Daniel Defoe and the Spanish Picaresque Tradition: The Case of MOLL FLANDERS

Nicholas Spadaccini
University of Minnesota

Daniel Defoe was a reader of Spanish picaresque fiction, and his knowledge of that genre was far more thorough and direct than is commonly supposed by modern critics who have dealt with the subject. In this article I shall first review those pieces of external evidence that point to that conclusion and I shall then examine the elaboration in Moll Flanders of two major concerns of traditional (i.e., Spanish) picaresque authors: the relationship between delinquency and autobiography and the exploration of the interrelated themes of «freedom», «survival», and disillusionment. I shall do so through the application of a comparative approach, hoping to shed light on the nature of the picaresque as it is redefined outside the context of Catholic, seigneurial Spain of the early 1600’s in Protestant, bourgeois, England of the early eighteenth century.

The reasons for, and extent of, the changes effected by Defoe on picaresque autobiographic «Lives» can be clarified and explained by measuring the socio-economic and socio-cultural context of Moll Flanders against that of its earlier Spanish models. Thus I keep in mind the relationship between the structure of picaresque narratives and the structures of the societies where they were written and read. Specifically, I am concerned with what happens to a literary form when it is transformed at the place and level of consumption, i.e., reading, under different social structures. Finally, while I shall draw my references from all of the major Spanish picaresque novels, the last section of the paper centers on a comparison between Francisco de Quevedo’s Buscón and Defoe’s novel. The principal reason for that choice is that both novels deal with an «outsider’s» quest for social mobility and legitimacy. Moreover, the authors’ resolutions of problems arising from that quest provide a glimpse both into their respective ideologies and into the
dkinds of difficulties confronting critics who seek to define a dynamic and constantly-changing genre — both within Imperial Spain and, later, in «modern» Europe.

I

The evidence pointing to Defoe’s first-hand knowledge of Spanish picaresque literature is, I think, substantial, despite the notion fostered in the introduction to a widely-read edition of Moll Flanders that

Everything about Moll Flanders... has a naively direct relation to... [Defoe’s] own world of experience and interests. The kind is the literary biography of a rogue, a conventional if low form of literary expression since Elizabethan times. Rogue biographies were usually the lives of real criminals fictionally foreshortened and sensationalized (italics mine). 3

It is difficult to argue with much of this appraisal. It is, nevertheless, partial, for it tends to exclude from the purview of Defoe’s interests the kind of rogue biography which portrayed the lives of «fictional criminals»: an influential novelistic sub-genre — the picaresque — which flourished first in Hapsburg Spain between 1554 and the 1640’s and somewhat later in Europe (especially England, Germany and France) through various translations, adaptations and imitations. 4

While it is now virtually out of fashion in literary studies to speak of influences (with the exception of Howard Bloom’s revival of the term’s theoretical potential. See The Anxiety of Influence [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972]), lest one should foster the notion of unoriginality, the study of sources through an analysis of an author’s elaboration of them can be a useful tool in the formulation of a genre’s history and can offer as well an insight into an author’s, and into a society’s, dominant ideology.

It behooves us, therefore, to identify as clearly as possible Defoe’s connection to Spanish picaresque fiction. To do so we must reexamine his world of literary experience and interests by piecing together information pertaining to his knowledge of the «Lives» of fictional rogues the likes of Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), Guzmán de Alfarache (1599; 1604), La picaresca fistina (1604), El Buscón (1626) and Estebanillo González (1646), just to mention the key, representative novels of that tradition.

It is, perhaps, in order to begin here by reiterating what an important critic of the picaresque said some ten years ago speaking of the influence of Spanish picaresque fiction on Defoe: that criminal biographies were «part of the tradition begun in England by Mabbe’s Rogue». 5 It is
significant that less than twenty years after the publication of the second part of Mateo Aleman’s Guzman de Alfarache (1604), James Mabbe made his «translation» and «adaptation» of the Spanish novel available to the English reading public whose acceptance, in turn, was to make possible a flurry of indigenous literature along the same lines. Similarly, one can note the translations of virtually every other picaro novel, and the immense popularity that they enjoyed especially during the first thirty years of the eighteenth century—that is, precisely at a time when Defoe is writing Moll Flanders. The point is that Defoe had access to Spanish picarque fiction and is, therefore, likely to have been intimately acquainted not only with most of the representative novels of that genre but also with the various polemics surrounding them. There is evidence for this assertion. For example, Defoe himself mentions Don Quixote and Lazarillo de Tormes in his writings. Hence it is not surprising to find in the «Preface» to Moll Flanders an echo of the reservations expressed by Cervantes’ galley slave, Ginés de Pasamonte (Don Quixote, I, xxii) regarding the contrived nature of «fictional» picarque «Lives». Defoe’s playful suggestion that «we cannot say, indeed, that this history is carried on quite to the end of the life of this famous Moll Flanders, as she calls herself, for nobody can write their own life to the full end of it, unless they can write it after they are dead» (p. xxviii) takes into account Ginés’ answer to Don Quixote when the latter asks the criminal-turned-author if he has completed his «Life»: «¿Cómo puede estar acabado si aún no está acabada mi vida?» (How could it be finished if my life has not yet ended?). For the time being, suffice it to point out that Defoe’s subsequent suggestion that a «third hand» writing the life-story of Moll’s husband «gives a full account of them both» (p. xxvii) incorporates, implicitly, Cervantes’ criticism on formal grounds of the closed nature of picarque «Lives».

Perhaps the most decisive piece of external evidence connecting Defoe directly to the Spanish picarque tradition is his possession of a copy of Francisco López de Ubeda’s La picara Justina (1604) in the original Spanish. This fact (hitherto unmentioned in the various studies on Defoe) is significant because it raises the possibility that Defoe may have read at least some picarque novels in Spanish—and thus calling to question the common assertions regarding his knowledge of rogue biographies through secondary and tertiary sources. Also, it happens that Justina is the first in the line of female rogues and, more important, that the novel about her «is an implicit satire on the aims and structure of Guzmán de Alfarache», the archetypal picarque novel which Defoe probably had in mind in his «Preface». We shall see later that the «Preface» to Moll Flanders begins—as does La picara

Justina—by explaining, somewhat ironically, the dual structure of a repentant criminal’s life-story.

Finally, there is the appraisal of Sir Walter Scott. He makes an unmistakable connection between Defoe and Spanish picarque fiction. Writing in the «Preface» to the Ballantyne edition of Defoe’s works (1810), he specifically relates Defoe’s sources and style to the type of picarque fiction dear to the Spaniards:

But whatever way he [Defoe] acquired his knowledge of low life, Defoe certainly possessed it in the most extensive sense and applied it in the composition of several works of fiction, in the style termed by the Spaniards Gusto Picaresco, of which no man was ever a greater master.

Among Defoe’s compositions of gusto picaresco, Scott includes Moll Flanders.

II

Defoe’s connection to, and deviation from, the mainstream of traditional picarque fiction can be seen more clearly in Moll Flanders (1723) than in any other fictional work of his. The novel possesses several elements in subject matter which on the one hand ally it, it closely to the Spanish predecessors and, on the other, disengage it from the type of spiritual autobiography produced in counter-reformational, seigneurial, Spain of 1600. None the less I believe that the developments in the «Life» of Moll can be clarified by comparison with the developments in the «Lives» of those ex-rogues, Guzmán and, especially, Piblo, whose life stories, unlike that of Moll, represent a rejection of their former selves.

A clue to the direction taken by Defoe within the context of picarque fiction is provided in the «Preface» to Moll Flanders, as I shall try to show in a review of its main points. The «Preface» opens in typical Cervantian fashion as the reader is confronted with fiction’s claim to historical truth: he is told that it is a «private history» rather than a novel or romance. Then much in Aleman’s manner of establishing the credibility of the «ex-delinquent», Guzmán de Alfarache, as narrator of his own story, Defoe tells us that the «Author» (Moll) is supposed to be writing her own history. The comparison with Aleman is instructive: unlike Guzmán’s story, which goes directly to the reader, here the original («which came first to hand having been written in language more like one still in Newgate than one grown penitent and humble, as she afterwards pretends to be» [p. xxiii]) is somewhat altered in style, that is Moll «is made to tell her own tale in modester
words» (p. xxiii) and, «the vicious part of her life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other parts are very much shortened» (p. xxiv).

A distinction is subsequently made between the «moral» and the «story». There is an attempt to explain the dual structure of the novel and to stress as well the reader's responsibility in grasping the lessons that even an apparently unworthy story can entail: «this work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to read it... so it is to be hoped that such readers will be more pleased with the moral than the fable, with the application than with the relation, and with the end of the writer than with the life of the person written of» (xxv).

Mateo Alemán had expressed himself in much the same terms in two separate prologues to Guzmán de Alfarache. In one («Al Vulgo») he accuses mindless, irresponsible, readers of not going beyond the fable or the story-line to grasp the significance of the message, or the moral, inherent in the tale. To such a reader he says: «no miras ni reparas en las altas moralidades de tan divinos ingenios y sólo te contentas de lo que dijo el perro y respondió la zorra» (p. 92); and in the other («Al Discreto lector») he reminds the discerning, cautious, reader of the importance of the moral contained within the framework of an entertaining story-line: «Haz como leas lo que leyeres y no te rías de lo consejo y se te pase el consejo» (p. 94, italics mine). Guzmán's consejo is the equivalent of Moll Flanders' «penitent part»; it deals with the «application» or the «end of the writer». The consejo, on the other hand, corresponds to its «criminal part», or the «fable».

This kind of dual structure had been attacked as early as 1604 by Francisco López de Ubeda in his «Preface» to La picara Justina (the very novel that we find in Defoe's library) on the grounds that one cannot mix the spiritual and the profane to the advantage of the former. 16 López de Ubeda's solution to the problem was to make the didactic purpose of his story explicit in the form of an appendage to each chapter of his novel rather than to deal with the matter on the level of narrative: «añadi, como por vía de censure o moralidad, al tono de las fábulas de Esopo y de otros de Agatón, consejos y advertencias útiles, sacados y hechos a propósito de lo que se dice y trata». 17 In effect, Ubeda burlesques the dual structure of Alemán's novel (1599) and proposes to dispense with any possible ambiguities inherent in that type of organization.

It is clear that much of the polemic concerning the narrative structure of picaresque «Lives» is in the back of Defoe's mind as he shapes his «Preface» to Moll Flanders. For example, one of the stated intentions of «the pen employed in finishing Moll's story» (p. xxii) is to turn Moll's account to the advantage of the reader: «All the exploits of this lady of fame, in her depredations upon mankind, stand as so many warnings to honest people to beware of them, intimating to them by what methods innocent people are drawn in, plundered and robbed, and by consequence how to avoid them» (xxvi). That is, Moll's story is offered ostensibly as an instructional manual, i.e., as a practical checklist, of what to do and what not to do in one's dealing with others. That is also one of the stated intentions of López de Ubeda's narratíve «todos los hombres de cualquier calidad y estado, aprenderán los enredos de que se han de librar, los peligros que han de sufrir» (p. 704) but, in addition, López de Ubeda repeats perhaps in jest, a theme prevalent in Alemán's novel and in much of the didactic literature fo Spain during the Counter-Reformation: the need to control passion and the senses if one is to avoid the road to spiritual damnation or, in Ubeda's words, «los pecados que les pueden saltar las almas» (p. 704).

In Moll Flanders there is no such explicit religious claim. We are told, of course, that from every part of the book «some just and religious inference is drawn» (p. xxvi) and that the narrative «is all applied... to virtuous and religious uses» (p. xxv). But Moll's success story is never allowed to wander outside the context of the material world. That is precisely the difference between this «spiritual» autobiography and the line initiated in Spain by Guzmán. For while one of Guzmán's major lessons is that spiritual salvation is not tied to social mobility but, rather, to the acceptance of one's role in life since each individual can be saved regardless of his social position («salvarte puedes en tu estado» [p. 275]) through faith, good works and divine grace, the «Preface» to Moll Flanders suggests that even the lowest creature on the social ladder can exercise a degree of control over his own social and spiritual destiny through industry, diligence, application and good management.

It must be remembered that Defoe, as well as most English writers and politicians who were mercantilists, emphasized the need to combat the great vice of idleness, which, together with what Defoe refers to as the «crimes» of luxury, sloth and pride, was deemed a direct cause of poverty. 4 In fact, «idle and unprofitable» persons had been repudiated in England even before the Reformation, when idleness was seen as the «root of all evil», as the base of all vices that, according to a formulation of the age, «suck the breasts of industry». 19 Those same preoccupations are outlined in Moll Flanders when the reader is told that Moll's story can be instructive to all unfortunate creatures, who can learn from her success «that no case can be so low, so despicable, or so empty of prospect, but that an unwarried industry will go a great way to deliver us from it, will in time raise the meanest creature to appear again in the world, and give him a new cast for his life» (p. xxvii).
Mercantilists considered idleness a problem to the extent that it worked against the economic interests of the nation. Moreover, since they held that power was gained through wealth, i.e., through the accumulation of bullion, which in turn was created by the balance of exports over imports, they sought to stimulate agriculture, commerce and industry. Idleness, therefore, was a social ill that was to be conquered and, to achieve that goal, they sought to rally public sentiment and policy.

Moll's success story fits within the line of mercantilist thought; for Moll's activities in Virginia imply a total rejection of idleness (and with it of poverty and hopelessness) as a way of life, in favor of a work ethic which brings with it promises of a new mold—a blueprint for social advancement as well as spiritual gain. Such, at least in part, is the message that Moll's story conveys to a largely middle class reading public and to «literate people from the lower classes». Here the contrast with the Spanish predecessors is striking. While Moll is made to embrace «industry» by the circumstances of her destitution and by the psychological necessity of gaining respectability—i.e., the genteel life through the acquisition of wealth (something which she manages to do quite well during her eight fruitful years in Virginia), Guzmán de Alfarache, the convert, is finally made to abhor idleness because of the spiritual dangers that it entails; and, as we shall see in the last section of this paper, Pablus, the swindler, is forced—by the realities of his inferior station—to abandon the quest for the life of leisure that he had sought as a way of affirming his own legitimacy in a society where both manual labor and commerce are associated with impure blood and inherited antihonor.

It is clear from the foregoing observations concerning the «Preface» to Defoe's novel that Moll's account is consciously conceived, at least in part, within the framework of picaresque autobiographic «Lives.» Yet, the differences with that tradition are equally marked, as I hope to demonstrate by contrasting Moll's position as narrator, the quality of her repentance, and Defoe's treatment of the themes of freedom, survival and disillusionment with the handling of those same issues in some key Spanish picaresque narratives, especially Quevedo's Buscón.

III

One of the common assumptions about Moll as narrator is that she «writes» her story after having undergone an authentic religious conversion. The fictive narrator's own words, in line with those of the «Preface,» remind us that there is a moral to her account, for she classifies it a «storehouse of useful warning» (p. 300) for those individuals who know how to read it. The instructional purpose of her story is underscored by the religious overtones present in several key moments of the narrative. One of the more prominent of these moments involves her experience at Newgate prison—the very place where she was born, some 50 years earlier—while she awaits execution: she says «it was now that, for the first time, I felt any real signs of repentance» (p. 321). It was at that moment that she first thought about her moral void and lack of spiritual direction. Another key reflection comes at the very end of her story when, having returned at age 70 to England from Virginia, she tells how she and her husband «resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived» (p. 384).

The first sign of Moll's repentance is triggered by a practical consideration: by her condemnation to the gallows and, specifically, by the reprieve from the hanging that she obtains through the intercession of a minister to whom she had «confessed» her story of crime and passion (pp. 324-325 fl.). And her reflection at the conclusion of her story comes at a time when—to borrow Moll's own words in an earlier episode—«the power of further sinning was taken away» (p. 306). That is, at the height of economic success, at last totally free from a life of necessity or from the remotest threat of destitution, having experienced a turn of fortune—thanks to a socio-economic order that makes allowances for those low creatures who are diligent and industrious—she can finally «reject» her sinful past.

There is evidence to suggest that the degree and timing of Moll's rejection of her past delinquency is in direct proportion to her economic rise. Moll herself is conscious of this tradeoff: «my past wicked and abominable life never looked so monstrous to me, and I never so completely abhorred it, and reproached myself with it, as when I had a sense upon me of Providence doing good to me» (p. 378); that is, speaking now as a middle class gentlewoman blessed with economic success, she defines the pragmatic quality of her «conversion.» This same equation between repentance and profit surfaces once again as she recounts the reaction of James—her last husband—to her revelations about the wealth that she had brought along from England in the form of livestock and merchandise for their plantation in Virginia: «then I ie, him know what I had brought over in the sloop, besides all this; I mean the horses, hogs, and cows, and other stores for our plantation; all which added to his surprise, and filled his heart with thankfulness; and from this time forward I believe he was as sincere a penitent, and as thoroughly a reformed man, as ever God’s goodness brought back from a profligate, a highwayman, and a robber» (pp. 380-
Thus, the achievement of economic well-being and the determination to lead a moral life seem to go hand in hand. Moll Flanders has come a long way, and her climb up the ladder of success is (unlike Lazarillo’s) not only economic but also social and spiritual. Let us review briefly her itinerary. Born an orphan in Newgate, of disreputable origins, having been fired up by vanity as a young lady to become a gentlewoman, she searches for economic security—for the genteel life—in a series of marriages. Then, when she is left destitute, at age 48, after having lost some of her feminine charms, a fear of necessity and poverty drives her to steal to preserve her life. That is when she becomes a full-fledged delinquent. Maximilian Novak argued convincingly some years ago that for Defoe and his contemporaries ‘necessity’ indicated a state of desperation, usually associated with starvation and destitution, in which the victim is forced to choose between certain death and a life prolonged only by violating the laws of society, religion or personal honor. This fact, however, explains fully neither Moll’s life of crime nor the quality or nature of her spiritual autobiography. It has been amply documented, for example, that her thieving is not always justified on the grounds of necessity, especially after she acquires considerable wealth through shoplifting and the stealing of gold watches. Moreover, Moll’s own reflections about her life of thieving seem to point to these conclusions, as she recalls how she became ‘hardened to a pitch above all reflections of conscience or modesty.’ And she goes on to add: ‘Thus the devil, who began, by the help of an irresistible poverty, to push one into his wickedness, brought me on to a height beyond the common rate, even when my necessities were not so great, or the prospect of my misery so terrifying’ (pp. 223-224). No longer afflicted by the social illnesses of poverty and necessity, Moll is spurred on by ‘the devil; by a psychological need to survive as a gentlewoman above everything else. To the very end of her story she is driven by her mercantile mind, never allowing herself to jeopardize her long-sought-after life of middle-class gentility.

Moll’s so-called ‘repentance’ or religious ‘conversion’ is not supported by the literal sense of the text and Moll’s statements about her guilty conscience are not worked out on the level of plot. Perhaps nowhere in the novel are these facts more readily borne out than in the episode where she steals some valuables from a family in distress while their house is on fire. Moll recalls that she was really ‘stretched’ when she looked at the treasure: ‘to think of the poor disconsolate gentlewoman who had lost so much by the fire besides’ (p. 229). But she goes on to say that although she recognized the cruelty of her actions, she, ‘could never find it in her heart to make any restitution’ (p. 229). The matter of making amends for her crimes is, therefore, brought to her consciousness. Yet, Moll never contemplates acting on it—even as a successful business woman at age 70.

There is another, more poignant example that reveals the quality of Moll’s emotional life. When her old governess apprises her that her thieving accomplice has been hanged, she is greatly relieved by the news, for it meant that he could not direct the law towards her: ‘at last she sent me the joyful news that he was hanged, which was the best news to me that I had heard a great while’ (p. 244). Denis Donoughue, who has commented brilliantly on this passage, correctly points out that Moll is ‘closed against feeling’ and that her reaction to her accomplice’s death is more indicative of Moll than her eruptions of conscience. Donoughue observes: ‘In Moll, and in Defoe himself, life is a matter first of survival and thereafter of competition: there is no recognition of any “promises of life” beyond the next meal or the next marriage… Life is a narrow and grim affair in which evil means loss and good means gain.’ This same equation between good and profit is found in the cynical line of Spanish picaresque Lives.

It seems that while Moll Flanders partakes of the structural design of the confessional kind of picaresque literature initiated by Guzmán de Alfarache in Spain (1599, 1604) and by Mabb’s version of it in England (1622), Moll’s position as a narrator indicates that Defoe’s novel incorporates and develops fully the secularized treatment of delinquency which one sees in emblionic form in Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) and, to a greater extent, in Estebanillo González (1646). In both of those anonymous novels the picaresque life is shaped by the corrupting influences of those in positions of power and, significantly, his economic fortunes rise in direct proportion to his acceptance of the role of social inferior: Lazarillo obtains a government job as a town crier and prospers as the cuckolded husband of an archpriest’s mistress in Toledo, while Estebanillo survives the miseries of the Thirty Years War as the clown of some of the leading personalities of that conflict. Estebanillo even recalls the reasons for accepting a jester’s costume and concludes that, given his hardships and circumstances, there was no alternative but to become subjected to a master; his survival depended on the submission of his will to a nobleman (Ottavio Piccolomini) and on the acceptance of the most humiliating of roles. It is for that reason that the narrator of the last authentic picaresque novel of Spain has no intention of apologizing about, or rejecting, his delinquent past. Survival, i.e., freedom from physical necessity, as with Lazarillo, depends on his ability to make all accommodations necessary to effect economic gains. But it is important to point out that despite their search for salvation within the material world, they have no illusion
of achieving authentic social mobility. For mobility is possible only within another type of class structure, as a comparison of Moll Flanders’ quest to become a gentlewoman and Pablos’ aim to become a gentleman will show.

What distinguishes Moll Flanders from some of its early predecessors may, perhaps, be more important than its connections to them; and, by discovering those divergences, one may be able to delineate more clearly the extent to which Defoe’s novel becomes the first bona fide example of the modernization (and secularization) of picaresque fiction. The reasons for, and extent of, the genre’s changes at the hands of Defoe may be clarified by measuring the socio-economic and sociocultural contexts of Moll Flanders against those of Spanish picaresque fiction. In the process of so doing we will also be defining the changing nature of the picaresque.

IV

Generally speaking, the traditional picaresque is a low-born subject without a fixed profession or occupation. He is, to varying degrees, an «outsider» who becomes an offender against moral and/or civil laws as he seeks to obtain, or to reclaim, his freedom from social conventions and obligations. Through his actions (and occasionally upon reflection) he questions the values of a society that discriminates against him along socio-economic and racial lines. It’s significant that the full development of this type is Spanish letters takes place precisely during the repressive period of the Baroque (especially during the early 1600’s) when, in the theater, for example, the literary image of the servant—the graciós—is made to serve the status quo, i.e., the monarchical interests. Yet, unlike his social counterpart in the theater, the picaresque refuses to be cowed by a closed, static, system which excludes any possibility for social mobility and, through his non-acquiescence to society’s class requirements, he expresses a new social will. His resentment is manifested in his preference for idleness over manual labor or trade; in his refusal to accept any type of permanent position or occupation; and in his ultimate rejection of service as a means of remedying his miserable lot.

The traditional picaresque’s «anti-establishment» attitudes and his role as a disintegrating force in the social fabric are the subject of writers as diverse as Alemán and Quevedo. The former is a bourgeois manqué; a «half-outsider» who suffers economically, socially and psychologically because of his converso status, i.e., that of a Christian with Jewish blood. The latter is a nobleman, of old Christian stock, who is a product of, and, in general, a subscriber to, the conservative ideology of the dominant monarcho-seigneurial system. The difference in the treatment of social and moral deviance at the hands of those two writers is grounded in certain ideological assumptions. Those assumptions are then manifested in the text by the type of distance that each author creates between himself and his literary character.

Alemán is rather sympathetic toward the young Guzmán, since he is struggling with his conscience in trying to understand the meaning of honor and freedom. He is especially so (or, at least that is the fictional game he is playing) toward the new Guzmán, who has embraced God after rejecting idleness and the bitter after-effects of a misunderstood freedom. As a «half-outsider» he can even identify with the repentant sinner who has come to recognize the notion that freedom and survival, equality and justice, are possible, if only on a metaphysical level, even for an illegitimate subject born with tainted blood, whose human weaknesses and lack of direction had contributed to his social ostracism and spiritual bankruptcy.

In contrast, Quevedo’s attitude toward Pablos, the pretentious social climber, is one of contempt. The son of a thief and of a whore, the nephew of a hangman, he seeks to become a gentleman, i.e., a man of leisure. He is not only doomed to failure but is also ridiculed and systematically exposed for his foolishness. Thus, Pablos is made to experience total disillusion, without the benefit of the slightest hope, on any level. He is made to realize that neither a formal education, nor a change of name, nor his attachment to the rich (including the nouveau riches who have managed to acquire a letter of patent nobility) can change his social identity. Thus, while passing himself off as the rich Don Felipe, on the verge of a successful courtship of Doña Ana—a cousin of Don Diego Coronel, his former master—he is punished with blows and slashes for being a lying bastard: «¡Asi pagen los pícaros embustidores mal nacidos!» He is literally disfigured and made to look like the ruffian and hustler he really is (pp. 223-224). Even his external appearance is made to change so he can no longer deceive others about who he really is. His role-playing from then on is confined to the stage, as he becomes an actor and author who thrives on borrowed lines. Significantly, although his venture becomes a financial success, he rejects that life for its lack of social prestige, thus implicitly reaffirming one of the themes of the traditional picaresque novel; that nothing—not even money—can change one’s social identity.

Pablos’s fortunes continue to deteriorate and he descends into the lowest social circles possible: the underworld of Seville. He becomes an accomplice to murder and, in order to escape the same inexorable fate of execution that had befallen his parents, he decides to emigrate
to America with a lowly prostitute named Grajales. In the New World things went from bad to worse for, as he says now upon reflection: «pues nunca mejoró su estado quien muda solamente de lugar y no de vida y costumbre» (p. 254). Thus, Pablos, who left home at an early age because of a vain desire to disassociate himself from his disreputable genealogy (in the narrator's own words to his uncle he wanted to «negar la sangre» [p. 149], «negar su own blood») comes full cycle. The chain of misfortunes («desgracias... encadenadas» [p. 84]) that have befallen him because of his foolish social expectations and lack of self-knowledge have to do, ultimately, with his aspiration and search for a life of leisure. Thus, in having Pablos accept —implicitly—total responsibility for his own failures, Quevedo's position seems to be that one need best not question the established social order, that blood does matter, and that nothing can change the burden of one's lineage.

Unlike Moll, who experiences a socio-economic, psychological and «religious» change of status as a direct result of her commercial activities in Virginia, Pablos' change comes only from within: through the knowledge and the acceptance of his own social limitations. His physical and psychological survival depend on that change. Hence the new Pablos is totally distanced from the old. As a «writer» he says what he could never get himself to admit as an acting protagonist; he reveals with corrosive humor the most intimate details of his biological, social, and emotional life. He does not hide the facts that he comes from Segovia, that his father was a thief and a drunkard who possessed a dose of vanity, that his mother engaged in witchcraft, and that she was suspected of being tainted with Moorish or Jewish blood (pp. 43-44). He talks about his father's execution at the hands of his uncle, the hangman, about his mother's auto da fe, about his humiliations at the University in Alcalá when he is totally covered with excrement, and about every misfortune that has befallen him up to the moment of change, after his experiences in the New World. So, then, to the extent that Pablos the narrator is free from vanity and self-delusion, he can be totally analytical about his past self. But in his new-found «freedom» he has become a mouthpiece for the status quo, a tool at the hands of a brilliant reactionary writer.

The historian Pierre Vilar was correct in reminding the readers of Don Quijote some years ago that every work has a date. The importance of Vilar's statement becomes even more evident as one seeks to underscore the differences between Defoe's treatment of delinquency in Moll Flanders (1723) and that of Quevedo in Buscón (written, ca. 1606; published 1626) or, as one approaches the formulation of the picaresque genre's history (1554-1723) along comparative lines, without confining it —as has often been the case—to a study of the genre's morphology.

Moll's story represents the fulfillment of her early aspirations; the achievement of the goal she set for herself early in life when, as an orphan, she sought a life of middle class gentility. She finally achieves her goal thanks to her own resourcefulness and to the opportunities for grieve, social mobility offered those poor people who sought, through industry and diligence, i.e., hard work, to better their lot. At least that is Defoe's treatment within the confines of the novel; it is a resolution that falls within the thinking of mercantilist ideology. Pablo's account, in contrast, is a story of disillusion framed by a reactionary writer. In the absence of an authentic middle class—a bourgeoisie marquée—in the largely pro-capitalist and pro-industrial Spain of 1600, the search for a life of leisure meant aspiring to the ranks of the upper classes. That aspiration is indicated by Pablo's attitude toward work—especially manual labor—trade, and money. In the sense that he prefers a life of idleness and ostentation rather than one bent on thrift and on the fruitful investment of capital, he is on the one hand embracing the values of a parasitic nobility and, on the other hand, hiding his genealogy. Is it true that Pablos and Moll, then, represent two different mentalities which can be attributed to socio-economic, cultural, and ideological differences between the bourgeois, Defoe, writing in early eighteenth century England and the old aristocrat, Quevedo, writing in early seventeenth century Spain. Those differences explain why their respective stories (which after all share some of the same literary sources) involve two distinct resolutions to the problem of delinquency and autobiography and two contrasting treatments of the picaresque themes of freedom, survival and disillusionment. While Pablos of Segovia is imprisoned by the dominant reactionary values of the Spain of early 1600's, Moll experiences freedom from social and psychological necessity—a release from the physical and mental bondage that she had experienced first as an orphan child and later as a defenseless woman in her 50's.

When viewed against the background of its Spanish predecessors, Moll Flanders, then, represents a logical step toward the secularization and europeanization of picaresque, fictional, autobiography. And the reasons have to do with ideology and its reflection in literary form. Moreover, it seems clear that Defoe himself was fully conscious of the changes that he had effected on that type of literature and, if we are to judge by his constant dialogue with the genre's conventions, it is not unreasonable to view him as a partial descendant of Spanish picaresque fiction.
NOTES


5 Parker, op. cit., pp. 102-103. For the fortunes of Lazarillo and its sequels (especially of the Protestant Juan de Luna) in English translation, see Randall, pp. 184-188; and, Bjornson, «Translations and Transformations...», esp. pp. 126, 133.


11 Parker, p. 50.


13 Cf. Parker, «Literature and the Delinquent», pp. 102-103, who takes to task both E. A. Baker, The History of the Novel (London, 1929), III, 69; and also Robert Alter, Rogues’ Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 26 (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), for not considering Moll Flanders a picaresque narrative. Parker attacks their mistaken notion that a novel could not have «sociological significance» or entail «a serious study of the effects of heredity and environment in the making of criminals» and, at the same time, be written in comic style (p. 102). Earlier, Chandler, op. cit., II, 289-299 had largely divorced Moll Flanders from the Spanish picaresque tradition because of the latter’s treatment of love, subordination of incident to character — with the loss of the comic and the satirical — and embodiment of a unity which goes beyond the antihero’s identity.


15 Última declaracion para el entendimiento de este libro. Guzmán de Alfarache en la novela picaresca espanola, I, ed. Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Planeta, 1967), p. 96. Textual references are to this edition and are noted parenthetically by page number.

16 Sieber, op. cit., p. 49.


18 See, for example, «Giving Alms no Charity» (1704), in A Select Collection of Stories and Valuable Economical Tracts, ed. R. Mcculloch (London, 1859), pp. 59-60. Defoe, however, is not always consistent on this point. See, for example, Novak, op. cit., pp. 72, 165-166 n.; see also pp. 1-31, for a discussion of the concept of mercantilism and Defoe’s brand of it.


21 Cf. Mateo Aleman’s letters to Fernan Perez de Mereira, author of the famous Discursos comparativo de las legiones pobres y reducción de los jíngidos (1598); rpt. in Edmund Croes, Proof and the gueux: recherches sur les origines et la nature récét picaresque dans Guzman de Alfarache (Paris: Didier, 1967), pp. 436-444.


23 Parker, pp. 202-203, argues that this «is exactly the same as the aim of Pabloés in Quevedo’s Buscón to become a gentleman».


25 Ibid., p. 515. Cf. Daniel Defoe, «Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe», rpt. in Romances and Narratives, ed. George A. Atkinson (London: J. M. Dent, 1899), II, 35-36: «Necessity is about the power of human nature, and for Providence to suffer a man to fall into that necessity is to suffer him to sin... Necessity makes things come lawful, and things evil in their own nature arc made practicable by it»; and, Bjornson, «The Picaresque Hero...», p. 191ff.


28 See my «Estebanillo González», where I argue that Estebanillo’s cynical point of view and basic approach to life is (striped of Estebanillo’s humor) reasserted and elaborated in Moll Flanders.


30 Ibid.


34 I have kept in mind the perceptive observation of Henry Ettinghausen, *Francisco de Quevedo and the Neostico Movement* (Oxford, 1972), that *Pablos is portrayed as the antithesis of the Stoic sage, an example of and a warning to the vulgus* (p. 127).

35 *Le temp du'Quichotte*', *Europe* (janvier, 1956), 1-16. A Spanish translation of this important essay appears in Villar's *Crecimiento y Desarrollo* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1976), pp. 332-346. The following observations are especially pertinent to our discussion: «en Castilla y hacia 1600, el feudalismo entra en agonía sin que exista nada a punto para reemplazarle» (p. 340); and, «Por posición y coyuntura (no por religión o temperamento) la sociedad española de 1600, antítesis de la sociedad puritana, vuelve la espalda al ahorro y a la inversión» (pp. 342-343). Some of the best sociological interpretations of Buscón are offered by Edmond Cros, *L'aristocrate et le carnaval de gueux*. Étude sur le *Buscón* de Quevedo (Montpellier, 1975), esp. 67-69; José Antonio Maravall, *La aspiración social de "medro" en la novela picaresca*, *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 312 (junio 1976), esp. 23-29; and Anthony N. Zaharias, *Quevedo's Buscón: Structure and Ideology*, in *Homenaje a Julio Caro Baroja* (Madrid: Turner, forthcoming).

36 Along the same lines, Molho, *op. cit.*, p. xlv, claims that, «Guzman de Alfarache apparaît comme un violent réquisitoire "anticapitaliste", le plus violent sans doute qu'ait produit l'Europe aristocratique des XVIe et XVIIe siècle contre l'argent, la banque, et le négocié, représentés par la lignée abjecte des gueux allemands».