Introduction

Mi pluma y mi tintero me valen lo que quiero.

—Spanish proverb

From the *relación* to the captivity narrative, the Hispanic imperial project relies heavily on the first-person authority of genres whose authenticity undergirds the ideological armature of national consolidation, expansion, and conquest. At the same time, increasing pressures for religious conformity in Spain as across Europe require subjects to bare their interiority to external authorities, in intimate confessions of their faith. As it emerges in this charged context, the unreliable voice of the picaresque poses a rhetorical challenge to the authority of the witness, destabilizing the possibility of trustworthy representation precisely because he or she is so intimately involved with the material. The picaresque also limns itineraries beyond the metropole, transcending the limited range of foundational texts such as *La Celestina* and *Lazarillo de Tormes* to model alternative relationships to Spain and Spanishness from a distance. Via its imaginative geographies, it thus interrogates the conceptual and actual limits of nation and empire: while the texts themselves chart communities that transcend the nation, they also challenge the idea of a bounded polity from a transnational and imperial optic. *Knowing Fictions* shows, first, how the fictional serves as an early site of skepticism within Spanish letters, and second, how itinerant texts complicate both national and literary affiliations. It reveals the picaresque as both a writerly and a readerly strategy, problematizing truth and authority while implicating the broader textual apparatus of imperium in its fictionality and interestedness.

The picaresque is largely a retrospective critical construction, with Cervantes as an early and perspicacious adopter: not only is it famously debated and debatable, but there are as many examples of texts that might arguably be picaresques as those generally admitted to belong to the club.[1] As Claudio Guillén notes, "No work embodies completely the picaresque genre"[2]—and

this seems to be even more true for the picaresque than for other kinds. Rather than reengaging this debate, my goal here is to examine the picaresque affiliations of complex, adjacent fictions—para-picaresques, if we were to imagine solid boundaries—as well as widely recognized picaresque texts, to examine the ideological work that they do. In their own moment and over a much longer history of reception, I will suggest, picaresques help to construct knowing readers, of the sort that Cervantes so often seems to address.

My readings build on Guillén's marvelously economic definition of the picaresque as "the fictional confession of a liar,"[3] to explore the historical and epistemological implications of the form. Beyond Guillén's useful construction of genre as "a problem-solving model," for writers, he also characterizes the picaresque as "a procedure for ordering the continuum of individual literary facts; and, as a critical perspective, perhaps fruitful at the moment of reading."[4] John Parrack extends Guillén's insights to argue that the picaresque "underscores its own narrative silences," inviting a particular "'game' of interpretation."[5] Parrack locates the picaresque's development in a historical context of print technology, increasingly widespread literacy, and the concomitant development of silent reading, all of which enable a more active—and even suspicious—reader. As the individual reading subject is granted more authority, Parrack argues, "picaresque discourse not only acknowledges but invites and requires interpretation as an active force to challenge existing systems of authority and textual 'truths.'"[6] *Knowing Fictions* proposes both a historical and a theoretical approach: it situates the picaresque in relation to imperial expansion and confessional suspicion, which render narrative authority singularly charged, and simultaneously proposes the form as a tool for reading. By venturing beyond the echt-picaresque, I explore what framing a text, rather than simply classifying it as picaresque or noting its inherent generic affiliation, can reveal.

Picaresque Framing

Some years ago I essayed the most radical version of this critical move, deliberately and perversely framing an English New World relation as a picaresque in order to complicate its construction of national and religious allegiances in a context of inter-imperial rivalry.[7] The narrative of "one Miles Philips, Englishman, one of the company put on shoare Northward of Panuco, in the West Indies by Mr. John Hawkins" covers events occurring from 1567 to 1582, and was published in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations of the*

English Nation (1589, 1598–1600). Hawkins's voyages of the 1560s launched the triangular trade between Europe, Africa, and the New World: the English took on human "marchandize" on the coast of Guinea, then sold the enslaved Africans in the Caribbean. On the third voyage, which was to prove so fateful for the young Philips, a storm forced the English ships into the port of Veracruz, New Spain, where the Spanish fleet largely destroyed them. Having lost most of his ships, Hawkins chose to abandon a portion of his crew to fend for themselves in New Spain while he tried to reach England with his remaining human cargo.

Richard Helgerson—whose insights in person and in print I sorely miss—argued that Philips's text asserts the emergence of an English identity that survives multiple trials—abandonment by Hawkins, wandering in the New World wilderness, interrogation by the Inquisition, the lure of Spanish riches.[8] Yet the narrative's retrospective quality and its deliberate re-presentation of its protagonist's adventures simultaneously cast that identity into doubt. My reading explores how the use of a Spanish literary frame—the picaresque—to analyze this English text serves to interrogate its construction of English identity, revealing the rhetorical maneuvers involved in performing and sustaining English national difference after the fact. For Philips is caught in a bind: his survival in New Spain clearly depended on his adaptability and even his ability to pass as a Spaniard, yet his reintegration into English society as he tells his story rests on proving that he remained distinctly English while among the enemy.

At the heart of Philips's account lies a harrowing interrogation of the ragged company of suspected "Lutherans" by the Inquisition, during which the English are asked to confirm their belief in transubstantiation and other Catholic dogma. Yet in narrating these events, Philips sidesteps his disavowal of reformed religion, and instead stresses the perilous alternative to acquiescence with his captors: "To which if we answered not yea, then was there no way but death."[9] While older or perhaps less pragmatic members of the crew die for their true beliefs, Philips serves five years in a monastery. The retrospective narrator must thread a fine rhetorical needle here, persuading his readers that whereas he needed to lie during the interrogation to survive, his present account of what transpired is completely trustworthy. We are meant to believe that his repudiation of Protestantism in New Spain was a necessary fabrication, yet the account we read is, if not heroic, at least fully authentic.

Framing Miles Philips's narrative as a picaresque is an extrinsic critical move: his account is not formally a picaresque, or even a literary text, nor do we have any evidence that Philips was familiar with texts such as *Lazarillo*.[10]

Yet as an "allegory of legitimation"[11] for a deracinated subject, the picaresque productively frames Philips's transatlantic narrative of vexed allegiances and protean transformations. The Spanish form elucidates this peculiar English narration of adventures in New and Old Spain both by revealing its distinct shape and by casting suspicion upon the narrator's claims. Thus a willfully perverse formal contextualization within a precise historical setting highlights the rhetorical maneuvers involved in performing and sustaining English difference, and reveals in the text ambiguities and hesitations that are occluded even by other literary referents, such as the epic, with which Helgerson frames the text.

In *Knowing Fictions*, I return to the Old World, tracing Mediterranean itineraries of diaspora, captivity, and imperial rivalry in a corpus that engages picaresque conventions to contest narrative authority. I focus on texts that fit uneasily within standard categories of genre and geography: in addition to Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*—one of the few texts generally agreed by critics to represent the picaresque—I explore Francisco Delicado's *La Lozana andaluza*, the anonymous *Viaje de Turquía*, Cervantes's plays of captivity, and his various versions of the picaresque in the *Novelas ejemplares*. My canon is provisional rather than exhaustive: I offer it as a first sally beyond the lines of genre, a model for how reading with and through the picaresque might transform our understanding of a broad range of texts. My goal is not to lard the canon of the picaresque with runners-up and wannabes; I am less interested in how we delimit the form than in what we can do with it, mobilizing genre as a tool for our own reading. Intensive close reading in a picaresque vein, I argue, reveals connections and operations that cumulatively challenge not just social verities but their epistemological grounding. At the same time, although *Knowing Fictions* deals exclusively with texts explicitly engaged in literary play, I want to suggest how recognizing their strategies may prove useful in rereading historiographic materials often marked by similar ambiguities.

Critics have effectively charted the close connections between the picaresque as it emerges in the sixteenth century and the bureaucratic, legal, and inquisitional discourses of a vertiginously expanding and transforming Habsburg empire. As state and religious institutions required subjects to provide a narrative account of themselves, they produced not just subjects—in an early form of Althusserian interpellation—but also fictions. Yet even as witnessing becomes increasingly important as a guarantor of knowledge, the picaresque reveals that the compelled or interested stories of witnesses can be simultaneously more persuasive and less true. They are more authoritative, to be sure, given the narrators' proximity to the action, but also more interested,

more evidently narrated for a particular reason and organized around deliberate emphases and omissions. Because they engage so closely the forms of knowledge authorized by experience, picaresques introduce doubt into the circuit of interpellation and subjectification.

I am intrigued by the possibilities of narration—whether in the first person or not—that problematizes first-person authority, revealing instead an unreliability born of intimacy and complicity. In the most straightforward version of this dynamic, the narrating *pícaro* demonstrates that across society things are not what they seem, especially when viewed from below, while his or her own narration remains fundamentally unreliable and self-serving. Yet beyond the *pícaro*'s own disenchantment with a society in which lying and stealing are widespread,[12] the picaresque sows doubt on narrative authority itself. From the equivocal immediacy of the exculpatory narrative that Lazarillo addresses to "Vuestra Merced," to Guzmán's dizzying alternation between moralizing and immorality, the knowing *pícaro*, cognizant of all the tricks of a narrator's trade, gives us a wised-up story. Whether narrated in the first person or not, the narrative foregrounds the *pícaro*'s point of view, and thus contrasts markedly with related genres, such as English "coney-catching" literature, that promise to expose the rogue. In the knowing fictions that concern me here, the immediacy that supports the *pícaro*'s claim to narrative authority—his or her central role—vies with an interestedness and partiality that undo that authority. Beyond the limited credibility that the reader might grant a marginal narrator—what Miranda Fricker might term the "epistemic injustice" of this testimonial transaction[13]—the unreliability of the narrative remains inextricable from its situatedness, its closeness to what is being narrated, often in the first person. Hence the picaresque functions as the vexed double of first-person narration that touts experience as the basis of authority, whether the New World *relación*, the Mediterranean captivity narrative, or even the confession. As a skeptical response to the outsize importance of first-person accounts, the picaresque reflects on the epistemological challenges of a particular moment and its outsize valorization of the witness.[14]

Beyond the unreliable first-person narrator, other forms in this early, wildly experimental era of prose fiction also challenge the reliability of the witness. Dialogue, which often includes long stretches of first-person narration, foregrounds problems of perspectivism, partiality, and situated truths, particularly in its portrayal of an intradiegetic audience that is often as complicitly interested as the narrator but with different goals in view. From *Lozana*, in which the narrator enters the story and contemplates an erotic encounter with his opinionated character, to the *Viaje de Turquía*, in which corrupt

listeners hang on the captive's every word so they can learn how to lie more effectively, intimacy and opportunism erode narrative authority. Cervantes's kaleidoscopic exploration of picaresque variants in his *Novelas*—upper-class *pícaros*, two *pícaros*, dogs as *pícaros*—also probes what characters know and how they relay that knowledge, with the reader as voyeur, unacknowledged traveling companion, or even reluctant dupe. In all these cases, knowingness adumbrates the possibility of knowing.

At the same time, these are expansive texts: they explode the stifling small-town geography of *La Celestina*, and even the domestic itinerance of *Lazarillo*, with large-scale crossings to Italy, North Africa, the Ottoman Empire. Their events are relayed across the Mediterranean, while their narrators reveal how differently they operate in different spaces. Far-ranging picaresques foreground the challenges of relayed authority, calling our attention to the particular exigencies of trusting a narrator who describes what the reader has never seen or experienced, and who acknowledges the situatedness of his or her own telling. Their geographic expansiveness underscores the fragility of imperial and ideological mechanisms all too dependent on subjects' self-presentation. From the equivocal self-fashioning of Lozana or Guzmán in Italy to the recollected faith of the former captive Pedro de Urdemalas, an expanded world offers a more distanced, nuanced view of empire, and of the more flexible selves that might exist within it.

In this expansive version, the picaresque allows us to consider how narrative both renders and complicates the project of encompassing a larger world, one whose very dimensions make the authority of the witness at once crucial and untenable.[15] At the same time, it problematizes assumptions of access to the "little world," in John Donne's felicitous term, of subjectivity, interiority, and faith, reminding us that narrators who are uniquely positioned to relay their own truths often become less reliable the greater the stakes.[16] If the early sixteenth century featured the internalization of religious experience, through both Catholic movements that promoted a more intimate connection with God and the Protestant rejection of external marks of faith, it also saw the extensive policing of that experience, whether by an Inquisition suspicious of heterodoxy or by various state agents attempting to enforce a specific official religiosity. The externalization of what had become interior in compelled accounts of belief raises important questions about the narrating "I" whom the picaresque brings to the forefront. If intimacy or, even more problematically, self-interest compromises reliability, what is the basis for knowledge? How, in confessional accounts, can we distinguish knowing from knowingness?

Knowing Fictions focuses closely on a corpus of singularly self-aware texts, while reconstructing the intellectual and ideological contexts in which they operate. Although these texts seek particular effects as literature, they also evince and complicate larger debates about truth and knowledge in the period, from art history's exploration of the power of the image as guarantor of truth, to history of science's inquiries into the social construction of authority and the development of modern empiricism, to the broader historical examination of the epistemological and representational challenges of Iberian empire and metropolitan consolidation. In dialogue with these important developments across the disciplines, as well as with the burgeoning study of fiction and interiority, *Knowing Fictions* argues for the particular role of the literary as a locus of skepticism and resistance.

Witnessing and the Arts of Empire

The horizons of European exploration and conquest expanded exponentially in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from the early Portuguese voyages to Africa and India to the transformative encounter, first by Spain and soon thereafter by other Europeans, with the New World.[17] From late fifteenth-century narratives of travel to Jerusalem, still envisioning a latter-day crusade, to Columbus's imperial purview on the New World, witnessing became a key source of the traveler's textual authority. While the immediacy of first-person narration conveyed to readers the original proximity of experience, travelers, illustrators, and printers also developed multiple strategies to construct and support their accounts.

An important early collaboration, widely read across Europe, made the case for the visual as guarantor of travelers' authority. Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio* (1486), an account of his voyage to Jerusalem, foregrounds firsthand observation, bolstered in no small measure by the illustrations of the artist and engraver Erhard Reuwich, whom the aristocratic patron employed to record the experience. Above and beyond the narration, Reuwich records from observation the peoples and animals encountered en route (including, significantly, a unicorn), while rendering city views from an embedded, firsthand perspective. As Elizabeth Ross argues, Breydenbach enhances his narrative with Reuwich's visual authority, constructing a doubly powerful version of witnessing as the basis for knowledge.[18] The text traveled across Europe in a multitude of editions, with the reproduced images warranting its authority and authenticity.[19]

If the construction of authority was instrumental for an account of travel to Jerusalem, it would be all the more crucial for describing the Americas, a world never before contemplated in biblical or classical texts. However fitfully, eyewitness authority replaced that of preexisting texts, in what Anthony Pagden calls the "autoptic imagination."[20] New World accounts could not easily appeal to the extant canon of authoritative texts, or even build upon them, given that their matter had never previously been contemplated. Instead, "authority could only be guaranteed (if at all) by an appeal to the authorial voice," to "the inherent credibility of the 'I' who has 'been there.'"[21] "Esto que he dicho," claims chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, "no se puede aprender en Salamanca, ni en Boloña, ni en París" ["What I have said cannot be learned in Salamanca, or in Bologna, or in Paris"].[22] The self-referential quality of autoptic authorization makes it both self-contained and self-sufficient, yet also renders it fragile. In the absence of external scaffolding for authority, everything rides on the narrator's reliability and probity.

As direct observation became a crucial guarantor of accuracy in describing the New World, visual artists supported the work of writers, as Reuwich had done for Breydenbach. As Pamela H. Smith notes: "The desire . . . to couple (artisanal) visual and (humanist) verbal accuracy with the communicative potential of images is often accompanied by what appears to be a new emphasis on first-person observation and autoptic proof, especially in an age when news out of the newfound world was arriving thick and fast. Images became an important way of recording, collecting, cataloguing, and witnessing the curious, the marvelous, and the particular."[23] In a famous instance of this desire to bolster narrative authority with visual confirmation, Oviedo laments that he does not have an artist with him to record the unfamiliar nature that he describes, "porque es más para verle pintado de mano de Berruguete u otro excelente pintor como él, o aquel Leonardo de Vince, o Andrea Manteña, famosos pintores que yo conocí en Italia" ["for it would be better to see it painted by the hand of Berruguete or another excellent painter such as he, or that Leonardo da Vinci, or Andrea Mantegna, famous painters whom I met in Italy"].[24] While maintaining the superiority of eyewitnessing over book learning, Oviedo nonetheless longs for visual supports for his narrative, from painters whom he has met personally and can presumably vouch for. Thus witnessing anticipates and invites empirical observation, yet circles back to established measures of authority—the artists are not only famous, but personally known to Oviedo.

Anxieties over what constituted sufficient narrative authority were magnified by the Iberian empire's widespread reliance on the written word. In Ángel Rama's hugely influential formulation, Spain has long been recognized as a "lettered" empire.[25] Explorers and conquerors wrote their own accounts, which notaries and chroniclers followed hard upon, in what historians describe as a "notarial culture" with specific textual models for relaying to the Crown and its representatives events that occurred far from the metropole.[26] While this textual bureaucracy, with its *relaciones*, *memoriales*, letters, and histories, helped establish and maintain the colonial regime, it also offered the means to individual advancement. First-person accounts of services rendered to the Crown, and individual achievements worthy of *mercedes*, or rewards, include not just the formal, codified genre of *relaciones de méritos y servicios*, but a much broader range of accounts of exploration, all of which are written, at least in part, to justify the narrator's actions and either claim rewards or avoid negative consequences. From Columbus to Cortés to Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, many of the most influential texts in the colonial canon offer accounts designed to excuse and promote their author. Influential histories of the New World, from Oviedo's *Historia general* to Bernal Díaz's belated *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales de los incas*, also rely on the authority of the witness, often contrasting his or her own proximity to events with the distance—geographic, chronological, cultural—that hampered previous chroniclers.[27] As recent historiographies increasingly recognize, however, in these accounts "the actors themselves are supplying us with rather slick narratives in order to emphasize their personal integrity, the objectivity of the way they conduct official business, and the transparency of their motives."[28]

The challenge of authoritatively relaying new worlds was singularly productive in the literary realm, on both sides of the Atlantic. Mary Gaylord has shown how the proliferation of the "true history"—from *relaciones* to *historias*—produced a range of texts that flourish "on the frontiers between reality and fantasy," as they "paradoxically call into question, along with the verisimilitude of the places, people, and events they detail, the very authorial privilege they invoke."[29] Gaylord notes how fragile were the boundaries between fictional and historiographical accounts:

> The lived experience of astonishingly new worlds, and the urgent need of Spaniards in Europe and America to write about them, put the earnest historian and the literary liar in the same boat. Indeed,

> most early modern writers, whether of fiction or of history, wrestled with one and the same set of representational paradoxes. For both, after all, had to make things "never before heard or seen" present in the here and now of their audiences' imaginations. Both had to deal in and with things "not here": fiction, with scenes and characters that weren't here by definition, that didn't and never would exist outside the pages of books; contemporary history, with radically new scenes "not here," because dramatically increased physical distance precluded the widespread sharing of experience. . . . Each writer of history had to invent his own chain of witnesses and documents and to work actively to maintain his authority in the face of his readers' incredulity, of the possible appearance of other witnesses with other stories, or of chance turns of event that would require the rewriting of the entire narrative.[30]

Even in the absence of explicitly competing narratives, I suggest, narrative authority could be productively challenged by this sense of provisionality and partiality, particularly in texts that set out to interrogate the givenness of a narrator's claims.

My point in locating the picaresque within this context of competing accounts is not to suggest that it contrasts with the truth of the archive, but to signal, as Gaylord does so suggestively, the contiguities between what we now deem "literary" and "historiographic." Natalie Zemon Davis, in her influential *Fiction in the Archive*, alerted us to how powerfully fictionality operates within specific genres of the historical record, as petitioners to the courts shape and mold their narratives to particular ends.[31] More recently, Kathryn Burns has forcefully argued the need for historians to "look *at* our archives, not just through them," in order to recognize how "people's truths collided and competed" in the production of truth-effects and "textual fictions of agency."[32] The picaresque, as a mode not just of writing but of reading, allows us to recognize how situated, partial, and negotiated those truths are. If, as Burns argues, "Notarial records are . . . always in implicit dialogue with an imagined litigious future,"[33] the picaresque collapses that future skepticism into the reader's present, underscoring the difficulty of believing an interested witness, no matter how carefully his or her narrative has been codified.

By foregrounding interested knowing, the picaresque also ironizes the force of the captivity narrative, which claimed to be uniquely positioned to transmit information about religious and cultural others in an expanding

empire.[34] As Lisa Voigt has demonstrated, narratives of captivity play a key role both in the turn to experiential authority in the period, and in the concomitant development of fictions that claimed to offer both truth and entertainment. Captives, Voigt argues, could offer themselves as privileged intermediaries whose knowledge, acquired among other peoples, could serve to support the imperial project.[35] Captivity narratives also served to solidify cultural identities and in particular religious difference, by foregrounding the immutability of the captive's faith even in the face of death. But if the captivity narrative invokes the martyrology, it must also finesse the narrator's actual survival through some sort of accommodation. Hence when the *Viaje de Turquía* foregrounds the unreliability of its narrator, a former captive, and the venality of his clerical audience, it challenges the authority of the witness and the religious hierarchies that captivity narratives ostensibly uphold. A narrator who knows too much—especially about a rival power or confessional other—can be as problematic as one who does not convince.

Inquisition, Interiority, and Fictionality

> Vuestra merced escribe se le escriba y se le relate el caso muy por extenso . . .
>
> [Your Grace writes you should be written to and the case related in great detail . . .]
>
> —*Lazarillo de Tormes*

Above and beyond the specific context of empire, critics have long noted the connections between the picaresque and those early modern discourses that serve to examine subjects or account for their actions. Perhaps the most influential account, by Roberto González Echevarría, links the picaresque with the *relación* as confessional modes before "the Law": "The individual conscience, which can and does err, writes to the embodiment of natural law (Lázaro to Your Lordship, Cortés to Charles V) to exculpate and recapture his or her legitimacy. This is the beginning of the Picaresque, and of the novel: the story of a new, civil individual, who writes on his own, subject to no myths and no tradition."[36] Robert Folger usefully expands upon González Echevarría's insight with detailed explorations, first, of *Lazarillo* as "a response to th[e] state-induced demand for autobiography,"[37] and second, with a survey of New

World texts actually prepared to satisfy official inquiry and seek recompense, as *relaciones de méritos y servicios*. David Gitlitz focuses on autobiographical confession to the tribunals of the Inquisition, noting: "the ingrained rhetorical strategies of disclosure and evasion, strategies of self-promotion and vindication, and habits of incessant self-monitoring with their associated hyperconsciousness of one's identity as a reportorial voice, so harrowed the psychic soil of Spain that the autobiographical genres easily took root."[38] Because intellectuals and *conversos* were constantly watched, Gitlitz argues, "survival required habits of thought which prepared one to give autobiographical account on demand."[39] Open-ended and deliberately vague, inquisitorial processes always welcomed—and often compelled—more stories.

Generative though these readings might be, they are primarily interested in the sources or origins of the picaresque, and treat it as largely mimetic of those genres. My argument picks up where Gitlitz leaves off: having noted the striking resemblances in the narrative strategies of the fictional *Lazarillo* and the inquisitional confessions as they attempt to satisfy their respective interrogators, he concludes, "Yet we—their wider public—perceive their inconsistencies and hypocrisies in ways that produce effects radically different from those the authors intended."[40] Gitlitz does not say what those effects might be, or how either authors or readers, as opposed to the narrators, of the literary texts might seek precisely those "radically different" effects. Literariness is clearly one of these: readers savor the irony, contradiction, and indirection of the picaresque in a way that would be obscene for the inquisitional confession. More importantly, knowing fictions inherently challenge the larger apparatus of interpellation that relies upon trust-worthy relation or confession. They rehearse and announce what cannot be said about the official discourses: that the latter rely on narratives riddled with interestedness, self-protective strategies, and deliberate omissions. Picaresque texts thus offer a critique of the structures of knowledge and control upon which the imperial project relies. Although they do not always leave evidence of their reception—many had limited or manuscript circulation—they can help us reconstruct a constellation of resistant, skeptical voices. As interested, partial responses to "the Law," knowing fictions reveal the literary as a site of contestation, from which the mechanisms of interpellation and subjectification can productively be challenged.

What might this contestation look like, beyond our own critical claims for the texts? Reconstructing reception is complex: as I have noted, many of these texts leave little evidence of their impact on readers. Literary history offers one kind of corroboration: Cervantes, who appears often in these

pages, was himself an astute reader of picaresques—possibly the *Viaje*, certainly the *Guzmán*. His ironic response to picaresque narrators demonstrates that the challenge they pose was abundantly recognized in some quarters: thus the early modern writer provides evidence of what at least one early modern reader could take from the texts.

More broadly, modern scholars have begun to identify cognate phenomena that suggest we may need to revise our understandings of the policing of interiority in the early modern Hispanic world. In a recent study of inquisitional interrogations of would-be mystics, Dale Shuger shows the doubts that emerged as religious interiority became increasingly incompatible with the legal structures that attempted to control it. Shuger suggests that this dynamic, which long predates secularization, reveals the Inquisition's decline "from within": "the incompatibility of legal discourse and a post-Reformation language of mystic spirituality forced a separation of God and law, the withdrawal of God to private spaces, and the atrophying of an institution created to treat religious practice as a matter for public control."[41] What Shuger calls the "discernment of interiority"[42] presented problems akin to those posed by ironic texts: readers were required to assess the value of signs and opaque language that could point to diametrically opposed meanings, in what became for the legal process an impossible bind.[43] Paul Johnson, for his part, has recently traced the Inquisition's problematic attempts to read the sincerity of those who were accused of heresy and testified before its tribunals.[44] Attempts to codify a hermeneutics of authenticity based on forms of bodily expression coexisted with the increasing codification of gesture as performance in the world of the theater, where verisimilitude, rather than truth, was the goal. Inquisitorial attempts to develop an "emotional hermeneutics," in Johnson's term,[45] even as the theater was expanding its own gestural repertoire, suggest the complexity of basing certainty on the subject's own claims about his or her interiority.

On a similar front, scholars working on Spain and beyond have highlighted the vexed connections between fictionality and the investigation of interiority in early modernity. Enrique Fernández examines anxieties about interiority through what he calls "dissective narratives": texts, including novellas by Cervantes and María de Zayas, that appear to offer bodies up for scrutiny using anatomical methods, but which actually "practice a form of pseudo-compliance with interpellating authority" akin to the picaresque's.[46] In his study of the emergence of autobiography in early modern France, Nicholas Paige traces how a "naïve confidence in the readability of the human interior"

gradually gives way to doubt about the possibility of such access, with autobiography as the "manifestly problematic promise to make identity readable."[47] All of these cognate investigations suggest how the picaresque might have engaged readers primed to recognize the epistemological challenges of reading intention and interiority.

While focusing on literary texts, the chapters that follow trace cognate problems to flesh out the historical resonance of each: the force of observation versus authority in medicine and the natural sciences; the vexed question of the (historical) captive's voice; and the slipperiness of credit as both a financial and a reputational category. *Knowing Fictions* thus returns to the intersection of inquisition, interiority, and fictionality to propose the newly distinctive form of the literary, and in particular the picaresque, as an emergent locus of skepticism in early modern Spain.

For a New History of Skepticism

Knowing Fictions dialogues with the recent work of Mercedes García-Arenal, Stefania Pastore, Felipe Pereda, and others on the intellectual consequences of forced conversion and religious polemics in Iberia. In a series of studies, these scholars have mapped out how orthodoxy is interrogated in texts and practices across Spain and its empire, from philosophical debates to religious images.[48] Many of these instances address the challenge of what one might term confessional opacity: the exterior invisibility of intimate convictions, on the one hand, and the dissimulation enabled by what García-Arenal calls "overlapping religiosities," on the other. Only a careful reading of what are often overdetermined and contradictory narratives can recover their complexity, and the historians doing this kind of work have called for a more sensitive reading of sources—a "linguistic turn" for the history of belief, in an effort to complicate the categories that the Inquisition sought to distinguish and keep apart.[49]

The stakes in identifying skepticism in early modern Spain and its empire are high. Pastore's work alerts us to the larger narratives reenacted when Spain and Italy, in particular, are largely omitted from key accounts of European skepticism: "Thus, on the one side we have Montaigne, Charron, Descartes, Spinoza and Locke, laying the foundations of a secularized culture that turned doubt and relativism into the keys to a new and modern culture that would eventually open its doors to the great age of the Enlightenment; on the other, a total void."[50]

Instead, Pastore contends that an important antecedent to the Spinozan "Marranism" that scholars identify as a source of modern, radical tolerance and skepticism in the Netherlands is the much earlier contestation of religious orthodoxy in sixteenth-century Italy. From the late fifteenth century, Spaniards in Italy, including but not just the Jews expelled in 1492, become synonymous with what is ironically termed the "peccadillo" of disbelief. "Marranos" in Italy, Pastore contends, contribute to the coalescing of religious doubt long before the Netherlands emerges as a locus for tolerance. Historiographical accounts that privilege the alliance between the Spanish crown and the papacy as Counter-Reformation defenders of the faith, she contends, often overlook the much richer and ambivalent history of Spanish disbelief in Italy. With frequent references to the literary, Pastore traces an alternative to the Counter-Reformation axis, recovering instead a world of intellectual questioning and disbelief.

Knowing Fictions moves from Spain to Italy and across the broader Mediterranean, identifying that questioning and disbelief in a specifically literary mode. From Zemon Davis to Burns to García-Arenal and Pastore, historians have increasingly argued for the need to attend to the fictional and the linguistic in order to reconstruct the fullest versions of early modern culture and its imaginaries. This study brings the literary to the table from a different angle, to suggest how self-consciously fictional texts intervene in their culture with an ironic force that interrogates the mechanisms of truth-telling. Picaresques are perhaps best known for foregrounding the situatedness of truth, reminding us how things look from below. The expanded corpus that I chart here is more radical: it reflects doubt about the reliability of knowledge itself as transmitted by any interested observer, and especially the first-person witness. As I suggest in my conclusion, this may be its most lasting effect, as it trains readers in discernment: how to ask the right questions of a text and read between its lines—how, in short, to read critically.

Chapter 1, "Imperial Picaresques: *La Lozana andaluza* and Spanish Rome," charts the limits of narrative authority in the Spanish exile Francisco Delicado's semi-anonymous *Retrato de la Lozana andaluza* (1528), his account of a Cordoban courtesan in Rome set just before the Spanish invasion of 1527, and his surprisingly proximate authored treatise on syphilis. *Lozana* ironically claims to *retraer*—to both paint and retract or recant—its syphilitic protagonist, in a highly self-conscious narration that foregrounds questions of authority and knowingness. As it chronicles the ravages of syphilis on the narrator and his subject, the text explores imperialism itself as a kind of

contagion—a cosmopolitan disease that undoes them both. Delicado's version of the picaresque undercuts Spain's epic aspirations via erotic intimacy: his complicit narration, fully implicated in the borderlessness of its main character, can only render a debased Rome. On the eve of the Spanish invasion, the contaminated, picaresque account implicates the narrator while ironizing the imperial project that links Spain to the classical and contemporary city.

Delicado's brief contemporary treatise on syphilis, *El modo de adoperare el legno de India Occidentale* (1529), tantalizes with the promise of empirical certainty to supplement *Lozana*'s lacunae. The treatise confirms the *retrato*'s authorship, as the coy author of one text claims to have also authored the other. Where the fiction can only gesture toward epistemological certainty, the treatise foregrounds a medical and botanical accuracy born of experience. Yet the yoking of the two texts foregrounds the intimate connections between syphilis and empire as well as the interestedness of the observer, ultimately undermining the authority of the treatise rather than bolstering *Lozana*.

Chapter 2, "Picaresque Captivity: The *Viaje de Turquía* and Its Cervantine Iterations," explores the imbrication of humanist dialogue, travel account, and captivity narrative in the anonymous text of that name (1557/58), and its reprisal in Cervantes's *Persiles* (1616) and his *comedias* of captivity (pub. 1614). The *Viaje* presents a dialogue between three characters over two days, with a subsequent account of Constantinople and of Ottoman origins, also in dialogue form. Pedro de Hurdimalas, a former captive who has arduously made his way back to Spain, encounters his old acquaintances and agrees to share his experiences with them, though they will put his story to venal ends when recounting their false pilgrimages. In addition to the profoundly corrupt scene of telling, I explore what it means for the captive to be simultaneously an authoritative and an unreliable source. The intimacy of captivity, I suggest, complicates the mediating role of a narrator both privileged to know and arguably tainted by his knowledge. Marcel Bataillon dubbed Pedro "l'Ulysse espagnol,"[51] and indeed, the picaresque Pedro's narrative loudly advertises both its unreliability and its utility for the wily. In its relentless play with referentiality and instrumentalization of first-person authority, the *Viaje de Turquía* manages to ironize both travel and captivity narratives as they become versions of the picaresque. Beyond the famous episode of the false captives in the *Persiles*, Cervantes's *comedias* of captivity echo the *Viaje*'s irony by locating Spanish *pícaros* in Algiers and Constantinople. Their remarkable intimacy—both familiarity and erotic susceptibility—with Spain's religious others undoes the ideological distinctions that the captivity narrative strains to establish.

Volubly, even comically expressed on stage, the *pícaro*'s mix of self-interest and intimate knowledge qualifies the privileged position of the captive as narrator. Marked by its glib ventriloquizing, untenable justifications, and venal oaths, the *pícaro*'s voice in these *comedias* problematizes any authority that captivity might have afforded the narrator.

Chapter 3, "'O te digo verdades o mentiras': Crediting the *Pícaro* in *Guzmán de Alfarache*," examines perhaps the most canonical of picaresques, Mateo Alemán's confessional, first-person, two-part tour de force (1595, 1605). A consummately interested and unreliable narrator, Guzmán alternates between moralizing retrospectively as a *pícaro* now reformed and gleefully describing the exploits that required his reformation. His story makes patent just how easily narrative can supplant an unavailable or even indeterminable truth. If *Lozana* featured a less-than-fully authoritative narrator tussling with his ribald protagonist, *Guzmán* internalizes the struggle for authority in a single narrator and his imperfect attempts to convince the reader. As he crisscrosses the Peninsula and even tries his fortune in Italy, the *pícaro* uses distance to his advantage. He self-fashions easily and effectively, moving from the abject to the respectable and vice versa, in the process implicating not just the reader but the social mechanisms that served to authorize everything from identity and genealogy to the moral and financial credit granted to persons.

Chapter 4, "Cervantes's Skeptical Picaresques and the Pact of Fictionality," traces the author's engagement with the picaresque across the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613). In a range of picaresque fictions, Cervantes explores the connections between narrative authority, perspectivism, and skepticism. In "La ilustre fregona," a nobleman's irrepressible desire for the picaresque life ironizes exemplarity by emphasizing the idiosyncrasy of individual experience and taste. *Gusto* undoes any predetermined sense of self, offering instead new trajectories and alternative itineraries. "Rinconete y Cortadillo" and the dyad of "El casamiento engañoso/El coloquio de los perros" probe a broader readerly skepticism, extending beyond irony to epistemological questions of the truth of narratives and how they might be assessed. The tension between exemplarity and skepticism—the one offering models for behavior that presume belief, the other encouraging instead a productive doubt—results in a fully engaged fictionality as an alternative to the exemplary text.

Immersed in the challenges of Spain's internal consolidation and global expansion in the sixteenth century, knowing fictions offer a powerful reflection on the nature of authority and representation. Profoundly engaged with the epistemological and political challenges of conveying authority and

determining truth, they interrogate how we know and what we know. In challenging the bonds that establish community, trust, and belief, knowing fictions also suggest the limits of any attempt to police those bonds, or get at the truth. They thus reveal fictionality as a locus of skepticism vis-à-vis the desire for certainty, offering opacity in response to interpellation and the tantalizing possibility of a resistant interiority.