certainly he seems to have been more familiar with their customs and psychology than any other Spanish writer of his age. In any case, Cervantes' tale is not a sociological book, but rather a joyous celebration of the freedom that comes from a wandering life and of Preciosa's beauty. His female leading character has haunted writers of succeeding ages: she reappears in Goethe's Mignon, in Pushkins's *The Gypsies*, in Victor Hugo's Esmeralda (in *Notre Dame de Paris*), as well as in a modern ballad by Federico García Lorca, *Preciosa y el aire (Preciosa and the Wind)*.

As the contemporary Spanish critic Joaquín Casalduero has pointed out, this short story was composed with aesthetic goals in mind, not with the object of portraying faithfully reality or a social milieu. There is a rhythm of song and dance: Preciosa dances and sings in an exceptional manner and we can almost hear the music she dances to. Preciosa is a poetic being, a female Ariel who turns everything she touches into grace and poetry. Her travels constitute a strange adventure, yet there is nothing absurd or impossible in what she does or says. She is exceptional, yet she is not an artificial or impossible being: her grace and agility are always down-to-earth. To sum up: this long short story has always been a favorite among Cervantes' readers; there is a touch of magic in it, yet we are never far away from daily life.

IV The Generous Lover

This story follows after *The Little Gypsy* in the published text. Many scholars think it was written early. In any case, it is one of the weakest and least interesting of the book. Its theme relates it to some of Cervantes' comedies dealing with prison life. Many details seem to come from Cervantes' experiences as a soldier and his capitivity in North Africa, although the action does not take place in Africa but in Turkey, and the protagonists are not Spaniards but Sicilians. It is clearly a story influenced by the "Italian Style." It deals with the voyages of two young lovers, Ricardo and Leonisa, who wander off into the Eastern Mediterranean and are taken prisoner by the Turks. They manage to ward off all the amorous advances to which they are subject during their capitivity, and finally regain their freedom and "live happily ever after." The male hero is too romantic and perfect to be credible. Some of the adventures are also hard to believe. The best feature is the description of sea travel.

V Rinconete and Cortadillo

This is, many believe, one of the best short stories ever written by Cervantes. To read it after *The Generous Lover* can be compared to the experience of reading a good short story in the magazine *The New Yorker* after reading an old-fashioned story by a second-rate imitator of O. Henry. As J. L. Alborg states, "even if Cervantes had not written *Don Quixote*, he would have a place of honor in Spanish literature simply as the author of *Rinconete and Cortadillo*. Furthermore, while recognizing the hazards in any absolute judgment, we would dare to maintain that after *Don Quixote* this novel is the most outstanding work of its kind that has even been written in Spanish."[12]

It is difficult to give a résumé of its plot since there is really no plot, not in any traditional sense of the term. It is rather a picturesque frieze or fresco, a succession of vignettes populated by human types that represent every aspect of the underworld of Seville. We meet at the very outset two young boys, two "apprentice rogues" who have left their homes and are wandering towards Seville in search of fortune and adventures. Within a short time they come in contact with a union of rogues: it is made up of ruffians, assassins for hire, beggars, prostitutes, and other riffraff. They are all perfectly organized under the leadership of a formidable character whose name is Monipodio. This gang has all the characteristics of an institution, following rules and bylaws: one can say that it has industrialized delinquency and has managed to stabilize its relationships with society and the police. Since they work as a group and always help each other, they have achieved a remarkable efficiency. The warm sense of brotherhood, of goals shared, of dangers to be surmounted by sticking together, permeates each act of this gang. They know how to elude the pressures of the police—that is, when they are not cooperating with it by corrupting it and offering the policemen a share of the business, "a piece of the action." In order not to leave anything to chance, they even have their heavenly patrons, their favorite saints to whom they offer gifts and masses, like any other honorable institution. They want to be on good terms with everybody, and succeed most of the time.

This picture is remarkable for its mixture of cynicism and realism, the precision in the details of its setting, the ease and charm of the

dialogue, the psychological truth in the situations described. These rogues can be witty; they are smart and alert, and above all, they know how to enjoy humor. This picture of local color slowly becomes a picture of implacable satire of all the "upper classes," all the so-called respectable people who not only made possible the activity of the underworld, but also seemed to tolerate it and made it prosper because they themselves were busy in parallel efforts to cheat and rob their fellowmen.

It has always been said that a writer who wants to succeed must write about an environment he knows well. Cervantes' knowledge of the milieu he describes is precise and rings true: he was obviously well acquainted with the underworld, whether because of his long stay in Seville, a city that was almost completely in the hands of the underworld, or due to his experiences in jail. Seville was at that time a fascinating city. It was wealthy and corrupt. It offered a variety of experiences and of human types not to be found in any other Spanish city. A writer gifted with sensitivity and the capacity for accurate observation—and curious about every angle of human life—such as Cervantes, was to find in Seville all the lessons that he could not have found in Salamanca, the Sorbonne, Oxford, or Cambridge. His long residence in Seville, the kind of people whom he met because of his occupation and his social position, and even his frequent jail sentences, allowed him to acquire first-hand experience with Spain's gangsters, with their customs, and their dialect. The fact that the novel—or, if we wish, the long short story—was still a virgin field where any writer could dictate the rules of the game allowed him to develop his characters: the stage was still too rigid for such fluid material, his genius too restless to limit the development and the descriptions that make up this novelette.

The conversation of rogues, as reported by Cervantes, is an intriguing mixture of conventional piety and cynicism. They do not see themselves as outsiders, but rather as intelligent members of society, able to earn their living without hard effort and always keeping open the channels of communication to the Heavenly powers. One of them explains thus their behavior to young Cortadillo: "We say our rosary at intervals during all the days of the week, and many of us don't steal on Friday or hold converse with any woman named Mary on Saturdays." The young man replies: "All this . . . fills me with admiration, but I wonder if your worship could tell me whether

you have any penance to perform. Does any restitution have to be made?" The rogue replies, "As for restitution, don't mention the word. That is an impossibility, owing to the many parts into which a theft has to be divided before each agent and contractor has received its share. And so the original thief would find it impossible to make restitution, especially since there is no one to compel us to do anything of the kind, seeing that we never go to confession, and if letters of excommunication are launched against us, they never come to our notice, for we avoid the church on the days where they are read out and go there only when there is a Jubilee, so that we can reap a rich harvest from the crowds of people who gather there." Cortadillo presses on: "If this is all these gentlemen do, how can they say that their lives are good and holy?" The answer: "Why not? What is bad? Is it not worse to be a heretic or a renegade, or to kill your father, or mother, or be a Solomite?" "Your worship must mean Sodomite." "I mean that."[13]

We are of course used to literary explorations of the underground: they are commonplace in contemporary literature. It was new ground for Cervantes to cover, and it would be difficult to find a parallel to these pages outside the Spanish picaresque literature of the period.

In view of its background and its protagonists, it is clear that *Rinconete and Cortadillo* belongs, at least in principle, to the world of the picaresque novel. And yet Cervantes, who borrowed so much from all the literary genres of his period, always surpassed and changed them in his creative process. His short story differs from the usual picaresque novel in certain formal aspects, in what we may call its technique; Cervantes' rogues do not relate their own adventures in the first person singular, as is the custom in all the picaresque novels. More important, Cervantes' tale lacks the bitterness, the pessimism of most of these novels. It also lacks the moralizing tone of many of these tales. The picaresque novel developed independently from Cervantes. It was born somewhat earlier and followed a different path. Cervantes never imitated it slavishly or even clearly, not even in *Rinconete and Cortadillo*, which deals with more or less the same environment that the picaresque novels describe. We do not find in Cervantes' tale the deep psychology of marginal men that *Guzmán de Alfarache* exposes. Cervantes' goal points towards an intense gaiety, a luminous enjoyment, a sort of ar-

tistic indulgence in the forbidden fruit, which makes us forget the ugly and criminal aspects of the lives he describes.

Damon Runyon, the great teller of tales of American gangsters, could approve of Cervantes' characters. Cervantes looks at the underworld with the eyes of a poet. His style is therefore very different from the style of the true picaresque writers. It is fluid and whimsical, while the style of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, for instance, the typical picaresque novel according to some critics, and according to others the forerunner of all picaresque novels, is sober and spare, and the style of Mateo Alemán, the celebrated writer of *Guzmán de Alfarache*, is dry, witty, bitter. It is therefore an illusion for us to think that Cervantes invaded the field of picaresque literature: we can observe that Rinconete and Cortadillo, his two would-be rogues, are not the victims but the agents of the action. In the picaresque novels, we are always confronted with a desperate hero in search of survival. As a contemporary Spanish critic, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, has pointed out, we should recall that two of the main traits of the picaresque novel are, first, that we usually deal with the story of a vagabond without any means of fortune who has to find any means to survive: hunger is therefore the antihero's first and foremost motivation. in order to satisfy his hunger with the least possible work, the picaroon will do anything he can—commit any crime, betray his friends, debase himself—without in the meantime achieving any other goal. He manages to survive, and this is the only aim that counts for him. He serves several masters; he begs, steals and dupes. The world, as seen from his limited viewpoint, seems to have no higher existential goal than his own. Cynicism pervades his every thought. When some characters do seem to aim for higher goals, we are immediately warned by the author—or by the picaroon who is his mouthpiece—that it is all vanity, empty gesturing.

Compared with the heroes of early fiction, especially with the dashing knights of the chivalry romances, and also with some of Cervantes' heroes in his short stories, the picaroon is of course an antihero. He may be lowly, but he is everpresent: the second trait mentioned by Blanco Aguinaga (and one that we have mentioned before) is that the adventures of the picaroon are always narrated in autobiographical form.

As Blanco Aguinaga sees it, "from the fusion of these two traits we may derive a third in which substance and form are quite the same:

the picaroon is always a lone wanderer, a true exile who never achieves authentic dialogue with other men because most of them distrust him and he distrusts them all, once he has acquired a little experience."[14] As the story develops, we begin to realize that every aspect of "reality" is conveyed to us through the single lens of the picaroon: he is the one who digests for us both his own adventures and the events that befall other characters; he is lonely and bitter, and so is the view of the world that we are allowed to see in his descriptions; the loneliness of the picaroon results in a sort of total isolation from the outside world. Therefore, it avoids outside judgment and justifies itself: it is precisely because he is lonely and desperate that he can afford to judge and condemn everyone else. How could they understand him and share his experiences? He can at least see them from the outside—and his bitterness filters into every aspect of other peoples' lives, contaminates every idealization, every moral principle. Reality becomes distorted, perhaps, and yet the reader begins to suspect that this is the way the world was shaped from the very beginning: the picaroon is unhappy not only because he is lonely and despised, but also because in a humble way he is part of a world that is evil, humble, and to be despised.

Rinconete and Cortadillo differs from the picaresque, as we have pointed out, in the fact that it is a tale that seems to open up to an undetermined future: there is no strict chain that links its antiheroes to a specific place and makes them move to and fro like puppets suspended from a string. Its very beginning seems to be an accident, something that happened by mere chance—and perhaps would not have happened if circumstances had been slightly different: "At the inn of Molinillo, which lies on the famous plain of Alcudia as we travel from Castile to Andalusia, on a hot summer day two boys of perhaps fourteen or fifteen met by chance . . ."[15] This is the beginning of a story in which most of what happens will be revealed through dialogue, the dialogue of the two boys, and also their conversations with the rogues in Seville: yet there is nothing that can be absolutely pinned down, clearly and scientifically defined, in a dialogue that is usually full of feints and clever wordplay. No aspect of the present will propel the two would-be rogues into the future against their will: just as Don Quixote let himself be guided by Rocinante, so they are going to let themselves be guided by chance, luck, destiny.

The two boys hesitate at first to speak the truth to each other, yet finally they tell each other their names and discuss their families. Afterward they join forces, deceive the muleteer, rob the travellers that are taking them to Seville, and end up in the courtyard of Monipodio, the king of local gangsters. What happens then is almost a tale within the tale: the two boys observe what goes on without passing any moral judgment; as the tale unfolds our admiration for the rogues of Seville grows, and so does the wonder and admiration of the two lads, and yet they seem to come to the conclusion that the game is too dangerous for them. They are not ready for it, and Rinconete, who seems to be the moralist in this strange duo, or perhaps is the more timid and prudent of the two boys, argues that it is time to go elsewhere and find less dangerous ways to earn a living. Yet the end is left wide open: "But in spite of all this, led by his youth and inexperience, he went on with this life for several months, during which occurred things that call for lengthier exposition, and so it is left for another occasion to recount his life and miracles, along with those of his master Monipodio . . ."[16] The future can be only guessed at—we see it through a glass, darkly. Once more human freedom is depicted as fluid: it cannot be pinned down, the reader remains with the hope of more adventures, more life, endless possibilities.

Cervantes introduces an element of uncertainty from the very beginning: a chance encounter can lead us towards a number of paths, no conclusion is unavoidable. The European novel of the following centuries will take a cue from such uncertain a framework. The environment is to be taken into account, it can explain much; yet it should not overwhelm the characters, for where there is no freedom there can be no spontaneity, no surprise for the reader—or for the characters. The idea that the characters of a novel can have an autonomous being, that they should be as independent as possible from their creator, was bound to play a basic role in the development of the modern novel. There is only a limited number of novels, some of them undoubtedly good ones, in which human freedom is stifled: the novels created by Zola and his followers in which the extreme Naturalistic theories come into full bloom. In these works it is the background that decides every development: from the very beginning the characters are slaves to their social and economic milieu, to their biological heredity. Therefore we are right in seeing in these novels an offshoot of the Spanish picaresque literature. Zola

and Mateo Alemán are guided by high moral principles: art must be placed at the service of social criticism, literature should become the handmaiden of politics. Soviet social realism is basically not too different from this trend. Cervantes would have disagreed: he was not averse to criticizing the Establishment, but he thought that art had a destiny of its own. Social criticism was a welcome by-product of the work of art, not its main ingredient or its major goal.

Dogmatic distortions have no place in Cervantes' version of picaresque realism. Moralizing was not his favorite role. Perhaps Carlos Blanco Aguinaga is the critic who has come closest to the definition of Cervantes as a novelist when he states: "Writing novels for Cervantes is, in some sense, letting do and letting live in the created world of half-truths and half-lies which no one has yet known how to demarcate satisfactorily. This is a vision of the world that tells us that the novelist (a most rare inventor) is indeed like a god who by the word casts forth reality, though like a god perhaps a bit skeptical of his ability to judge, however confident of the freedom of his creation and full of love for it."[17]

To put it succinctly, Cervantes at his best—in a tale like *Rinconete and Cortadillo*, and also in *Don Quixote*—is opposed to the facile Manichean division between "the good guys" and "the bad guys." His picture of reality is complex and ambiguous: he involves the reader in this conception. He avoids absolute moral judgments because he does not think they are possible or desirable—especially in literature. What he gives us is a multifaceted presentation of lives coming into being, struggling to become: in this sense he can be called an Existentialist writer.

VI The Spanish Englishwoman

To read this story after *Rinconete and Cortadillo* is to feel disappointed. Cervantes falls back on the tricks of the Italian school of short story writers. This tale is a curious mixture: on the one hand, romantic adventures, strange coincidences, the usual tricks; on the other, old personal memories of the author.

This is the plot: In one of the sackings of the city of Cadiz by the English, an English warrior captures and brings to England a six-year-old girl, Isabela. She is brought up by the Englishman and his wife, who are Catholic. After a period of time, the son of the warrior, Ricaredo, falls in love with Isabela and asks her hand in marriage.