SANGONERETA: BLASCO IBÁÑEZ'S PICARO IN *CAÑAS Y BARRO*

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In one of the most widely quoted articles on the picaresque, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," Claudio Guillén comments on the dearth of picaresque novels in the nineteenth century: "The nineteenth century did not welcome the ambiguous outsider [i.e., the picaro] . . . . By and large, the nineteenth century was the time for the full outsider, the dreamer and the bohemian, the revolutionary and the ideologist, the man of courage, the rebel against man and God. The *pícaro* could not rival Prometheus or Robespierre" (104). For Guillén, what best exemplifies the picaresque's minor role in nineteenth-century literature is "the fleeting appearance, in a story within a story, of Manoel, the roguish sergeant of Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen*" (104). Yet Guillén does acknowledge that various major characters of the period exhibit picaresque qualities. Concerning the Realist/Naturalist novels of Spain, he notes that "the heroines of the two more important novels were orphans: Fortunata in *Fortunata y Jacinta* by Galdós, and Ana de Ozores in Clarín's *La Regenta;* but the former was a symbol of humble living, and the latter was a dreamer" (104-05).[1] To this list I propose to add a pivotal secondary character from Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's *Cañas y barro,* an orphan who revives the spirit of the classic picaros. This "ambiguous outsider" is Sangonereta.

The picaresque antihero's initial problems are genealogical in origin. Born into a disreputable family that has a tradition of immoral and illegal activity, the future rogue also occupies the lower levels of the socioeconomic scale: "Cuando el pícaro no es hijo de personajes humildes, es hijo del pecado o niño expósito" (Alfaro 26). Feeling the need to escape this flawed family background, or as a result of being abandoned, the child ends up alone and is "obliged to fend for himself *(buscarse la vida)* in an environment for which he is not prepared" (Guillén 79). As a reflection of this desperate situation, in the picaro's tale "[t]here is a general stress on the material level of existence or of subsistence, on sordid facts, hunger, money" (Guillén 83), with special emphasis on hunger, which, for Emilio Carilla, is one of the picaresque's "dos ejes fundamentales" (17). Hunger also forms part of a larger concern, "an economic and social predicament of the most immediate and pressing nature . . . , an entanglement with the relative and the contemporaneous" (Guillén 77). Hoping to deal with this entanglement and to find what has been lacking during the critical childhood years, the youth becomes a wanderer, but, while roaming from town to town or nation to nation, "the 'unfortunate traveler' soon learns that there is no material survival outside of society, and no real refuge—no pastoral paradise—beyond it" (Guillén 80), a realization that leads to tenuous truces with society, where the youngster continues to seek materialistic salvation.

In the course of these adventures, the rogue "(though not always a servant of many masters) observes a number of collective conditions: social classes, professions, *caractères,* cities, and nations" (Guillén 83) and, in the process, learns many lessons, one of the most significant of which is that society is hypocritical, for it "requires

adherence to Christian principles while withholding material rewards from anyone who actually practices them" (Bjornson 28). Upon perceiving this disillusioning truth, the picaro views very cynically the values that society preaches but does not reward: "La filosofía picaresca se ríe de la sociedad, de sus prejuicios y, en ocasiones, de lo que considera sus mitos (amor, honor, patriotismo, trabajo, virtud . . .)" (Casas de Faunce 965). Not believing in society's myths, but desiring to prosper *(medrar)*, the rogue utilizes in a practical fashion all knowledge gained through experience, avoids work whenever possible, and seeks "the path of least resistance" (Eoff 115). Especially important for making one's way through society is the realization that "[s]ocial role-playing is as ludicrous as it is indispensable. This is where the solution of 'roguish' behavior is preferred" (Guillén 80). The multifaceted nature of the rogue's predicament makes the ability to "desempeñar papeles diversos" (Zahareas 85) an essential picaresque skill. While playing these varied roles, the rascal often crosses the line that separates gamesmanship or childish pranks from illegal activities such as petty thievery (Díez Echarri and Roca Franquesa 225).

In addition to being a quick-witted individual who survives by instinct, guile, and deceit, the rogue holds a perspective on life that is "reflective, philosophical, critical on religious or moral grounds," but such reflections must be viewed with great skepticism, for "[a]s a 'half-outsider,' his moral credentials are equivocal, though not his expert sense for fraud and deception" (Guillén 82-83). With no intention of attempting to change the world but rather hoping to "asimilarse a la sociedad aunque sabe que es defectuosa" (Ricapito 25, n. 36), the picaro develops a philosophy "que acomodaticiamente acepta el orden establecido, en beneficio propio, y que se burla o critica, a la vez, el convencionalismo social que permite esta situación" (Casas de Faunce 965). Briefly stated, the picaresque antihero "is a lonely spirit, or a dissembler, or a hypocrite" (Guillén 92).[2] In the case of Blasco Ibáñez's *Cañas y barro,* its cunning rascal Sangonereta exhibits all of these characteristics and more.

Shortly after the publication of *Cañas y barro,* Eduardo Gómez de Baquero sought Sangonera's philosophical counterpart in Tolstoy, for Blasco's character "se ha formado también . . . un cristianismo suyo, una moral propia" (124-25). As a believer in the sincerity of Sangonera's religious convictions, Gómez de Baquero took to heart his negative comments on the modern era's obsession with work. More recently, Jeremy Medina has found Sangonera to be in part a Romantic noble savage who offers a healthy alternative to the work-obsessed Valencian.[3] Medina also states that through this humorous character—"a modern version of the 17th-century *gracioso,* the comic 'servant' who nevertheless is able to utter some very wise convictions" (279)—Blasco Ibáñez "is at least indirectly condemning the traits of *egoísmo* and *envidia*" (280). Charles Aubrun has seen Sangonera as a social critic who has a wide variety of concerns: "il a pour mission d'entraîner dans le ridicule l'église et le mysticisme, dans l'opprobre et la déchéance l'amoral Tonet et dans le grotesque le bourgeois pleutre et vaniteux de Valence" (53). For Vicente Ribelles Pérez, Sangonera's objective is to inject much-needed spirituality into a world dominated by materialism.[4] Despite the diversity of these views, they all assume that Sangonera's comments and actions are to be taken seriously, as if he were Blasco's spokesperson. A different reading of the text, however—one which takes into consideration its various narrative voices—reveals that Sangonereta is an often humorous, yet hypocritical picaro who embodies many of the attitudes and vices that Blasco Ibáñez decries in *Cañas y barro* and other works.

Sangonereta begins life facing many obstacles related to his genealogy. His moth-

er dies when he is a small child, and his father, "[a]l quedar viudo, sin más hijo que el pequeño Sangonereta, se entregó a la embriaguez" (704). His father is also a petty thief who steals the fishermen's catch from their nets, a liar who denies these thefts, and a wanderer who disappears and abandons his son for weeks at a time, all of which are traits that reappear in Sangonereta. Forced to spend his childhood wandering from house to house in search of food in his native town of El Palmar, the orphan succeeds in supporting himself because of his ingenuity and the local populace's generosity, but years later, when the townspeople have tired of feeding him, "él se veía forzado a salir del Palmar, a correr el lago, como en otros tiempos lo hacía su padre; a pasar de pueblo en pueblo, siempre en busca de generosos amigos" (798). Blasco reinforces Sangonereta's identity as a wanderer by repeatedly referring to him as "el vagabundo."

In addition to being famous among the local children for his independence, Sangonereta is renowned for taking advantage of any set of circumstances that presents itself: "[Los muchachos] creían ser más hombres acompañando a aquel tuno, que todo lo consideraba como propio y sabía aprovecharlo para su bien" (706-07). One example of this phenomenon is that, while Tonet and Neleta appreciate nature for its beauty as they walk through the forest, Sangonereta ignores their esthetic concerns and instead successfully seeks "algo aprovechable en aquella Naturaleza tan esplendorosa y perfumada" (711), a utilitarian attitude that is also in evidence during his hunting excursions with Tonet, when the rascal constantly looks to see "si había algo aprovechable al alcance de sus zarpas" (852). With no other weapons at his disposal, Sangonereta relies on picaresque *ingenio* to acquire food: "Nacido en una choza de perros, donde jamás entraba el pan, había tenido que ingeniarse desde pequeño para conquistar la comida" (705). He also displays his creativity by using "artes ingeniosas de su invención" (707) when he goes bird hunting. A particularly well-conceived stratagem is that he schedules his unannounced visits to local homes to coincide with mealtime so that the fishermen will take pity upon him and feed him. On other occasions, when dogs become excited by the smell of food and dash toward its origin, Sangonereta picks up their cue, follows them, and helps the besieged diners protect themselves from the ravenous animals, earning himself "los restos de la sartén" (706). Willing to do whatever is necessary to gain the favor of influential figures, Sangonereta acts obsequiously toward the priests he serves, which calls to mind Pablos's treatment of Don Diego Coronel in the *Buscón,*[5] but his favorite picaresque tactic is petty thievery, as he confesses on his deathbed to the local priest.[6]

In the process of distinguishing what is to his advantage from what is not, Blasco's eleven-year-old future rogue coldly cuts off contact with his childhood friends so that he can direct his energies into what are potentially more beneficial channels, such as the Church: "Su instinto de parásito le hizo frecuentar la iglesia, ya que ésta era el mejor camino para introducirse en la casa del vicario" (708). From this point on, Sangonereta is as self-centered in his approach to friendship as were his picaresque forefathers. Tonet makes this discovery each time he requests his share of the profits from their bird trapping expeditions: "Imposible sacar cuentas con semejante tuno. Tonet se cansaba de zurrar a Sangonereta, sin conseguir un ochavo de la venta" (707-08). On another occasion, when nightfall threatens to trap the vagabond in the forest with Tonet and Neleta, the orphaned girl injures her foot so badly that she can scarcely move. Even though Sangonereta is the only one of the group who is familiar with the terrain, he proposes to Tonet that they leave her behind, and when this idea

is rejected, he departs alone, again placing self-interest above interpersonal considerations.

After Tonet returns from the war in Cuba, Sangonereta accompanies him constantly, not out of a spirit of brotherhood but rather to take advantage of the former soldier's sudden popularity: "él era el primero en pedir en la taberna que contase cosas de allá, pues sabía que tras el relato llegaban los vasos" (748). He considers as his friends those who buy him drinks: "¿Había amistad entre [Tonet y él] o no? ¿Era capaz de convidarle a una copa?" (797). During the annual festival of the infant Jesus, friendship and alcohol are linked again when the musician Dimoni arrives: "Sangonera era su mejor amigo, y cuando el dulzainero venía a las fiestas, el vagabundo no se separaba de él un momento, sabiendo que al final se beberían fraternalmente el dinero de los clavarios" (827). Blasco's picaro thus rejects society's concept of friendship, establishes no binding commitments or emotional ties, and most assuredly would never sacrifice himself for the good of another human being. He abandons those who would be his friends, deceives them whenever possible, and uses them to achieve his short-term goals.

As occurred with his picaresque ancestors, Sangonereta finds that his search for survival leads him back into society, where he serves an unspecified number of priests, plays the role of a hunting dog for his on-again, off-again companion Tonet, and unwillingly hosts a visiting hunter during one of the region's annual outings, in each case receiving life's basic necessities in return for his efforts. Perhaps more important than obtaining food and shelter, however, is that, while he serves the Church, the priests unwittingly teach him invaluable lessons about life, the most immediate of which is that society permits a few privileged individuals to earn a living without performing manual labor. Since what allows the priests to belong to this elite group is their knowledge and use of words, Sangonereta begins to spend long hours reading religious texts.[7] During the course of this apprenticeship, the attentive youngster learns the meaning of hypocrisy as he sees his masters fail to live according to God's commandments: "Eran iguales a los demás: vivían atenazados por el deseo de la peseta ajena, pensando en la comida y el vestido, quejándose del decaimiento de la piedad cuando no entraba dinero en casa" (802).

Father Miguel in particular has numerous shortcomings and vices, such as the volatile temper and love of power he displays when disorder breaks out following the annual lottery of fishing plots: "comenzó a repartir culatazos, con la satisfacción que le causaba pegar impunemente ejerciendo de la autoridad" (839). These violent tendencies carry over into his professional life, for "[e]l genio violento le acompañaba en todas sus funciones sagradas" (760). Not only does he go on illegal hunting expeditions, but he advises his malnourished parishioners to do likewise. Closely linked to these character flaws are the priest's questionable drinking habits. The narrator (or is it the priest himself?) alludes to this problem as Father Miguel literally and figuratively kicks Sangonereta out of the Church for having assisted at Mass while drunk: "En su casa, sólo el cura podía beber" (760). The same concern reappears each time El Palmar's mayor visits Valencia and leaves Father Miguel in charge of the village, for as the priest makes his self-appointed rounds with the Coast Guard commander, he takes frequent drinking breaks. Considering Blasco's well-known anticlerical views, it is not surprising that he focuses upon the immoral and illegal activities of the novel's only Church figure who is not anonymous, nor is it surprising that he makes Sangonereta's principal negative role model a priest.

As Sangonereta reads religious texts in imitation of his masters, he claims to find in the Sermon on the Mount a biblical explanation for his laziness, as he tells Tonet: "Había comprendido de pronto por qué su voluntad se rebelaba ante el trabajo embrutecedor y penoso. Era la carne, era el pecado quien hacía vivir a los hombres abrumados como bestias para la satisfacción de sus apetitos terrenales" (800). Filled with self-confidence following this discovery, he maintains that he left his position at the Church because he "[p]oseía la verdad, y no podía vivir con los ciegos de espíritu" (800). Achieving this self-assurance represents an important step in the young man's personal development, for it marks his passage from adolescence to adulthood, which Blasco acknowledges by removing the diminutive "et" from his name (804). As a confident, born-again Christian, Sangonera claims the right to criticize the region's inhabitants for their sins, but since the targets of his comments are the same individuals and groups whom he blames for his own failures and frustrations, the rogue consistently compromises his credibility. His charges that the priests are excessively materialistic are made shortly after he has been dismissed for assisting at Mass while drunk; he accuses the residents of being greedy when they stop buying him drinks; and, after being barred from the region's taverns as a penniless nuisance and finding himself forced to take shelter from a storm in his miserable hut with Tonet, he blames this predicament on what he sees as an avaricious and sinful world: "¿Por qué era desgraciado él? ¿Por qué sufría Tonet, ensimismado y aburrido desde que no podía aproximarse a Neleta? . . . Porque en el mundo todo era injusticia; porque la gente, dominada por el dinero, se empeñaba en vivir al revés de como Dios manda" (856). In all of these cases, when one places Sangonera's preachings within the context of recent events in his life, it becomes clear that the rogue's criticism results from pettiness, personal grudges, or a desire for revenge rather than from a Christian's righteous indignation.

Any remaining doubts that Sangonera is a hypocrite disappear when the morally superior tenor of his comments is contrasted with the baseness of his actions. This conflict of word versus deed comes into play as he accuses society of "molestando y sacrificando cada cual al vecino para robarle un poco de bienestar" (801), for Sangonera himself has survived by bothering families as they eat, harassing the clients of area taverns, and stealing the catch from the fishermen's nets so often that he can no longer distinguish one theft from another. As for the rogue's sermons against avarice, each time that Tonet endeavors to obtain his rightful share of the profits from their bird trapping excursions, Sangonereta denies it to him. The adult rogue best demonstrates his continuing interest in material wealth when he attempts to talk his way onto the fishing plot eligibility list in order to become rich without working: "Ya se arreglaría de modo que trabajasen otros para él, dándole la mejor parte del producto" (779). In his lengthy pronouncement before Tonet, he associates the fishermen's sinful working ways with their pride, and he accuses Neleta—who has just dismissed him from her tavern—of the same sin, even though his own history with this particular transgression extends back to his days as an acolyte, when he was so proud of not having to perform manual labor that he looked "con altanería a los demás" (724). As an adult, he affirms with great pride that God has placed him in the Albufera region "para que fuese ejemplo de un verdadero creyente" (802), and he is sure that he will be one of the select "corazones sencillos" (805) whom Christ will seek during the second coming.

The most compelling example of Sangonera's hypocrisy, the most damning proof

that he lives according to a conflicting set of verbal texts and actions, is his casuistic treatment of Tonet's illicit affair with the married Neleta, for here the rogue subordinates the uncompromising moral severity of the Ten Commandments to personal whim as he deconstructs the sinner-victim binomial:

> El vagabundo intentó protestar en el primer momento. Aquello estaba mal hecho. "No desearás la mujer de tu prójimo." Pero a continuación, llevado del agradecimiento a Tonet, encontró excusas y justificaciones para la falta con su burda casuística de antiguo sacristán. La verdad era que tenían cierto derecho para quererse. De haberse conocido después de casada Neleta, sus relaciones resultarían un enorme pecado. Pero se trataban desde niños, habían sido novios, y la culpa era de Cañamèl por meterse donde nadie le llamaba, turbando sus relaciones. Bien merecía lo ocurrido. (855-56)[8]

Upon inverting the roles of victim and victimizer to suit his wishes, Sangonera demonstrates that his malleable system of values can accommodate any unprincipled act, which in turn verifies that his pretended moral superiority is a sham. This consistent pattern of hypocritical behavior—accusing others of greed while being greedy himself, denouncing others as pride-filled sinners after having developed his own superiority complex, and chastising others for stealing even as he continues the family tradition of petty thievery—confirms that Sangonera has learned well the lessons that society has taught him.

Since one of these lessons is that those who control verbal and written texts can avoid manual labor, the astute rogue decides to combine his long-standing dislike of physical exertion with his recently acquired knowledge of religion. The result is a philosophy of life based on the assertion that, according to the bible, Christians should not work. After being dismissed by Father Miguel, Sangonera—who refuses to join the work force—infuses his otherwise unjustifiable laziness with the moral authority of the Church: "él no trabajaría aunque le obligasen. El trabajo era obra del diablo: una desobediencia a Dios; el más grave de los pecados . . . . El había reflexionado mucho; sabía más de lo que se imaginaba el Cubano, y no quería perder su alma entregándose al trabajo regular y monótono para tener una casa y una familia y asegurar el pan del día siguiente. Esto equivalía a dudar de la misericordia de Dios, que no abandona nunca a sus criaturas; y él, ante todo, era cristiano" (799).

Sangonera's deathbed revelations provide further insights into this postacolyte rascal and his code of conduct, for in his final words with Father Miguel he makes an apparent confession that is actually a deft but inadequate defense of his laziness and a shrewd attempt to delude God's representative with lies and half-truths. To begin with, he rewrites recent history by omitting from his confession the most obvious truth, namely that he has literally eaten and (to a lesser extent) drunk himself to death. Operating under the assumption that this omission goes unnoticed by his audience, Sangonera implies that God should take pity on him, since he is about to pay with his life for having momentarily lapsed into the sinfulness of work: "Una vez se había resignado a ser como los demás, a prestar sus brazos a los hombres, poniéndose en contacto con la riqueza y sus comodidades, y, ¡ay!, pagaba esta inconsecuencia con la vida" (937). The pivotal point in this ingeniously worded, self-pitying discourse is Sangonera's contention that he has worked, which conflicts with all previous textual evidence. First, the day of his demise begins as he stands to the side and watches others make all the preparations for his hunter, Don Joaquín. Then, "Sangonera, satisfecho de haberse librado de todo trabajo, invitó al amo a ocupar el puesto" (918), demonstrating how a picaro takes advantage of the labors and good will of

others. As the hunting expedition continues, Sangonera ignores his assigned task of gathering up Don Joaquín's catch and surreptitiously devours all of the hunter's bountiful and unguarded food supply, pausing but twice to shout firing instructions to his hunter. The third time that he calls out, the now surfeited, inebriated, and disoriented rogue directs a confused Don Joaquín to fire upon nonexistent prey: "sin que se viera un ave en el horizonte, [Sangonera] bramaba con mugido interminable: —*¡Chimo! ¡Chimo!* . . . ¡Tira . . ., que *t'entren*! En vano se revolvía el cazador mirando a todas partes. No se veía un pájaro. ¿Qué quería aquel loco?" (926). As this synopsis of the rogue's activities indicates, Sangonera's deathbed confession self-destructs when it is contextualized, for its truths prove to be lies and what is omitted from it is as telling as the falsehoods it includes. Rather than a confession, the rogue has created an anticonfession, since what kills him is not a short-lived period of work, as he tells the priest, but his refusal and failure to work. Ironically, had Sangonera even attempted to perform his designated chores, he would not have had time to kill himself by overeating.

Besides using the Scriptures to justify his laziness as a manifestation of God's will, Sangonera attempts to convince Tonet (and Blasco's reading public) that drunkenness is a noble, even holy state. Having known the rogue since early childhood, Tonet has serious doubts about the sincerity of his former companion's religious conversion, doubts that he expresses in a sarcastic question: "¿Le mandaba Dios ir de taberna en taberna para correr después los ribazos casi a gatas, con el tambaleo de la embriaguez?" (802). The sly picaro has a predictably ingenious response: "Su embriaguez a nadie causaba daño, y el vino era cosa santa: por algo sirve en el diario sacrificio a la Divinidad. El mundo era hermoso; pero visto a través de un vaso de vino parecía más sonriente, de colores más vivos, y se admiraba con mayor vehemencia a su poderoso Autor" (802-03). In his pointed query, Tonet underscores a serious issue: how can a Christian who must obey God's laws have (and make no attempt to correct) a character flaw that leads to degrading, non-Christian behavior? As Sangonera begins to respond, he ignores this potentially damning consideration and attempts to create an image of himself as an inoffensive innocent whose drinking bothers no one, even though the text consistently reveals that his alcoholism never fails to have harmful effects on those around him, from the religious community whose sacred rituals he has desecrated by attending to Mass while drunk, to the clients at local bars and taverns whom he bothers with his incessant appeals for handouts after he is discharged from the Church because of his untimely drinking, to the fishermen whose nets he has resumed plundering, and even to Tonet, who becomes an alcoholic because he spends so much time with the rogue.

Sangonera evades Tonet's question a second time by extolling the virtues of holy wine ("el vino era cosa santa"), an impersonal and noncontroversial matter of Church doctrine that has nothing to do with the rogue's drinking habits. Referring directly to the Eucharist in his next utterance, Sangonera attempts to establish a surface level connection between the alcoholic's wine that leads to self-degradation and the Church's transubstantiated wine which is the blood of Christ (drunkenness = wine = Eucharist): "Su *embriaguez* a nadie causaba daño, y el *vino* era cosa santa: por algo sirve en *el diario sacrificio a la Divinidad*" (my emphasis). But instead of ennobling his drunkenness through this implied comparison, as he had hoped to do, Sangonera only succeeds in demythologizing the holy wine. In progressively lengthier clauses filled with rhetorical flourishes that obfuscate the issue at hand, Sangonera

continues to exhibit the verbal skills he has learned from the priests as he shifts the focus of attention still further away from himself and his shortcomings by looking outward toward nature and upward toward God: "El mundo era hermoso; pero visto a través de un vaso de vino parecía más sonriente, de colores más vivos, y se admiraba con mayor vehemencia a su poderoso Autor." In addition to the obviously sacrilegious image of a drunk toasting and adoring God through a glass of wine, Sangonera subtly reduces Tonet's concern about uncontrolled drinking to a mere glass of wine. As was the case with his deathbed (anti)confession, Sangonera's pretended defense of his alcoholism proves to be a document of self-indictment, since its surface message is subverted and negated by its context—his evasiveness, his refusal to answer the question as asked, and the conflicting evidence found elsewhere in the text. With each word the rogue's response further disintegrates into a self-contradicting network of nonanswers, falsehoods, and sacrilege. The collective weight of these revelations—Sangonera's lies and purposeful omissions, his evasive answers and deceptions, his conflicts of interest and acts of blatant hypocrisy—clearly reflects negatively upon his recent religious conversion, which, in order to be theologically genuine, must be accompanied by "a conversion of life, that is, a moral transformation. The whole personality of man is involved. The convert ceases to be what he was before" ("Conversion" 289). But a comparison of the preconversion Sangonereta with the postconversion Sangonera reveals that, rather than turning away from his past, the adult rogue cynically uses the Scriptures to justify and defend his decades-old vices.[9]

Sangonera's tale comes to a close as he suffers an ignominious death imbued with the picaresque spirit.[10] Blasco prepares the background for this finale by describing hyperbolically the amount of food that Don Joaquín brings to the hunt: "La señora le había pertrechado con tanta abundancia como si fuese a dar la vuelta al mundo" (918). As Sangonera devours one container of Don Joaquín's provisions after another, he motivates himself to continue eating by thinking about the renown that this gratuitous act of gluttony will earn him and exhibits an attitude familiar to all students of the classic picaresque novels: "Reía a carcajadas pensando en lo que dirían en el Palmar al conocer su hazaña, y con el deseo de completarla probando todos los víveres de don Joaquín, destapó el tercer puchero" (925). When the hunter realizes the enormity of his aide's deed, he verifies its picaresque roots by describing Sangonera as a "bigardo" (928).[11] Ironically, although it costs the rascal his life, this exploit does bring Sangonera the fame he seeks: "Relataban aquel atragantamiento portentoso que le ponía a morir, y las gentes del Palmar reían asombradas, sin ocultar al mismo tiempo su satisfacción, contentas de que uno de los suyos demostrase tan inmenso estómago" (929). Drunk boatsmen who visit Sangonera on his deathbed contribute to the vulgar proceedings with their own crude brand of humor: "Algunos más animosos llegaban hasta él para bromear con brutal ironía, invitándole a beber la última copa en casa de Cañamèl" (932). Bringing this episode to an appropriately nauseating and irreverent conclusion, Sangonera vomits on the priest who is administering him the last rites.

The same air of insolence and disrespect dominates the rogue's wake, where his former drinking companions find it difficult to keep from laughing as they say goodbye: "Sus antiguos compañeros se frotaban los ojos enrojecidos por el alcohol, conteniendo la risa que les causaba ver a su amigote tan limpio, en una caja de soltero y vestido de fraile. Hasta su muerte parecía cosa de broma" (938). What makes these passages devoted to Sangonera's death so delightfully roguish are the striking juxta-

positions they display before the reader: death resulting from gluttony and sloth leads to the traditional last rites, hypocrisy and lies overlap with confession, vomit and a hangover intersect with formal Church rituals, scatological humor defiles prayers, etc., all of which demonstrate that Sangonera's picaresque life has ended in an equally picaresque death. Having lived parasitically at the expense of others, he also dies at their expense;[12] having been a source of laughter in life, he dies an irreverent and undignified death. Even more intriguing, given Blasco's critical attitude toward the Church, is that the ultimate question is left unanswered: has the rascal succeeded in talking his way into heaven?

A retrospective glance at the totality of Sangonera's attitudes and experiences confirms that, while living neither completely inside nor outside society, he leads the life of a picaro from the days of his unfortunate childhood to the extremely crude and humorous scenes of his death. From his father he inherits a weakness for alcohol, his skills as a petty thief, and a nickname that defines him so completely that his Christian name never appears (Sangonereta means "little leech").[13] Abandoned at a very early age, he quickly learns to confront in ingenious ways life's basic problems, especially hunger. Both as a child and as a young adult, he is constantly on the move, wandering from house to house, tavern to tavern, or town to town, in order to meet his meager needs. As occurred with his literary predecessors, he loses the diminutive form of his name in the process of maturing. An astute observer of human folly, he discovers that society preaches one set of values while in its daily operations it honors another, then incorporates this lesson into his own life and becomes cunning and opportunistic in his pursuit of his daily bread. Perhaps most importantly, while, on the one hand, he develops a philosophy of life that allows him the freedom to criticize his contemporaries from a lofty peak of moral superiority, on the other hand, an analysis of the text which recognizes the existence of conflicting narrative perspectives reveals that both his code of conduct and his self-created image are built upon lies, deception, and hypocrisy. For all of these reasons, Sangonera is a worthy successor to the classic Spanish picaresque antiheroes.[14]

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NOTES

[1] For Guillén, all lonely and abandoned children, including picaros, are orphans. The picaro and the orphan are related in that, "[i]n the history of narrative forms, *Lazarillo de Tormes* represents the first significant appearance of the myth of the orphan" (79). This association of the picaro with the orphan "implied the *pícaro*'s detachment from the historical past or the presence of God, from an 'essential' image of man. It suggested the self-reliance and the 'homelessness' of the hero" (85-86).

[2] Far from being rebels, Lazarillo, Guzmán, and Pablos are conformists and hypocrites who live on the difference between appearance and truth. Wardropper devotes an entire article to hypocrisy in the *Lazarillo,* while Eoff has discovered that Guzmán's sermons are not the products of Christian fervor but rather of personal disappointment and petty vindictiveness (115), and Bjornson, among others, points to the chasm that separates Pablos's words from his actions as proof of his hypocrisy (112).

[3] Medina claims that Sangonera's "love for nature, his plea that man return to a simple way of life and his refusal to work because labor violates God's commandments suggest that Blasco has put some of Rousseau's perspectives to work in this character's creation" (279).

[4] "En el período de su juventud, a través del goce de los sentidos, [Sangonera] pretenderá llegar a lo espiritual, de igual modo que en la madurez querrá hacerlo por medio del ascetismo, un ascetismo que ya es inútil porque el cuerpo agotado nada puede" (Ribelles Pérez 28).

[5] "Cuando el vicario iba a Valencia, [Sangonereta] le llevaba hasta la barca el ancho pañuelo . . . lleno de ropa, y seguía por los ribazos despidiéndose del cura con tanta emoción como si no hubiera de verle más" (708).

[6] While speaking with Father Miguel for the last time, Sangonera "[c]onfesó en voz baja al sacerdote sus raterías contra los pescadores, tan innumerables, que no podía recordarlas más que en masa" (937).

[7] Knowing Sangonereta as he does, Tonet assumes that the rascal's sudden interest in religious texts has little to do with religious edification: "Al pasar frente a la casa del vicario veía a Sangonereta, que, dedicado ahora a la lectura, pasaba las horas sentado en la puerta leyendo libros religiosos y disfrazando su gesto de pillo con una expresión compungida" (735). At the time of Tonet's comments, his own life is going rather poorly, so that one might wonder if his doubts are rooted in his personal problems. Only later does the reader discover that Tonet was correct. In the meantime, since the readers have no more access to the rogue's thoughts than does Tonet, they can only remark as he does: "¡Imbécil! ¿Qué le importarían aquellos libracos que le prestaban los vicarios? . . ." (735).

[8] Also influencing Sangonera to redefine the terms in the case of Tonet's adultery is his desire to avenge himself at Cañamèl's expense, an attitude that ill befits a Christian: "recordando las veces que el gordiflón le arrojó de la taberna, reía satisfecho de su infortunio conyugal y se daba por vengado" (856).

[9] Sackett has described Sangonera's beliefs as "a false, mystical religion which vaguely resembles conventional Christianity" (107).

[10] On the subject of death and the picaresque, Monteser states: "there is little dignity left to characters in a picaresque novel, the hero or anyone else. Even death is not allowed to be solemn, and is either brutalized or laughed at" (17).

[11] For further information on *bigardo* as a possible forerunner for the word picaro, see García de Diego.

[12] Even in death, Sangonera lives off the local townspeople: "Las mujeres más ricas del Palmar . . . marcharon a Valencia para los preparativos del entierro, gastando en pompas fúnebres una cantidad que jamás había visto Sangonereta en vida" (938).

[13] The father acquires his nickname in the following fashion: "Al quedar viudo, sin más hijo que el pequeño Sangonereta, se entregó a la embriaguez, y la gente, viéndole constantemente chupar los líquidos con tanta ansia, le comparó a una sanguijuela, creándole así el apodo" (704). *Sangonera* is the Valencian equivalent of the Castilian *sanguijuela,* or leech. Interestingly, this nickname also has a picaresque forerunner, for in the *Buscón* Pablos refers to himself and a fellow boarder as leeches for having conceived and on various occasions executed a particularly ingenious robbery scheme: "Tuvímoslos desta manera, chupándolos como sanguijuelas" (93).

[14] Many thanks to Joseph Ricapito and Paul Smith for their comments on early drafts of this article.

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