agudo que...le apretaba mucho con preguntas y demandas" (65). Fortunately this does not complete the census of characters who touch and are touched by the protagonist of "El licenciado Vidriera."

After two years, a good and generous and competent person, a Christian truly moved to charity, breaks into the circle, rescues Vidriera from it and extracts Tomás from the bondage of madness. About this person we know almost nothing, because the narrator—who resents this interruption of the spectacle—chooses to tell us only that he is a friar of the Order of Saint Jerome who "tenía gracia y ciencia particular en hacer los mudos entendiesen y en cierta manera hablasen, y en curar locos" (73). For Heaven's sake: a gifted and trained, disciplined, patient, selfless and effective nurse of mutes and madmen! Who would have expected it! Indeed this good man "tenía gracia" and shares it: the rescue of Tomás is just this side of a miracle, as the recovered patient himself will proclaim, in reasonable, infinitely generous, and humble terms, in that last, very packed, page of our text. "Sucesos y desgracias que acontecen en el mundo *por permisión del cielo* me quitaron el juicio, y *las misericordias de Dios* me le han vuelto."²⁸ In the third year of his affliction Tomás found and was found by a true friend. The narrator, spare with words where his and his implied readers' interests are not engaged, wastes only two sentences, a single paragraph, on this decisive turning point in his protagonist's life.

If we could intrude into the narrator's study to assist him in revising his story, we would urge him to correct this slight and

²⁸ Cervantes very likely would call Tomás's recovery not a *milagro* but a *misterio*, a rare but not impossible occurrence. On this distinction and Cervantes' reliance on providential enablement rather than supernatural intervention, see John J. Allen. Tomás's clear awareness at the moment of anagnorisis that his test and his recovery were providentially designed means that we need not consider "El licenciado Vidriera" an exception to Allen's lucidly argued claim that Cervantes' fictions, romances and novels alike, are set in "one world, governed by a beneficent Providence" (191, Allen's emphasis; and see 194–95). Among the commentators mentioned in my note 5, Forcione alone notes the climactic instrumental role of the Hieronymite as a wise, charitable healer in the Erasmian mold (307, 313).

others as well, and in so doing enable those interpreters of this tale who regard Tomás as a loner, and alienated, as estranged, as friendless, to emend their readings. The fact of the matter is that our text shows, even in the sketchy evidence that is all its narrator has given us, that Tomás makes more friends, more real friends, and forms more time-tested friendships than any other character in the eleven other stories included among the *Novelas ejemplares*.²⁹ And he gives as good as he gets.

Young Tomás, self-surnamed Rodaja, is as engaging as he is bright.³⁰ He does not curry favor, he earns it "sirviendo a sus amos con toda fidelidad, puntualidad y diligencia" (44), while excelling in his studies. "Y como el buen servir del siervo mueve la voluntad del señor a tratarle bien, ya Tomás Rodaja no era criado de sus amos, sino su compañero." There is no irony in this declaration; it expresses the durable mutual fidelity that replaces an initial relation of servitude with companionship. Vidriera later will suffer without a friend for two years, but Rodaja's early relationships, which are constructed out of his virtues and his friends' recognition of his worth, endure well beyond his eight years of study. They are framed and accompanied by confirmatory evidence that extends as far as Tomás became known: "se hizo tan famoso en la universidad por su buen ingenio y notable habilidad, que de todo género de gentes era estimado y querido." This young man is not a bookworm nor an obsessive nor a narrow-minded intellectual; his successes are acknowledged far and wide, and they awaken no

²⁹ Closest to comparability with Tomás in this respect are two of Cervantes' exemplary heroines, Preciosa ("La gitanilla") and Isabela ("La española inglesa"), who coincidentally are the characters who also most resemble Tomás in mind and heart. They are his soul mates in the *Novelas ejemplares*. In strong contrast to mine is Rosales's understanding of Tomás's character: "Tomás Rueda no se vincula a nada. Tomás Rueda no comprende el amor. Tomás Rueda no comprende la amistad" (205). Cesare Segre notes the generous economic support extended to needy and deserving Tomás by his companions and friends (56).

³⁰ He also is naive because inexperienced, as we see in his confident and idealistic misinterpretation of his very first, pre-poisoning, aphorism: "yo he oído decir que de los hombres se hacen los obispos" (43). His history will show that in his society, decidedly not a meritocratic one, the worthy do not rise so "naturally" to high office; bishops are chosen by those who are bishops, for the same reasons that saints are "todos frailes y religiosos" (72).

jealousy. Finally these friendships are perfected in the appropriate fashion that the wealth of Tomás's gentlemen friends makes possible. They do not pay him off and dismiss him; rather they affirm and project their friendship across space and time by extending support to their friend so that he can do what he and they know he longs to do, which is to complete his education: "cortesés y liberales, se la dieron [licencia para volverse a Salamanca], acomodándole de suerte que con lo que le dieron se pudiera sustentar tres años." This is a model of fruitful friendship, unhedged by social and economic distinctions, space, and time, that speaks well of all its parties.

When subsequently Tomás is befriended by the charitable friar who cures him of the malady that is Vidriera, the Court does not join in to reward their favorite image-maker with any of the esteem, love, and security of employment that as a youth he earned and enjoyed in Salamanca. Tomás is able, nevertheless, to count on another true friend in need, the good Captain Valdivia, who like the Hieronymite is a Christian who lives his faith.³¹ Valdivia, a gentleman who proved the quality and constancy of his friendship years earlier, reemerges to give literal form to the concept of the lifelong friend. The last words of the story erase all doubts about the matter: "la vida que [Tomás] había comenzado a eternizar por las letras la acabó de eternizar por las armas, en compañía de su buen amigo el capitán Valdivia, dejando fama en su muerte de prudente y valentísimo soldado."

This is a friendship like Tomás's others, disinterested, carefully nourished over some years by both parties, who are drawn to each other and are respectful and supportive of each other's ways. They

³¹ After the dangerous, storm-buffed passage from Cartagena to Genoa leaves everyone "trasnochados, mojados y con ojeras," the captain takes his soldiers and Tomás to church before they undertake their rest and recreation (47). Judging from our evidence, there are among the crowd of characters in this tale three friends who practice their Christian faith: Valdivia, the nameless Hieronymite, and Tomás, though we ought not exclude the possibility that Tomás's good and true Salamanca friends (about whom we have no evidence of their beliefs, but positive indications in their conduct) were also of this dishearteningly small number. Tomás packs in his travel bag only two books, testaments to his esthetic refinement and his ingrained habit of daily prayer and devotion, "unas *Horas de Nuestra Señora* y un *Garcilaso* sin comentario."

join up on the road, they converse about this and that, each is attracted by the qualities shown by the other. So much does Valdivia say so well that Tomás is drawn toward the life his new friend describes. So delighted is the gentleman by the student's "ingenio y desenvoltura" ("agile mind and outgoing manner") that he offers to make Tomás his company's flag bearer. Since all that we learn about both of these characters speaks to the excellence of their character, we read this offer as the soldier's honorable response to his accurate assessment of the youth. Tomás ponders and then decides on his course not "espontáneamente" and "de improviso" as will be Vidriera's way of reacting (53, 74), but rather "de pensado," as Rueda's practice will be (74). The narrator observes that "la discreción de nuestro Tomás Rodaja comenzó a titubear y la voluntad a aficionarse a aquella vida," as the soldier's life is described by the attractive and reliable captain (45). Furthermore, when Valdivia proposes the European tour, Tomás reflects briefly, "haciendo consigo en un instante un breve discurso de que sería bueno ver a Italia y Flandes y otras diversas tierras y países" (46). "Titubear" and "breve discurso" ring warning bells for the reader; but when we imitate Tomás by giving careful consideration to the way he makes his decision and to the circumstances, and then study his consequent action, we are reassured. Tomás makes the right decision at this juncture for right reasons in the right way. He is right to think, as countless students have thought and think, that a period of study abroad (in his case a sort of "roads" scholarship funded by his liberal and grateful Salamanca friends) will broaden and deepen his understanding, and so it does. He decides to undertake the tour understanding it to be part of his professional formation (for a period of time that would not prevent him from "volver a sus estudios"), on terms that affirm his vocation and cement his new friendship, and win the further respect and support of the captain. The latter congratulates him in a light phrase that contains much praise, some knowing irony (about the profession of arms), and no sarcasm: "Conciencia tan escrupulosa... más es de religioso que de soldado; pero como quiera que sea, ya somos camaradas."³²

³² Rodríguez-Luis gives a clear-eyed account of the scrupulous mutual

When later they part, the soldiers for the Piedmont, Tomás for Rome, Naples, and other parts, it is with the hope and expectation that they will meet up again to travel the Spanish Road together (48). Tomás is as good as his word and, resisting the temptation to linger in Venice (which "casi le [hacía] olvidar de su primer intento" 51), he rejoins Valdivia's company, where "fue muy bien recibido de su amigo el capitán, y en su compañía y camarada pasó a Flandes" (51). And there too he does what he had designed to do, and when that is accomplished, he confirms our reading of his prudent original resolve: "habiendo cumplido con el deseo que le movió a ver lo que había visto, determinó volverse a España y a Salamanca a acabar sus estudios, y como lo pensó lo puso luego por obra." If later the narrator, out of his fascination with Vidriera, tries our sympathy, for this moment at least we ought to embrace him. He explains, without intending to do so, that Tomás did all that he did for good reason, consistent with the ambitious but reasonable master plan that motivated him when he was eleven years old and throughout his Salamanca years, and motivates him still when he is about twenty-two. His thinking and his actions are consistent, and the latter are guided over time and space by thinking that is ever worthy and carefully considered. And they win him constant and worthy friends wherever he goes. His comrade Valdivia in Flanders accepts Tomás's decision to depart "con pesar grandísimo" and "le rogó, al tiempo de despedirse, le avisase de su salud, llegada y suceso." Tomás promises to write. Now, these are friends indeed. Much like those others who file from the inn of Juan Palomeque amid repeated *abrazos* and other touching expressions of their mutual respect and their shared concern for the health of Don Quixote (I, 47), Tomás and Valdivia pledge to document and develop their affection really and symbolically in messages conveyed through exchanges of letters, affirming thereby and maintaining over space and time the bonds of their friendship while they pursue separate courses.

How sad it is that when these friends meet again, it is as a

respect of Tomás and Valdivia (195–96), and Casaldueiro emphasizes appropriately the modernity and humanistic cultural function of Tomás's study and travel abroad.

consequence of the rejection and exile from Court of an idealistic, exceptionally gifted and attractive, and determined young hero. Let us conclude this effort to flesh out Tomás's friendships with another act of imagination that will span the gap that the narrator neglected to bridge for us. Let us imagine how deeply it must have consoled Tomás on his return to Flanders to embrace his steadfast friend, to converse with him again with "ingenio y desenvoltura," and then to validate his friend's estimation of his worth, living and dying a prudent and valiant soldier.³³ What a shame it is that the narrator did not see clearly enough to add to his narrative at least a corrective afterword, reassessing his story from the perspective that Miguel de Cervantes makes available to readers who side with him.

Had the narrator been able to call upon Francisco de Quevedo for assistance in penning a rectification, we know precisely what advice he would have received regarding its appropriate sentiment, tone, and political vision. In the year 1604, plausibly the year of composition of "El licenciado Vidriera," Quevedo—who then was twenty-four years old, which is Tomás's age as well when he recovered his sanity, and who was as brilliant and precocious as our new friend—was living in Valladolid, the Court, where Miguel de Cervantes too lived at that time and Tomás too at that age. Both Quevedo and Tomás were corresponding then with esteemed friends abroad, Tomás with the Spanish captain in Flanders and Quevedo with the distinguished Flemish humanist

³³ Rodrigo de Cervantes, Miguel's younger brother, who tended the author's wounds after Lepanto and shared captivity with him in Algiers, continued in military service and died in Flanders at the battle of the Dunes, on July 2, 1600 (Canavaggio 197). He was an *alférez*, the rank that Valdivia offered to Tomás. "El licenciado Vidriera," commonly thought to have been composed ca. 1604–06 (El Saffar 50–51 n. 45), was imagined in the shadow of that loss.

The solace of friendship ("en compañía de su buen amigo") is the singularizing and touching detail about Tomás's end. "Dejando fama...de prudente y valentísimo soldado," in contrast, is a cliché and an indicator of how little the narrator knows or cares to record about the mature achievements of his protagonist; Mateo Alemán uses the cliché and many others in his formulaic dedication of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, II, to Don Juan de Mendoza, who in Flanders and Milan "alcanzó señaladas victorias, mostrando tanto valor y prudencia, cuanto admirable gobierno."

Justus Lipsius. Cervantes has left us no access to Tomás's letters and his state of mind, but here is some of what Quevedo wrote, at the same age and from the same Court, assessing the real historical crisis and the relation of the center of the Empire to the periphery where the fictional Tomás soon after found fame and an early death. "De mi España," writes the disillusioned young Quevedo, "¿qué diré que no sea con gemido? Vosotros sois presa de la guerra; nosotros del ocio y de la ignorancia. Allá se consumen nuestros soldados y nuestros recursos; aquí somos nosotros los que nos consumimos."³⁴

Choosing sides.

How many of us readers can match in our experience the number and quality of Tomás's sustained, generous, productive friendships: the many students for many years in Salamanca; the good captain in Spain, Italy, and twice in Flanders; and God's able agent, the ministering friar who repairs the break in Tomás's life. Does the text not make clear that Tomás is alone only during that small fraction of his years in which the badgering crowd surrounds him? Tomás is alienated only while he is insane, "carente de autoconocimiento" (Avalle-Arce, *Deslindes* 63). He is healthily centered and engaged, and steadily developing toward individuation and exemplary integrity except while he is the captive of a prince and the crowd and under guard at Court.

His strength of character is overwhelmed only for a while and by a motley conspiracy, in which the indiscriminate desire of his immature college friends cooperates with the devouring appetite of a dissolute woman and the poisonous impertinence of her coconspiratrix, abetted by chance. Betrayal does not ruin Tomás, but it leads—as we have seen—to a terrible test, a crisis of involuntary mortification, from which he is brought forth essentially intact and with blessed amnesia. If we see this episode and the total design of Tomás's life in the way Tomás Rueda himself does (in that paragraph of the last page in which he addresses the crowd and attempts to set their understanding straight), we must conclude that the narrator and his project and

³⁴ Quoted by Lida 107.

the resulting narrative are aberrant, whereas the protagonist is not. Tomás is simply a victim of the sort Ruth Benedict describes, one whose native responses are not esteemed by his community, including its scribe. Focused from that perspective, which Cervantes grants Tomás and also puts into our minds, overriding the narrator's shortsightedness, the untold story of Tomás is a celebration of the protagonist's free will, progressive self-realization, discernment, purposeful resourcefulness, adaptability, personal dignity, and estimable attainments. In contrast with Tomás's history is the story the narrator prefers to tell and the crowd helps write, and which the narrator expects his readers to relish.³⁵ It is a trivial tale and a disservice to Tomás and his friends and his readers.

On which side of this abyss do we stand? Shall we be counted among Tomás's friends or in the faceless crowd? Some texts, Rimmon-Kenan reminds us, are ambiguous as to their narrative reliability and make a decision such as this one impossible, "putting the reader in a position of oscillation between mutually exclusive alternatives" (103). This is not such a text, even though interpretative practice suggests otherwise. While the alternatives are mutually exclusive, the narrative is not ambiguous and we have no need to oscillate. The narrator stands with the crowd and listens obsessed to Vidriera, whose repartee is largely reflections of the community's prefabricated views, renewed by a fool's formal novelties. The products of Vidriera's hard-edged back-and-forth volleying are celebrated by the *turba* at courtside, who are comforted and confirmed by a madman's representation of their cultural inheritance of pre-cast values and decided opinions. On our other hand we have testimony (fragmented but formed into a pattern over space and time) about Tomás's wholesomeness from a series of witnesses, all of whom are more reliable than our narrator, and we have the evidence of the protagonist's life-long habit of good choices and consistent and coherent action.

³⁵ I would expand the following comment of Avalle-Arce's to embrace all of Tomás's career, rather than the Rueda portion alone: "Al estatismo de su filosofar [i.e., Vidriera's] le sucede...la dinámica de la soldadesca, lo que sería la verdadera novela de la vida de Tomás Rueda, no del licenciado Vidriera, y que Cervantes [his narrator, I would correct] no escribe" (*Deslindes* 65).

The insufficiency that I claimed for "El licenciado Vidriera" in my opening can be felt and measured by contrasting the fictional narrator's principal work, his anthology of "The Best of Vidriera," with the untold story of Tomás's principal work. The brilliant youth overcomes an episode of madness and achieves fame thanks to his resourcefulness, his valor and his prudence. The narrator is interested only in what he mistakenly takes to be his subject's words of wisdom. It appears that we have to acknowledge and consider two eccentrics of different magnitudes and the relation between them. One is the Glass Graduate, who is crazed for a while, and the other is the narrator, who made the madman famous forever by recollecting and editing his discharges, mostly of venom.

This eccentricity is contagious as well as poisonous from its start (from Salamanca "las nuevas de su locura y de sus respuestas y dichos se extendió por toda Castilla" [56]). What the narrator anthologizes previously had entertained multitudes at Court, from a prince down to unruly youngsters. If they prized Vidriera's banalities but turned their backs on Rueda, were the first receivers not also eccentric, even while they were representatives of the values and opinions of the center, the Court, the heart of the Empire? As Lázaro de Tormes observed, the writer writes not for himself alone, for it is hard work, but for one or another kind of remuneration. Implicitly our narrator writes hoping to share his entertainment with as many readers as he can attract, and he conveys the further implication that he expects that as far and for as long as his text circulates, it will find and gratify like-minded readers: outlying, latter-day eccentrics who missed the show but will buy the book.

We must ponder the implications of the spread of the fictional narrator's appeal into our world, where after nearly four centuries the ranks of admirers of this text have swelled until they number in the hundreds of thousands spread over the globe. How are we to distinguish ourselves from the narrator and the crowd and the implied readers within the imagined world? How are we to protect ourselves from this contagion of eccentricity, which on each concentric level (radiating from Vidriera to the crowd, and via the narrator to his readers, and into our midst) operates without

recourse to reason and recapitulates the individual and collective disfunctionality that is the core of Vidriera's vision of the society around him that he endures, reflects, and dismembers in his mean-minded tongue-lashing?

The answer to this last and most urgent question—how are we to save ourselves?—lies in seeing and responding, as the author would have us see and respond, to the striking incongruity for which his narrator is responsible. On one hand we behold the cartoon outline of Tomás's well-conducted life and his exemplary fame, which, going unrecorded and unstudied, faded before it returned across the Spanish border and never made it back to Court. On the other hand, and in our face, we have the manic interlude (representing less than ten percent of the protagonist's life) to which the narrator devotes a full two thirds of his narrative, thus winning for the mindless Vidriera a fame that is well on its way to becoming eternal.³⁶ Do we align ourselves with Miguel de Cervantes, who sought repeatedly in his art to teach us to be wary of the coercive authority of narrators, or will the incurious and inattentive narrator of this tale continue to beguile us with the wicked witticisms that were a demented adolescent's desperate defense against the madding crowd?

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

³⁶ The author plays with this idea in his last sentence: his narrator repeats the verb *eternizar* in characterizing his protagonist's roundabout course to forgotten fame. Tomás, the idea seems to be, will receive on high the full and fair reading of his life that is denied to readers of "El licenciado Vidriera" by the narrator's prejudiced indifference.

The words of Ruth Benedict that I choose for my epigraph are the middle part of a splendid paragraph that begins: "It is clear that culture may value and make socially available even highly unstable human types. If it chooses to treat their peculiarities as the most valued variants of human behaviour, the individuals in question will rise to the occasion and perform their social roles without reference to our usual ideas of the types who can make social adjustments and those who cannot." The paragraph concludes: "The person unsupported by the standards of his time and place and left naked to the winds of ridicule has been unforgettably drawn in European literature in the figure of Don Quixote." And as well, we must add, in the well-adjusted but lamentably under-supported Tomás, Alonso Quijano's nephew-in-literature.

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