

A COMPARATIVE ONOMASTIC VIGNETTE OF THE  
PICARESQUE NOVEL IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

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Spaniards were the first to cultivate preponderant roguery in the true sense of the picaresque genre introduced by Lazarillo de Tormes, a work imitated by all European countries. Pícaro is a substantive of uncertain origin first to be found in the jargon of the bullfighter's picadores but documented for the first time in 1545 meaning "evil person of immoral life." A marked distinction is to be made for the pícaro between vice and misery. The misery might be because of the pícaro's unemployment or ragged appearance. A pícaro can be a soul, a coin, the devil himself, a petty thief, a temporary honest jobholder, etc., serving a series of masters and personally satirizing society.

Some critics believe that Lazarillo de Tormes was like a breath of fresh air among hundreds of insipid sentimental and chivalric novels of knights and shepherds brave enough to fight any adversary, but prone to become weak in the knees when they saw their fair lady nearby.

Fernando Alegría believes that the imitation of the picaresque novel in Latin American Literature came so late that it was born and died in Hispanic America with the Mexican Fernando de Lizardi's

Periquillo Sarniento, while it continued in Spain with authors such as Pereda, Baroja, etc. Lazarillo, the Spanish protagonist, lived during the reign of Charles V (1516-1550), whose empire equaled only that of the Romans in extension, prestige and corruption, while Periquillo, the Latin American protagonist, lived from the time of the 1776 Declaration of Independence in the United States until the Proclamation of Independence of all the Spanish American colonies (except Cuba) in 1825.

The anonymity of the author of Lazarillo is still a secret, while the entire biography of Lizardi is well known, including the fact that he was buried in a cemetery ironically called San Lazaro, reminding us of Lazarillo. In 1554 Lazarillo de Tormes was simultaneously published in three editions and was widely translated, even into Hungarian, from a former Latin translation (Job Herezer) in Danzig in 1656. Two hundred and sixty-two years later the first two chapters of El Periquillo Sarniento appeared in Mexico but the novel did not appear in its entirety until 1830, three years after Lizardi's death. Both novels were censured for over 15 years after their first publication because of the caustic realistic satire of the clergy and, in Periquillo, the strong defense of the black man and the erroneous belief of the superiority of the nobility.

The main goal of the antihero pícaro is to fill his stomach. Hunger or food is still an obsession in the entire world, for seventy percent of the world population in the 1980's goes to bed hungry every day. However, the obsession with food of numerous individuals such as those in the United States is due to a desire for constant variety, and they have an overabundance. Just think of

the millions of dollars spent on dieting in the United States. If we were to count the commercials on TV dealing with food and drinks we would label our U.S. society as obsessed with junk food, and one following "eat, drink, and sex" as a motto in a corrupt lifestyle. Depicted in both cases are the extremes of starvation and gluttony.

Lazarillo speaks: "All that I could find and conceive to sustain my life: and I believe that hunger was a light to me in finding these darksome contrivances, for they say the wits are animated by it."<sup>1</sup> All his masters kept their food under constant lock and key.

Periquillo refers punctually three times a day to the fact that he is hungry, or it is now time to eat:

And my anxious stomach was cheeping like a bird  
to gobble up a couple of plates of chili sauce  
and a platter of toasted tortillas. 2

The first sentence of the Lazarillo is an onomastic explanation. His father was Tomas Gonzalez - Gonzalez from Gund "battle, fight" and Alv "elf or genius" which gives "genius in battle." His mother's name Perez means son of a rock rolling from place to place; however by transcultural homonyms from the Hebrew Uzza, who dropped dead for having touched the sacred ark, it means "broken, cracked, stricken." Nowadays one of the Israelite politicians is called Peres. Gonzalez-Perez, his true name as clearly stated, would be most apropos for Lazarillo, but these were not names fitting to portray misery and vicissitudes. He needed a cognomen to create pity, sympathy and compassion. There are five depths to the impact of the name Lazarus.

1. The transitive infinitive lacerar is a modern version of old Latin lacerare meaning "mangle, tear in pieces, hurt, strangle," while lacerar, the intransitive infinitive, denotes "to suffer, be in deep pain." The intransitive infinitive lazarar "to suffer miserably" is found only in Portuguese and Spanish. Lacería "means a conglomeration of knots difficult to unwind." Even though the form lazarar became the most forceful, we cannot conceive nor does there exist a later lazerus in the Spanish, due to the fact that a syncope lazro does not occur since the internal "a" of the last syllable (rar) is never lost. Yet to make this more bewildering we find a substantive in old Spanish lazrado, an infinitive (lazdrar), "he who suffers tribulations and misery."

2. The English substantive lazar might be thought to be a cognate of the Spanish lazar. However "a person stricken with leprosy" is the English meaning and "to tie into many knots" is the Spanish meaning.

3. Lazarus is the only proper name attached to a character in any of the parables of Jesus. The blind beggar, first master of Lazarillo, should have been given this name, but he was too astute to fall into that pattern. This universal force could not be given any specific name. He represented ninety-five percent or more of the 1500's world population, starving and in misery. He is nameless, just like the other seven masters, reminding us of the "privilege myth" of the Sufis in Eastern cultures and of Basilides, agnostic in Alexandria during the second century, who propagated the idea that nameless entities are even more powerful.

4. Is there an analogy with leprosy in this protagonist's name? Yes, symbolically! The order of St. Lazarus, established in the twelfth century for their care of lepers in France, confirms that the average life span of a person after stricken with leprosy was ten years. It is exactly ten years from the time that Lazarillo de Tormes, as a ten-year-old child, starts his roguery until he abandons it at the age of twenty.

5. The true origin of his name takes us to the Pentateuch (Genesis 15:2, Exodus 18:4, Exodus 6:23) and also to the Hagiograph (I Chronicles 23:15, 17) to the name Eliezar, Eleazar. The Hebrew, El azar means "God has helped" or "God is my help." Moses was so thankful for his deliverance from the Egyptians that his second son was named Eliezar. The Greek form of Eliezar is Lazaros and the Latin is Lazaro. The author has added the diminutive suffix illo to convey a very affectionate tone. The ragged leper whose salvation is envied by the rich man known as Lazarus is not to be confused with the Lazarus dating back to the sixth century.

Both the Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Martha and Mary (John 11:1), and the blind beggar whose lacerations were licked by the dogs are symbols of transcending poverty, malice, disease, corruption, and perversion. This is the basis of the name Lazarillo de Tormes, the outstanding picaresque protagonist, whose name added a new neologism to the Spanish vocabulary, i.e., "leader of the blind, eye-opener, one who enlightens by observations not bitter, not caustic, but compassionately and mercifully." Lazarillo de Tormes scales all five levels of the religious world. Of his second master the priest:

. . . I say no more, except that all the  
meaness of the World was enclosed in this one;  
I know not whether it was his own invention, or  
if he had annexed it with the clerical habit.

Of his master the indulgence seller, whose business Martin  
Luther highly criticized in 1523, Lazarillo expounds:

After fooling the populace with tricks and  
promises he sold 3,000 indulgences . . . how  
many of these games these cheats must play  
among the innocent.

The amount derived from sale of the pardons in 1551 is supposed to  
have been 440,000 ducats, of which the Church received only 20,000.

Friars are revealed to us in depth. The chaplain with whom he  
spends four of his teenage years conducted his business so wisely  
that Lazarillo finds himself dressing and eating almost like a  
gentleman. To appease his conscience he decides to serve a master  
outside of the religious world but quickly returns to it and mar-  
ries the servant of his last master, the Archpriest:

Sir, I told him I determined to stick to honest  
people, true it's that some of my friends more  
than thrice told me she [his servant woman] had  
three childbirths from you before I married  
her.

Lazarillo de Tormes is a superhuman force (the soul of the Biblical  
resurrected Lazarus in heaven) with human understanding, compas-  
sionate of the weaknesses and corruption of society, especially  
within the religious world. The nameless masters of Lazarillo de  
Tormes are to be divided into two groups - the poverty stricken  
whose sole purpose in life is to survive, represented in modern

times by the materialistic man, and those who comprise the religious governments.

The author of *Lazarillo* dared not reveal himself nor moralize in a didactic fashion about the evils of society, while Fernandez de Lizardi has such an abundance of sermonizing and strict authentic moralizing that only one-fourth of the thirty-three chapters refer to the adventures of the pícaro himself.

The names *Periquillo* and *Lazarillo* are both diminutive substantives, giving them an endearing, easy aura of acceptance to the public. <sup>3</sup>

In the *Periquillo* more than half a page is an onomastic explanation:

The custom or abuse to nickname was practiced in the schools, colleges, barracks . . . a bad habit . . . no one is free from wearing his nickname as rearguard. In my school, our real name was forgotten and we called each other by the injurious nicknames . . . Squinteye, Humpback, Sorehead, Nasty, Loony, Donkey, or Gobbler. My master sometimes affectionately called me *Pedrillo* . . . so my classmates changed it to *Periquillo* and then they needed an adjective to differentiate me from the other *Pericos*.

The name for our Latin American protagonist falls into the following three concepts:

1. *Pedrico*, from *Pedro*, and this from the many *Pero*'s of the eleventh to the sixteenth century in Spain. In archaic Spanish *Peidro* appears which crosses with *Pedro* with the dialectal *Peiro* from where *Pero* and the patronymic *Perez* result. As already established above, *Pedro* means "rock rolling from place to place."

Lizardi did not want to give his protagonist a fictitious name but stamp him with his baptismal name, Pedro, in disguise. Sarmiento, his surname by birth, is a biological proper name for twigs or runners similar to those strawberry runners from which plants take root or flagellum. This is a realistic nomen for an individual who bounces from one master to another and starts sermonizing from one point, running to another trying to establish the dogmas of true Christianity and common sense.

2. The nomen Perico is the plain substantive for parrot while being the diminutive of Pe(d)ro. So as to make it clear that it was the diminutive of Pedro and not Perico, another diminutive is added so that we have Pero - ico - illo giving Periquillo. I do not agree that the implication here is parrot as a stupid, senseless entity who only repeats what is heard, since our hero has profound words of his own. His moralizing starts in the very first chapter:

Oh children, if some day you marry and have young ones, do not leave them to the mercenary care of wet-nurses or tit-servants as we call them here. First . . . they are generally abandoned women and by their carelessness cause children to sicken . . . second because it is a thing against nature for a rational mother to do what a donkey, a cat, a bitch, or any female animal destitute of reason does not do . . . What evil men do who allow themselves to be dominated by their wives, especially concerning the rearing and training of their children.

3. The classmates of Periquillo renamed him Sarniento from sarna the itching disease which he had suffered and which caused his face to be somewhat deformed, with a sandy color. Two



denotations of "itch": 1) to have a restless desire or hankering; 2) scabies, a contagious skin disease caused by a parasitic mite and accompanied by intense irritation of the skin -- both are very appropriate for this pícaro who had a hankering to shout out to everyone:

A Republic whose constitution denies religious freedom; a Cathedral on which the canons would at the first opportunity replace the Spanish coat of arms; an ecclesiastical chapter which ignores the civil law altogether; streets full of stray dogs, beggars, idle police; thieves and assassins who flourish in criminal collusion with corrupt civil employees . . .

The name Periquillo some believe might have been given because he showed up in school wearing a green jacket and yellow pants, bringing to mind the predominant appearance of parrots. I do not agree with this interpretation onomastically. There is a logical onomastic explanation. Pedro Sarmiento was too serious and formal a name for an antihero who so humourously, innocently, and subtly satirized life in Mexico. He lived during the time when the revolutionary general Hidalgo and his fellow heroes Aldama, Jiménez and Allende hanged for days as public examples in iron cages at Guanajuato.

In comparing the names in Lazarillo and Periquillo we must admit that they were very carefully selected to give force and power to the explanation of life of the clergy, the politicians, the prisoners, etc. However, the names of both antiheroes are perceived through the eyes of a youngster, a teenager, a young adult, and finally a mature Periquillo and Lazarillo. Both Lazarillo and Periquillo forced the Inquisition and readers of

those days to tolerate the truths and caustic realities coated with humor and compassion, which is one of the peculiar characteristics of the Spanish and Spanish American picaresque novel.

There is a basic difference in the tragic end of these pícaros. At the end of Lazarillo's life, as told us in the spurious second volume written by Juan Luna in Paris in 1620, he found himself naked in the middle of the street. He had become a blind beggar in the true religious sense of the nomen Lázaro. Some ragamuffins chased him into the cathedral where he stayed at the mercy of the priests until his death. Periquillo, a pauper, all skin and bones, died surrounded by prearranged musicians and children singing his personally written epitaph. It is interesting to observe that both rascals confessed their sins and died repentant after being the products of the vices and corruptions of a society they scandalized and exposed for posterity. Thanks to the endearing Lazarillo and Periquillo for elucidating the kaleidoscopic Hispanic world from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Lazarillo de tormes are taken from the latest English translation The Life of Lazarillo de tormes - His Fortunes and Misfortunes translated by Robert Rudder. (New York City: Ungar Publishers, 1973.)

<sup>2</sup> All quotations of Fernando de Lizardi's El Periquillo Sarniento are my translations from the edition El Periquillo Sarniento. Prologo de Jefferson Rea Spell, tercera edición (Mexico City, Editorial Porrúa, 1961.)

<sup>3</sup> Alvarez-Altman, "Literary Onomastics in Lazarillo de Tormes," Literary Onomastics Studies, V (1978), 232-241.